

Unlocking imagination through maps: exploring the spatial imaginaries of food system transitions

**A case study of the UK food partnership
movement**

PhD Thesis

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Martha Cross

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Declaration of original authorship

Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Martha Cross

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Abstract

Relocalisation is often seen as an antidote to the problems associated with the 'globalised' food system. Shortening the distance between food production and consumption requires a significant shift in food systems thinking and practice. This thesis is concerned with how these rescaled food systems are imagined by actors seeking to move away from the 'global' and towards the 'local', and the role of these visions in transforming food systems. It fuses sustainability transitions – the process of change, usually from a *less* towards a *more* desirable state, with spatial imaginaries – the ways we collectively conceptualise, frame and experience spaces and places. The research focuses on the transitions sought by people working within and around UK food partnerships. It combines document review, interviews and spatial mapping methods to uncover and explore the desired destinations of transition – what I refer to as spatial imaginaries – how these visions are legitimised and justified, and by whom. It builds a picture of the conditions required for an imaginary to take hold, reflecting on the interaction between vision, policy and practice and the tensions that arise. In doing so, it responds to an identified research gap to better understand the role and influence of spatiality, agency and legitimacy in reimagining food system transitions. More specifically, it intersects with a current debate on the role of food partnerships in transitioning food systems through rescaling, by highlighting the value in more carefully considering our imagined food futures. The research makes two key original contributions. Firstly, by exploring the 'relational triangle' between spatial imaginaries, rescaling and transition, it sheds light on how the power of imagination and the politics of rescaling are harnessed to reconceive, shape and validate food system change. It identifies a complex and dynamic relationship between personally-held visions, written strategies and common spatial imaginaries and assesses the implications in research and practice terms. Secondly, the spatial mapping approach brings a unique dimension to exploring the visions, perspectives and actions of actors seeking change. The approach can help identify bounded thinking, avoid the pitfalls of localism and create richer and more inclusive and imaginative shared spatial visions of food system transitions.

Personal reflection

My journey from research assistant to doctoral student was nearly 20 years in the making, intersected by a career in environmental strategy and practice. Over the years I engaged with various visions ranging from the inspired to the mediocre, which made me realise that visions *matter*. Shared visions have the potential to shape policy and action (for better or worse). Truly great visions have the power to challenge us think to differently and start the process of handing agency to those who can effect change. But not all visions are equal. While some motivate, others frustrate. I encountered disappointingly bland visions where expectations were lowered to the ambition level of the least aspirational participant. I also became interested in the transition from vision to policy, noting how aspirations could become normalised by embedding them within written commitments, everyday practices and the ‘collective conscious’. These reflections raised questions. What makes some visions useful to work with? How do they enable a different kind of conversation to take place? Why do they capture imaginations? What (and who) are the forces and influences leading to their conception? What conditions make them ripe for adoption? What circumstances and events lead to the gradual acceptance of ‘vision as policy’? Do visions drive behavioural change, or are the antecedents already in place? This interest in the power and utility of visions in transforming the way we see, experience, and shape the world became the starting point for my PhD.

“Every town should have a temple of imagination... a place where you can go to imagine what you want the area to be like. We’re all stuck in who and what we think we are, but we should be able to imagine different possibilities.”

Jess Prendergrast, *The Onion Collective*¹

“Whole worlds pivot on acts of imagination.”

***The Thirteenth Doctor, The Tsuranga Conundrum*²**

¹ Wainwright, O (2021) ‘It began with a cider’: how a group of young parents transformed a Somerset harbour. *The Guardian* (20 Oct)
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/oct/20/watchet-east-quay-arts-centre-onion-collective> (Last accessed 17/02/2022)

² Dr Who Series 11 Episode 5, Jennifer Perrott (Dir), aired 04/11/18

1. Introduction

Food systems are under increasing pressure in the UK. In recent years, a global pandemic, Brexit, the war in Ukraine, the ‘cost of living crisis’ and the existential threat of climate change have drawn attention to the risks and gaps in our current ‘globalised’ food system. Given such periods of turbulence can create transformative change (Marsden, 2013), we have an opportunity to adopt new and different ways of working to transition towards alternative – and better – food systems. There is a scalar, spatial dimension to many of the responses seeking to make our food systems more sustainable, healthy, secure and fair (Hinrichs, 2003; Winter, 2003; Marsden, 2013). And although meanings may be contested, ‘relocalisation’ is often seen as an ‘antidote’ to food system failures. Yet there are open questions about how rescaling the food system is imagined and justified. Why do some relocalisation visions and imaginaries gather influence while others fail to gain traction? How are they conceived, and whose vision ‘counts’? To what extent are dominant imaginaries translated into policy and practice, and what tensions arise? The following research seeks to better understand the relationship between individual and collective imagination and the role of rescaling in transforming our food systems. This chapter provides the research background (contextualising the problem), framing (defining the problem) and approach (tackling the problem) and presents an overview of the thesis structure. In doing so, it outlines the value, significance and contributions of the research.

1.1 Research background

The ‘food system’ encompasses the production, processing, transportation and consumption of food. This is also referred to as the food supply chain. The current, highly globalised and intensive nature of the food system has enabled a greater proportion of the world’s growing population to access increasingly nutritious food. On the flip side, the considerable toll on human health and the environment has been well documented (WRI, 2011; UNEP, 2016). Attention has been drawn to ‘local’ as an antidote to ‘global’, comparing the perceived attributes of the ‘unfavourable’ global food system (intensive, industrial, monoculture, corporate, technocratic) to those of the ‘favourable’ local (moral, small-scale,

community, independent, democratic) (Lang 1999, Hinrichs 2003). Yet the globalised food system imaginary (Massey, 2005) is more nuanced than the term suggests. As an example, the UK produces about 60% of domestic consumption by value, although part of this is exported. This means around 54% of food on UK plates is produced domestically. Meanwhile, the UK production to supply ratio, which tells us about the UK's capacity for self-sufficiency, is around 75% for indigenous food (i.e. food that can be grown in the UK)³. Looking beneath the high level statistics though, the UK is least self-sufficient in the categories of fruit, vegetables and animal feedstock (Carey, 2011; Defra, 2021³). So there are subtleties, yet the term 'globalised food system' is often used (for example, by scholars and the media) as shorthand for a disconnection or lack of visibility between producer and consumer.

While there are multiple ways in which alternative, idealised food systems may be imagined, the concept of relocalisation is often at the core. For the purposes of this research I draw on four spatial imaginaries that have been popularised (or maintained widespread appeal) in recent years. These are foodsheds (Hedden, 1929; Getz, 1991; Kloppenburg et al, 1996, Zasada et al, 2019); city region food systems (FAO, 2016; Dubbeling et al, 2017; Zasada et al, 2017; Blay-Palmer et al, 2018; Cabannes and Marocchino, 2018); regionalisation (Kneafsey, 2010; Clancy and Ruhf, 2010; Vicente-Vicente, 2021) and localism (Hinrichs, 2003; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Born and Purcell, 2006). The evolution of the key principles and narratives associated with these four imaginaries are considered in Table 2.1. But their very existence raises questions around why some relocalisation imaginaries are favoured, justified and promoted over others, and to whose benefit (Kloppenburger et al, 1996; Winter, 2003; Born and Purcell, 2006; Clancy and Ruhf, 2010; Pain, 2017). In order to tackle these sorts of questions in the context of the UK, we first need to unpack the concept of relocalisation to better understand its complexities and multiple interpretations.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021-theme-2-uk-food-supply-sources> (Last accessed 07/07/2023)

1.2 Research framing

Since relocalisation is pivotal to the research, it is worth breaking down the concept to understand some of the complexities and difficulties in its interpretation and application. Often seen as the antithesis of globalisation, relocalisation is central to a wide range of socio-political movements seeking more secure, sustainable and just futures. Salient examples include Transition Towns, La Via Campesina, slow food and the food sovereignty movement. Yet placing 'local' and 'global' at different ends of a scale immediately raises questions of differentiation. At what point does local cease and global begin? Is the notion of local somehow diminished as access to the internet, instantaneous communications and budget travel shrink the world? And what of the relationality between the two, explored through the concept of 'glocalisation' (Swyngedouw, 2004)? Often positioned as a social construction of scale (Marston, 2000; Hinrichs, 2003), the term 'local' is somewhat slippery and hard to pin down. Noting it to be a nuanced concept and placing these definitional and semantic difficulties to one side, this section starts to delve into the meaning, scaling and use of relocalisation in the context of food systems.

Relocalisation movements are generally concerned with rescaling the food chain and altering attitudes and behaviours to deliver more secure, sustainable and just outcomes. Often-cited benefits include shorter supply chains, increased food security, resilience against changes in global food market conditions, improved access to food, jobs and income (FAO, 2016) and increased visibility of provenance within the supply chain (Dubbeling et al, 2017), potentially reversing the 'distancing phenomenon' and reconnecting people with the sources of their sustenance (Kloppenburg et al, 1996). Often described as a shift from 'food from nowhere' to 'food from somewhere' (Heller, 2021), the term often conjures an image of connectedness between farm and fork. Yet there are also potential difficulties, tensions and competing goals associated with scalar and spatial alternatives. For example, moving production closer to the point of consumption may lead to increased energy and water demands, outweighing any benefits from reduced food miles; tensions may arise from the need to balance environmental production with adequate nutrition, affordability and animal welfare; the desire to

increase agricultural land may conflict with other priorities such as meeting increasing housing and energy demands. Imaginaries of relocalisation may be rooted in deeply-held values and traditions. To some, the 're' in relocalisation represents a return to more traditional ways of farming, shopping and eating. This may conflict with a belief that new and novel technologies have an important role to play, from vertical farming and insect proteins to nanotechnology applications and using blockchain technology to track provenance. There are questions about what 'local' is, and whom it's for. For example, food grown locally may not be culturally appropriate. Relational (unbounded) spaces are especially open to interpretation (Hinrichs, 2003). Furthermore, there are no guarantees that relocalised food systems are any fairer, healthier or more sustainable, and we are warned not to fall into the 'local trap' – the assumption that local is inherently better (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Born and Purcell, 2006).

To summarise, relocalisation is clearly appealing but problematic. The act of rescaling is often the cornerstone of re-imagining how our food systems should be transformed. Yet there is a lack of consensus about how this should occur and what any transition towards a more sustainable, secure and just state should look and feel like. It raises questions around how relocalisation is interpreted and scaled, what advantages are conferred and who stands to gain, what desired outcomes are legitimised over others, and what drives these assumptions. There is a need – as a focus of this thesis – to explore the relationship between the visioning and scaling process to understand how desirable food systems are individually and collectively re-imagined. This will reveal and enhance our understanding of how these personal and organisational visions and more widely held imaginaries contribute to carving out pathways towards improving our food systems. The next section investigates and justifies this approach, highlighting its original contribution to knowledge and building a relational 'triangle' between imagined food futures, the process of transition towards these imagined futures and the role of scale.

1.3 Research approach

This section outlines how weaving together spatial imaginaries and transitions thinking provides a fresh perspective on food system rescaling and the relocalisation movement. The Transition Movement is perhaps the best-known example of fusing transition, imaginary and scale concepts. The description of “*a movement of communities coming together to reimagine and rebuild our world*”⁴ combines the practices of imagining and transition at community-level scale. The relationship is further reinforced by the Transition Movement founder’s emphasis on the need for collective re-imaginings of the future as a means to reverse our current transition trajectory (Hopkins, 2019). This research draws on sustainability transitions theory and the spatial imaginaries concept to better understand the synergistic relationship between imagination and transition in the context of food systems. In this way, it connects with and extends broader conceptual debates around the nature of spatial imaginaries (how they are created and expressed as desired destinations of transitions) and their relationship to the process of transition or ‘becoming’ (‘doing transitions’). Exploring and reinterpreting how imaginaries are enacted in the everyday reveals the need to critically reflect on meaning-making, that is, the ways in which place-based stories about the future are uniquely created, visualised and interpreted. This section introduces each concept separately before outlining the benefits of combining the two. It then outlines and defends the research focus on UK food partnerships and the Sustainable Food Places (SFP) network, positioning them as ‘disrupters’ in food system transitions. The section progresses to an overview of the research design, methods, research questions and key findings, before concluding with a summary of the remaining chapters.

Sustainability transitions are described as “*major shifts in established industries, socio-technical systems, and societies toward more sustainable modes of production and consumption*” by the Sustainability Transitions Research Network⁵. They incorporate ideas of systemic evolution (rather than revolution)

⁴ <https://transitionnetwork.org/about-the-movement/what-is-transition/> (Last accessed 28/09/2022)

⁵ <https://transitionsnetwork.org/> (Last accessed 05/10/22)

through structural, technological, cultural and behavioural change. A distinction is sometimes drawn between transition and transformation, the former implying a gradual process and the latter indicating a more radical or revolutionary shift (Brown et al, 2012; Hinrichs, 2014; Stirling, 2015), see Section 2.1. This research responds to a call for greater consideration of spatial dynamics and the role of place in sustainability transitions (Coenen et al, 2012; Markard et al, 2012; Truffer and Coenen, 2012; Truffer et al, 2015; Frantzeskaki et al, 2018) and more specifically in food systems transitions (Marsden, 2013; Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015; El Bilali, 2019). These calls raise questions about why transition occurs in some places and not others, how such transitions are 'scaled up and out' to reach more places and people, the extent to which the desired destinations of transition are shaped by place-based influences and who sets and drives these agendas. These open questions are channelled into three identified research gaps relating to transition destinations (spatial framings), transition agency and transition legitimacy, see Chapter Two. These three headings structure the research questions (Chapter Three) and form the basis of the three results and discussion chapters (Chapters Five to Seven).

Simply stated, spatial imaginaries reflect our shared conceptualisations of space and place that influence how we perceive and make sense of the world. They are implicit, collective understandings of spatiality that frame, permit and justify spatial practices (Davoudi, 2018). Spatial imaginaries gather power as they capture the collective imagination. Their neat slogans become shorthand for a shared ideal – 'the garden city', 'the 20-minute neighbourhood', 'the smart city' or 'the sustainable food city'. They are also a communication tool, signalling collective intent. Since relocalisation is often pursued as a favourable alternative, there is a need to better understand the extent to which ideas about rescaling the food system coalesce to form 'powerful' shared spatial imaginaries. This raises questions about what normative imaginaries exist, why one imaginary should be adopted while others fail, and the extent to which there is agreement about what scalar framings should be applied, especially in light of food and the rescaling of food systems. There are also questions of agency: how spatial imaginaries are created and by whom, and whether they are more reflective of certain interests over others. Might seemingly coherent and shared spatial imaginaries be

underpinned by dissent, conflict and compromise? To this end, the research draws a distinction between individual spatial visions and commonly-held spatial imaginaries. Specifically, the research seeks to better understand the relationship between the spatial visions of individual and institutional actors and more widely-shared, societal spatial imaginaries.

There are several good reasons for applying a spatial imaginaries lens to better understand sustainability transitions. Firstly, it shines a light on the transformative capacity of imaginaries to shape transition pathways. Researchers highlight a performative (mutually-reinforcing) relationship between the imaginary and the material practices associated with 'doing transitions' (Watkins, 2015; Sengers, 2017). Working in one direction, this indicates spatial imaginaries are critical to understanding transition, since they *"play a powerful role in shaping decisions and commitments in the present"* (Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). Secondly, the study of spatial imaginaries places transition within a socio-spatial context. This is helpful, given the need to better understand the role of place in sustainability transitions (see above and Section 2.1), and the ability of spatial imaginaries to gather power to promote certain transitions over others (Chateau et al, 2021). In reverse, fusing the concepts also enables sustainability transitions to inform spatial imaginaries thinking. This responds to a call for research on how spatial imaginaries are modified by material practices (Watkins, 2015). Specifically, it raises questions about how spatial imaginaries are shaped and legitimised by the everyday activities and behaviours seeking to bring about transition. Do adopted imaginaries reflect the relative ease of undertaking particular transition activities or patterns of rescaling over others? In other words, are imaginaries influenced by what is achievable in practice and limited by everyday realities? Or is there a disconnection between imaginaries and the everyday acts of 'doing transitions' (how imaginative are the imaginaries)? To summarise, studying the nature of the relationship between spatial imaginaries and sought transitions provides new insights into the drive to rescale our food systems.

Having justified the value of using a spatial imaginaries lens to better understand sustainability transitions, we now turn our attention to applying the approach in the context of food partnerships. Food partnerships and their associated

networks are primarily a feature of the global north, and have been identified as agents of food system transition (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Prové et al, 2019; RSA, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019; FAO, 2020), see Section 2.5.3. These partnerships go by a variety of names and operate at a range of spatial scales, but are united by the desire to tackle food-related issues such as obesity, food poverty, waste and climate change by developing cross-sector partnerships of local public agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses and academics⁶. Most active food partnerships in the UK (the research focus – see below) are affiliated to and supported by Sustainable Food Places (SFP). SFP is a partnership between Food Matters, Sustain and The Soil Association and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, one of the largest grant-makers to UK-based charities seeking to build an inclusive, creative and sustainable society⁷. SFP plays a key role in setting both the collective vision and agenda through the deployment of its processes, toolkit, awards scheme and a support network.

There are a number of reasons why the UK was selected at the research focus. Broadly speaking, UK food partnerships and SFP are relatively well-placed to engage with civil society, access funding, develop political connections (though this comes with risk) and respond proactively to policy gaps (Lang and Heasman, 2015; RSA, 2019; Parsons, 2020; Moragues-Faus, 2021). To expand, UK food partnerships and the SFP network operate in an arena where responsibility for food policy is highly dispersed (Parsons, 2020; National Food Strategy, 2021). The movement emerged in parallel to a political shift in the UK towards localism and volunteerism, reflected in the ‘Big Society’ and the Localism Act, see Chapter Four. Taking advantage of greater funding opportunities, SFP has sought to fill a vacuum created by the absence of a national food strategy or framework, recognising that in a country where 80% of the population live in urban areas, cities are key in transforming the food system (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018). Latterly, movement participants have provided evidence to the long-awaited National Food Plan (National Food Strategy, 2021). This means UK food

⁶ www.sustainablefoodplaces.org (Last accessed 08/02/18)

⁷ <https://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk/about-us> (Last accessed 25/05/2023)

partnerships are uniquely positioned as transition actors and disrupters, making them an ideal 'unit of analysis' for studying the relationship between rescaling, vision and transition of food systems.

The food partnership movement is already the recipient of researcher attention, with a particular focus on power and governance aspects. But there are gaps. Figure 1.1 visually positions the research within a recent body of literature exploring the influence of politics, power and governance on transforming food systems. Each 'petal' relates to a specific paper; themes broadly coalesce around the potential for food partnerships and their associated networks to transform the food system through rescaling. The intersection between the petals and the centre refer to the emerging scalar and/or spatial constructs that are both encouraged and hindered by prevailing governance and power structures. This research shifts the focus towards the spatial imaginaries themselves, illustrated by the 'research gap' in the centre of the circle. In doing so, it invites us to consider how individually imagined alternative futures coalesce to form shared spatial imaginaries of food system transition. The research reflects on aspects of politics, power and governance, including who is involved (and excluded) and how they are organised. But it also opens up thinking around the performative relationship between spatial imaginaries and sustainability transitions (Chapter Seven) and reflects on the 'relational triangle' between imagined food futures, the process of transition and the role of scale (Chapter Eight).

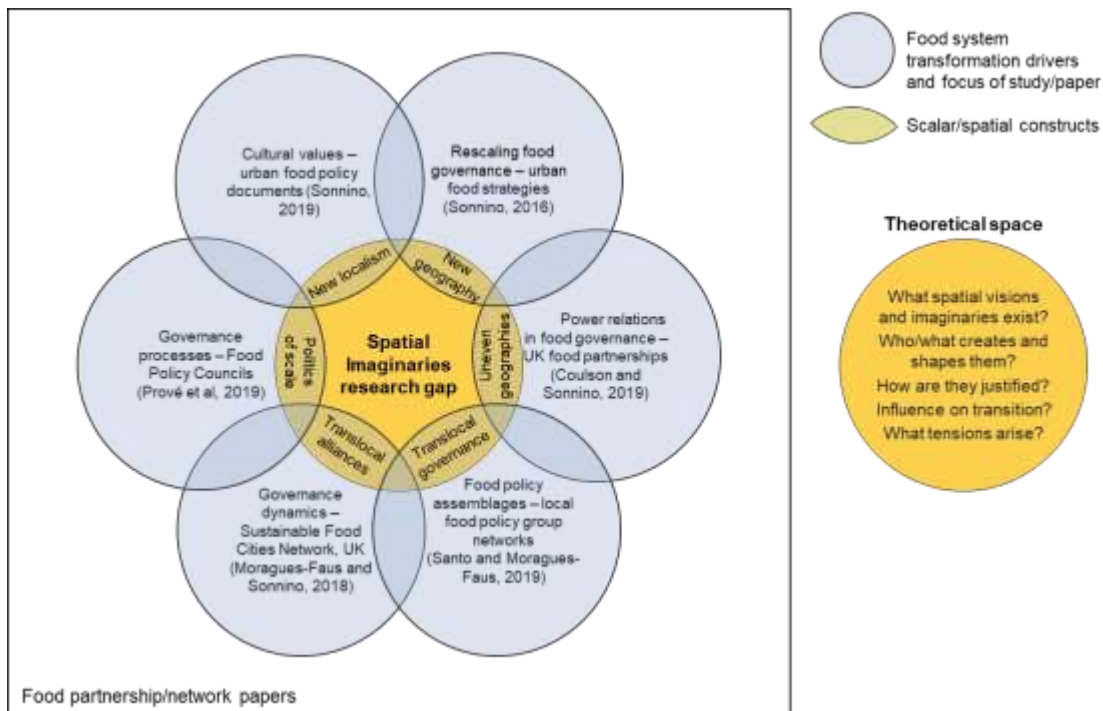


Figure 1.1 Spatial imaginaries research gap

While the research provides opportunities to inform both sustainability transitions and spatial imaginaries, the Research Questions (RQs) in this thesis use spatial imaginaries as the entry point through which to explore the relationship between imaginaries, transition and scale. This is consistent with the research gap highlighted in Figure 1.1. Developing and finalising the RQs was an iterative and reflexive process, drawing on the key research gaps identified in the evolving literature review and revisiting the draft RQs periodically to ensure data collection outputs met the research demand and responded to the challenges of Covid (see Chapters Three and Four). The RQs have been deliberately kept simple, exploratory and open-ended, in order to develop a depth and breadth of findings. The rationale behind each RQ is detailed in Chapter Three, and each RQ forms the basis of a results chapters (Five to Seven).

1. What visions and spatial imaginaries are present within and across food partnerships?
 - a. What spatial imaginaries exist within and across food partnerships?
 - b. To what extent is there alignment or tension between individual visions, food partnership strategies and shared spatial imaginaries?

- c. How are desirable scales re-imagined?
2. Who creates these visions and spatial imaginaries, and who is excluded?
3. How are these visions and spatial imaginaries formed, shared, prioritised and validated ('justifying transitions') and implemented and practiced ('doing transitions')?

The research takes a qualitative, mixed methods approach with experimental elements that required adaptation to meet the challenges of a global pandemic. Data sources comprise a review of publicly available documents from 50 active UK food partnerships, carried out between 2018 and 2019, and three diverse case studies incorporating semi-structured interviews with 27 participants representing national-level organisations and three food partnership-based case studies in England – Bristol, Calderdale and Leicestershire. This included the generation of 25 'current' and 'future' participant maps. The UK entered its first lockdown halfway through the data collection process. This led to some significant changes, including moving face-to-face interviews online and adapting the mental mapping exercise from participant-created maps to researcher-created drafts (based on carefully worded discussions) which were reviewed and finalised by participants. The data were analysed using a combination of narrative and mapping analysis.

The research results are presented across Chapters Five to Seven. Chapter Five's 'spatial framings' findings highlight the value of moving beyond the 'foodscapes' reflected in food partnerships' charters and strategies to examine the underlying individual spatial visions and more widely-held spatial imaginaries. The findings expose how the desired destinations of transitions are imagined and scaled by individual actors in multiple ways. Rather than being a problem, I argue that better understanding these differences, complexities and nuances is an important step towards developing more coherent, compelling, truly shared visions in future. Chapter Six's 'agency' findings collectively suggest food partnerships could benefit from making more intentional choices about the engagement (or exclusion) of particular actor groups to ensure those entrusted with delivering transition help to shape the spatial vision. They also urge food partnerships to make more conscious choices with regards to the organisational

structures and roles they adopt, which position them as ‘vision takers’ or ‘vision makers’. Chapter Seven’s ‘legitimacy and practice’ findings reflect the mutually reinforcing, potentially transformative relationship between spatial imaginaries and material practices. They demonstrate that while rescaling is central to reimagining the everyday imaginaries of food systems transitions, there is a delicate balance between idealism and practicality. In this way, the differences between food partnerships’ documented visions and individually imagined participant visions highlight tensions between what is politically and economically defensible and the innate values of individuals seeking transformative change. Failure to recognise and navigate such challenges risks locking out alternative imaginaries and locking in institutional norms. Collectively the nine findings demonstrate the utility of the mapping process in unlocking spatial imaginaries to better understand the role of scale in reimagining more sustainable, just and secure food systems transitions.

To summarise, this section has outlined and justified the application of a spatial imaginaries lens to better understand the relationship between food system imaginaries, sustainability transitions and scale. It has introduced UK food partnerships and the SFP network, positioning them as part of a wider movement seeking to break down traditional imaginaries and operating as disruptors or agents of transition in a highly turbulent environment. This collectively introduces the rationale behind selecting ‘the food partnership’ as the unit of analysis within the research, and forms the basis of the research questions. Finally, it has outlined the research methods and key findings. A brief summary of the remaining chapters concludes the Introduction.

The literature review is presented in Chapter Two. Building on the ‘relocalisation and the drive to rescale’ problem statement in section 1.2, Chapter Two critiques the literature on sustainability transitions and spatial imaginaries concepts separately, before examining the need for dialogue between the two. It makes the case for why they should be brought together, draws attention to a gap in literature and highlights the value derived from this pairing to make an original contribution to our understanding of how rescaling is used in (re)imagining food

systems transitions. It frames the research within a recent body of literature focused on the politics and governance of food system transformation, in the context of food partnerships and networks. It interprets the literature through a spatial imaginaries lens to justify the need to further develop thinking in this area. Taking a UK focus, it positions food partnerships as agents of transition and argues the need to better understand their influence on disrupting 'traditional' spatial imaginaries and promoting rescaled alternatives.

Collectively Chapters Three and Four frame the structure, approach and context for the research in more detail. Chapter Three outlines the research design and methods. It provides the justification for the three research questions (outlined above) which draw on the concepts of sustainability transition destinations, agency and legitimacy to reveal and explore the individual visions and shared spatial imaginaries seeking to rescale food systems. It outlines the research design and methods. Chapter Four sets the context for the research. It positions food partnerships within the national policy framework, contextualises the desktop review and case studies and sets out the analytical approach.

Chapters Five to Seven outline the nine findings. Each of these chapters is divided into a findings section and a broader discussion and reflection section. Chapter Eight brings together the nine research findings to broaden the discussion and reflect on the research's original contribution to knowledge. The chapter is organised around two sections. Section 8.1 considers the unique value (and limitations) of the spatial mapping exercise in bringing a greater depth of understanding beyond the written and verbal accounts (Lareau, 2021). Section 8.2 returns to the 'relational triangle' concept to examine how the findings collectively contribute to understanding the interrelationship between spatial imaginaries, sustainability transitions and the desire to rescale our food systems. Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by returning to the research title to consider the role of spatial mapping as a means to unlock imagination. It summarises the study's original contribution to knowledge, limitations and opportunities for further development.

2. Literature review

Chapter One highlights the desire to relocalise our food supply chains – popular within many ‘alternative’ food movements – to mitigate the problems associated with the current, globalised food system. It exposes a need to examine the extent to which powerful, shared visions of the future influence how food systems change or ‘transition’ towards these imagined, rescaled alternatives. In response, the research seeks to apply a spatial imaginaries lens to better understand the role of rescaling in food system transitions. The supporting literature review starts by laying down the key theoretical constructs and highlights how the relationship between sustainability transitions and spatial imaginaries is under-explored. It goes on to argue that examining the relationship will shed new light on how scale is re-imagined to drive food system transition. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 introduce sustainability transitions theory and examine the preferred scales within food system transitions literature. Section 2.3 provides an overview of the spatial imaginaries concept. It reflects on what the spatial imaginaries lens brings to sustainability transitions, and conversely the how the combination informs spatial imaginaries thinking. Section 2.4 brings together ideas about scale, spatial imaginaries and transition, and identifies some additional literature to support the research approach. Section 2.5 situates the research within a UK food systems context with a focus on the food partnership movement, and sets out how the problem statement (see section 1.2) will be tackled. By the end of this chapter we have a clear sense of the value of applying a spatial imaginaries lens to better understand the politics of rescaling food system transitions.

Figure 2.1 forms the backbone of the literature review structure and visually demonstrates the need for research in this area. Although not an exhaustive list, the Venn diagram highlights some key papers that have informed and shaped the research direction. The discussion moves from the outer to the inner circles, before targeting the intersection between spatial imaginaries and food system transitions. In doing so, the review seeks to examine the role and influence of place and scale on desired transition pathways. The literature review draws primarily on food system imaginaries, food system transitions and non-food related transition imaginaries research to identify potential knowledge gaps. At

the time of writing, no papers were discovered combining all the elements of food systems, spatial imaginaries and sustainability transitions.

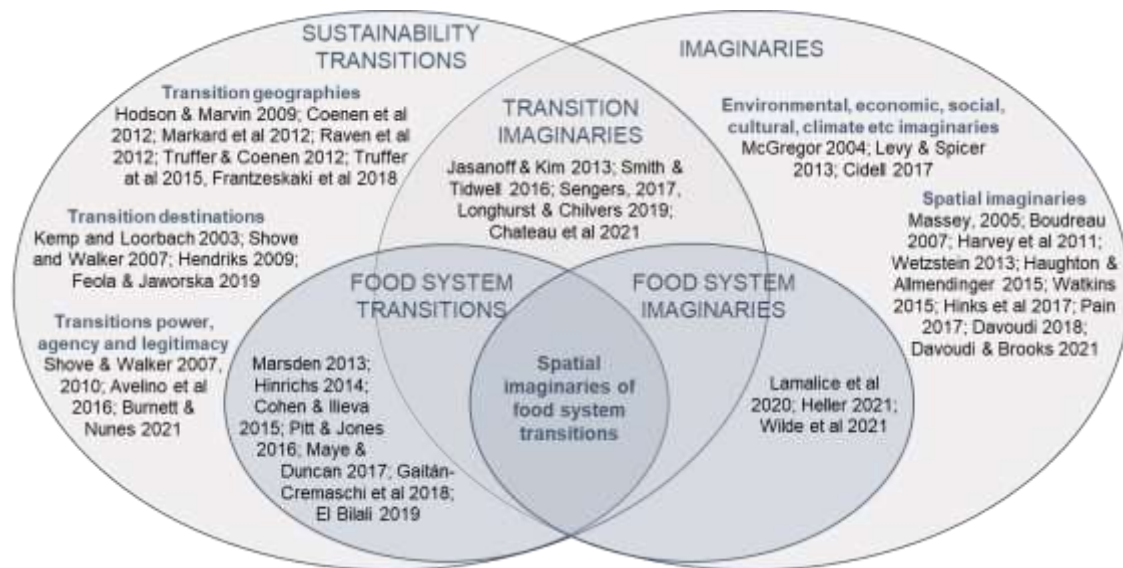


Figure 2.1 Defining the literature review boundaries and some key texts

Throughout the literature review I seek to build a case for the research questions, highlight gaps in current literature and explore the relevance of the research to both theory and practice.

2.1 Sustainability transitions

In its broadest sense, the research responds to the need for greater consideration of how place matters in sustainability transitions. The general call is amplified in relation to *food system* transitions. This section therefore provides a brief introduction to sustainability transitions, before honing in on the need to develop food systems thinking in this area. Although the research draws on a bank of transitions literature, the Sustainability Transitions Research Network's (STRN's) updated research agenda provides a good basis for discussion (Köhler et al, 2019). While my research touches on many of the STRN review's nine key themes, it is primarily aligned with three thematic areas: the geography of transitions; power and politics in transitions; and civil society and social movements in transitions. This section begins to shape the research focus. It starts to explore and unpack the interrelationship between transition destinations, agency and legitimacy (power and politics and social movements) and spatiality

(transitions geographies). Each of these areas are introduced in turn, firstly in relation to sustainability transitions in general, before narrowing the focus on food transitions. The section also includes a summary of two widely-used approaches within sustainability transitions: the multi-level perspective and transition management. These approaches have particular relevance to the research and are revisited in Chapter Eight.

While this research focuses on sustainability transitions, it also references the concept of transformation in relation to both transformative spatial imaginaries (Section 2.3) and food systems transformation (Section 2.5.1). As touched upon in Chapter One, it is worth explicitly reflecting on some of the nuances and ambiguities around defining 'transition' and 'transformation', and the extent to which the two terms can be used interchangeably. A number of researchers highlight how the two terms signal the need for widespread social change and are not mutually-exclusive (Feola, 2015; Stirling, 2015; Child and Breyer, 2017; Hölscher et al, 2018). It is asserted that the two terms are used interchangeably and in contraction to each other by different authors (Child and Breyer, 2017); that variations largely stem from the different nomenclatures adopted by distinct research communities (Hölscher et al, 2018); and that 'transformation' may be applied as a loose metaphor or an analytically relevant concept (Feola, 2015). Given the interconnections between transition and transformation and the lack of agreed definition, there is a logic to incorporating some targeted 'transformation' literature in the context of this thesis to enhance understanding of food systems transitions.

In broad terms, transition theory is concerned with the gradual movement of a system from one state to another, through fundamental changes in structure, culture and practice (Loorbach and Rotmans, 2010; Lachman, 2013). Over the last fifteen years, the initial focus on technological transitions (Geels, 2002) has broadened to include socio-technical transitions and most recently sustainability transitions (Lawhon and Murphy, 2012; Marsden, 2013). Sustainability transitions recognise the need to move beyond incremental improvements and technical fixes, seeking out more radical changes to tackle stark environmental and societal challenges (Grin et al, 2010; Köhler et al, 2019). There are multiple approaches

under the sustainability transitions umbrella that seek to explain how transitions occur. These range from strategic niche management (SNM) and technological innovation systems (TIS) which study the emergence of new innovations (Köhler et al, 2019), to a social practices approach (SPA) which recognises the importance of human agency and the need to shift everyday practices and behavioural routines (Hinrichs, 2014). The research draws on the multi-level perspective (MLP) and transition management (TM). The MLP and TM approaches are briefly introduced in the paragraphs below, and revisited in subsequent chapters, most notably Chapter Eight.

The MLP is used to express transition through interactions between three levels: regimes (practices, regulations, technologies and norms), landscape (exogenous factors and pressures such as climate change, environmental degradation, population growth) and niches (incubators, spaces and activities that support innovation). Opportunities to change the 'regime' occur either by the proliferation or breakthrough of niche innovation and/or by changes in the socio-technical landscape, for example in response to climate change pressures, water shortages, or a burgeoning obesity crisis (Geels, 2002; Marsden, 2013; Hinrichs, 2014). The advantages of the MLP approach include the ability to examine the socio-technical dynamics of complex systems; a multidimensionality that extends thinking beyond individual technologies and thus has utility to policy-makers (Smith et al, 2010; Geels, 2011; Geels, 2012; Lachman, 2013; Geels, 2019). Conversely, the shortcomings of the MLP approach have been debated at some length, drawing attention to factors including (but not limited to) a failure to adequately consider aspects of agency, politics and power; bias towards grassroots change; a narrow focus on technological innovation; insufficient consideration of spatial factors; a lack of attention to transitional decline or failure and the need for greater reflexivity (Shove and Walker, 2007; Smith et al, 2010; Geels, 2011; Coenen and Truffer, 2012; Marsden, 2013; Berkeley et al, 2017; Geels, 2019). Notwithstanding these debates, it is important to note this research does not constitute a critique of the MLP. Rather, the MLP approach is used as a vehicle to visually structure, interrogate and communicate the research themes and pathways to transition.

Working from the STRN's 'power and politics' and 'social movements' themes, the need for further research on transition destinations, agency and legitimacy is explored. Studying the pathways to transition is helpful for conceptualising *how* transitions could be made or what is holding us back (Lawhon and Murphy, 2012). However, the visions, goals or objectives of transitions are often overlooked. While 'sustainable transitions' highlight a general direction, such transitions are complex and require multiple solutions (Lachman 2013). Envisioning the desired destinations of sustainability transitions and defining what the outcomes should look and feel like is a challenging matter. For example, visions and supporting values, norms and practices may bring consensus and unity, or create conflict and tension where they are not commonly held by multiple actors (Hansen and Coenen, 2015). Of the various sustainability transitions approaches, transition management is most concerned about the goals of transition, who influences the trajectories and the ways in which actors shape and attempt to manage the process, although there is an argument that ultimately transitions cannot be managed (Shove and Walker, 2007). While transition management may ask more questions about the 'desired destination' of transition, it assumes firstly, that there is a vision and secondly, that the vision is shared by critical actors and their supporting organisations (Shove and Walker, 2007). They go on to call for research to "*articulate the complex, multiple, and always contested commitments that go into making future visions toward which transitions are directed*" (Shove and Walker, 2007). There is also a need to better understand how and by whom agendas are prioritised and contested as part of developing normative goals of transition (Köhler et al, 2019). This brings us to questions of transition legitimacy. Perceptions of legitimacy are critical to securing investment and policy support (Bergman, 2017). On the other hand, legitimacy may be undermined if actors are excluded or unheard, recognising transitions can also create injustices (Hinrichs, 2014; Marsden, 2013; Köhler et al, 2019). This research responds by seeking to understand how the desired destinations of transition are encapsulated in visions, the ways in which these visions are created, adopted and justified (why are some visions favoured over others, while others fail to germinate) and who shapes the direction of travel.

Attention is now turned to the STRN's 'transition geography' theme. Transition geographies literature considers the spatiality of transitions: why they occur in some places and not others, the role of place-based factors including institutions, infrastructure, local culture, networks and resources, and how transitions spread between places and across scales (Köhler et al 2019). This paragraph draws out research gaps relating to spatial influences on both the desired destinations of transition and the process of transition. A number of papers in the fields of both socio-technical and sustainability transitions have tackled the need to examine the role of place in transition (Hodson and Marvin, 2009; Coenen et al, 2012; Markard et al, 2012; Raven et al, 2012; Truffer and Coenen, 2012; Truffer et al, 2015; Frantzeskaki et al, 2018). Notwithstanding the work completed to date, the STRN-identified 'gap' recognises spatial context is an important but understudied factor in how transitions unfold. Clearly, transitions do not occur equally in all places. The process of envisioning and justifying the desired destinations of transition (and who is involved), is shaped by spatial context. Research to date has already recognised the relevance of spatial visions in mobilising a range of actors and providing direction, highlighting that visions may reflect tensions and negotiations across scales, rather than consensus amongst local stakeholders (Hodson and Marvin, 2009; Truffer and Coenen, 2012; Hansen and Coenen, 2015; Köhler et al, 2019). By tackling the normative orientations of transitions and recognising the importance of place-based understandings of sustainability and how agendas are prioritised, this research taps into an area identified for future work (Raven et al, 2012; Hansen and Coenen, 2015; Köhler et al, 2019). There is also a need to better understand the role of place in the transition process. An established body of niche-level research already considers spatial influences, particularly in the field of socio-technical transitions. But there are wider questions about the relationship between place, the transition process and the MLP 'levels'. For example, how do cities and regions draw down and interpret relevant landscape pressures in the local context? Can they establish their own regimes? (Hodson and Marvin, 2009). Furthermore, we are urged to consider the influence of place on the actors governing regimes and niches to understand why progress towards sustainability is uneven (Lawhon and Murphy, 2012).

The text above identifies transitions destinations, agency, legitimacy and spatiality as themes ripe for additional research in the sustainability transitions agenda. This gives rise to some preliminary questions: how are normative goals (desired destinations) of transition formed, and how they are shaped by place-based influences; who shapes the agenda and how is it justified; why does transition occur in some places and not others; what is the relationship between the process of transitions (“doing transitions”) and the desired outcomes. The interrelationship between transition destinations, agency, legitimacy and spatiality forms the nucleus of the research.

To draw the section to a close, attention now turns toward food transitions. Building on the STRN revised research agenda (Köhler et al, 2019), a systematic review to identify food system-specific research gaps was undertaken (El Bilali, 2019). Findings from this review are combined with other food systems transition literature to refine the research focus, see Figure 2.1. Gaps of specific relevance to the research relate to i) agency, especially within social movements and civil society; and ii) spatiality/geography in transitions (El Bilali, 2019). There are multiple calls for greater consideration of power, politics and governance in transitions (Markard et al, 2012; Lachman, 2013; Marsden, 2013; Hinrichs, 2014, Avelino et al, 2016; Köhler et al, 2019). Nevertheless, Hamid El Bilali’s systematic review indicates these areas have been relatively well-served *within food sustainability transitions research* (El Bilali, 2019). He does, however, identify the need for greater consideration of *agency* – where and with whom power is held, and who benefits – within the transition process. This call is echoed more widely in general transitions literature (Shove and Walker, 2007; Lawhon and Murphy, 2012; Markard et al, 2012; Lachman, 2013), with particular focus on the role of civil society actors (El Bilali, 2019; Feola and Jaworska, 2019). The research is therefore concerned with who creates and influences the goals of transition, and the ways in which actors and institutions seek to shape and manage the process. Furthermore and in line with STRN’s transitions geographies research theme, there is also a call for greater consideration of spatiality in *food systems transitions* (Marsden, 2013; Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015; El Bilali, 2019).

To conclude, this section has started to unpack the need to further investigate the relationship between food transition destinations, agency and legitimacy, framed within a spatial context. The next section returns to the ‘problems’ of relocalisation. Recognising the open questions about how our food system should be rescaled, the research makes a case for applying a spatial imaginaries lens to bring a unique perspective on the desired transition pathways away from the global and towards the local. This allows us to reflect on the both the nature of the desired goals of transition and the relationship between these sought destinations and the process of ‘doing transitions’.

2.2 Scalar aspects of food transitions

Although this section focuses on rescaling the food system, it is first worth reflecting on some of the wider concepts of scale and rescaling that have received long-standing attention within geographical scholarly discourse. Ideas about how scale should be defined and applied have been theorised and contested, challenging assumptions of scale as a hierarchical organisation of space. These debates have variously explored and unpacked notions including scale as a social construction (Marston, 2000; Hinrichs, 2003); the politics of scale (Smith, 1992; Swyngedouw, 1997 and 2004; Brenner, 2001) or scalar politics (McCann, 2003; MacKinnon, 2010); scale as a performative imaginary (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021) and the case for abandoning the idea of scale in human geography (Marston et al, 2005). Reflecting the *“local to global continuum”* (Marston et al, 2005), a range of discourse considers the scalar implications of particular spatial configurations, often incorporating vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (interscalar/networked) thinking (Brenner, 2001; Swyngedouw, 2004; Marston et al, 2005). Configurations attracting particular attention include regions (Harrison, 2008; Paasi, 2004 and 2010; Macleod and Jones, 2007; Jonas, 2012) and city regions (Deas and Giordano, 2003; Harrison, 2010; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021), alongside relationalities including the global-local or ‘glocal’ (Swyngedouw, 1997 and 2004). Moreover, some academics have extended scalar thinking to include ‘body’ and/or ‘home’ (Smith, 1992; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Marston, 2000; Brenner, 2001). Although these broader scale-focused debates are not the focus

of this thesis *per se*, they form a foundation from which food system rescaling literature has grown. Some of these themes are therefore revisited in Section 5.1.

Noting the wider context, this section spotlights the idea of rescaling to counter the failings of the current, globalised food system, outlined in Chapter One. We recall while the broad concept of relocalisation is often positioned as a favourable alternative, there is a lack of consensus around what this looks like. This section returns to four dominant food system narratives referenced in Chapter One: watersheds, city-region food systems, re-regionalisation, and localism. They were selected as the mainstay alternatives to the globalised food system, each reflecting differing principles, narratives, concepts and challenges, see Table 2.1. The narratives become a collective vehicle through which to identify potential gaps in our understanding, raising questions about when and why certain transition pathways are popularised over others, the influence of spatial geographies and the agents of transition, and the need to develop greater insights into the role of individual and collective visioning. The section concludes with a suggestion that applying a spatial imaginaries lens will bring new insights to the role of rescaling in transitioning our food systems towards more sustainable, just and secure alternatives.

Studying Table 2.1, we see the four narratives are not entirely separate entities. Rather, their stories are interwoven and inform one another. Carving out the ideological differences between localisation and re-regionalisation is particularly challenging. Both are relational, on other words, there is no clear boundary to define where one stops and the other starts. C. Clare Hinrichs reflects on this point in her exploration of the meaning of 'local Iowa food'. By highlighting how the US state of Iowa and England are similarly sized, she draws attention to the issues of defining scale and that 'local' is likely to mean different things depending on context (Hinrichs, 2003). Similar arguments are applied to different narratives, such as differentiating between 'regional foods' and 'regional food networks' (Donald et al, 2010; Kneafsey, 2010) and 'local foods' and 'local food networks' (Watts, 2005). Furthermore, different narratives draw on similar methods. For example, the foodshed concept re-emerges within city-region literature, evidenced by the growing number of quantitative models and foodprinting studies

assessing local and regional production and consumption (Cowell and Parkinson 2003; Fairlie, 2008; Geofutures, 2008⁸; Brinkley, 2013; Zasada et al, 2017). Looking more broadly across the wider food research movement, the ‘proximity principle’ (Kloppenburger et al, 1996) and the role of the region in reversing ‘distancing’ phenomenon between consumer and source (Clancy and Ruhf, 2010; Dubbeling et al, 2017) is reflected in the call for increased visibility of provenance within the supply chain. It is also reflected in the food sovereignty movement (Patel, 2006; Wittman, 2011). Similarly the ‘moral economy’ principle – connecting food production with human needs (Kloppenburger et al, 1996) – chimes with the food justice movement. Fundamentally, each rescaling narrative seeks some kind of reconnection between producer and consumer, even if the transition pathways (process) and the desired destinations of transition (outcomes) are envisioned in different ways. In some respects, the notion separating one food system narrative from another is at odds with the interconnectedness of food processes and networks stretching from the local to the global (Yap, 2022). On the other hand, these narratives reflect how ‘better’ food futures are variously imagined by groups of actors seeking to change them: they help us envision the desired destinations of transition in spatial terms, and also tell us something about the processes required to reach these desired transition destinations. They also raise questions around what causes actors coalesce around one imagined ‘food future’ over others, the ways in which their stance is justified and the extent to which place-based factors influences are a factor. In this way, these scalar narratives have visionary qualities. It is to these visions or ‘spatial imaginaries’ of better food futures we now turn.

The next section makes the case for using spatial imaginaries as a lens through which to explore agency, legitimacy, spatiality and desired destinations of transition. It argues that studying how food systems transitions are individually and collectively imagined – in spatial terms – sheds new light on the relationship between rescaling, transition and the role of spatial imaginaries. This speaks to the research gap identified in Figure 2.1 and supplements existing research on the influence of politics, power and governance on transforming food systems.

⁸ <http://www.geofutures.com/food/mapping-the-future-of-food/> (Last accessed 21/12/17)

Table 2.1 Alternative food system narratives

Principle	Imaginary	Key narratives	Evolution of ideas	Key terms, concepts	Gaps/weaknesses
Focus on the geographical area needed to feed a population	Foodsheds	Fostering sense of connection and responsibility to locality Analogy with watershed – flow of food into a particular place	Term borrowed from watershed Focus on the productive capacity of a geographical area – unit of analysis for thought and action	Proximity principle – linking consumer and food source Moral economy principle – connecting food production with human needs (Kloppenborg et al, 1996)	Lack of consideration of the role of governance and institutional structures and the complexity of urban-rural food flows (Blay-Palmer et al, 2018)
Cities have a role and responsibility to build a more sustainable and just food system	City Region Food Systems (CRFS)	Increasing the contribution of urban, peri-urban, regional agriculture to meet urban food requirements Cities as ‘units of transition’ (Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015)	Throughout history cities have relied on their hinterlands (Steel, 2008) Concept emerged from stakeholder discussions (2012-13); promoted by international organisations (FAO, RUAF, MUFPP)	Whole food chains within geographical regions, connecting urban centre(s) with the peri-urban and rural hinterland (Dubbeling et al. 2017; Cabannes and Marocchino, 2018)	Emphasises city at expense of rural Potential disconnect between promotion of the imaginary and practical take-up by towns and cities Not suitable for all circumstances e.g. small/island nations (Cabannes and Marocchino, 2018)
Insufficiency of the local	Re-regionalisation	Maximise food produced, processed and consumed at multiple levels and scales within the region	Links to foodsheds – emphasising natural capital and resource availability, potential to cross political boundaries	Promotes self-reliance over self-sufficiency (Clancy and Ruhf, 2010) Benefits to remain within region Diversity of solutions to suit individual regions	Focus on sustainable production at the expense of role of the consumer (Garnett, 2014; Lang, 2017)
Minimising distance between production and consumption	Localism	Increasing proportion of local food in a way that enhances economic, environmental, and societal benefits	Food sovereignty movement – encouraging community control over how food is produced and consumed	Increased visibility and control of provenance across the supply chain Scale as socially constructed (Born and Purcell, 2006)	Risk of uncritical view that local is inherently more sustainable or just/seen as an end in itself (Born & Purcell, 2006)

2.3 Spatial imaginaries of sustainability transitions

The previous sections established while sustainability transitions research considers the pathways to sustainability, there is a need to i) better understand the normative goals of these transitions (Hinrichs, 2014; Raven et al, 2017) and ii) develop place-based understandings of 'sustainability' (Köhler et al, 2019). This section examines how a spatial imaginaries lens can help. Imaginaries literature explores many different types of shared visions, including social (Mangnus et al, 2019; Lamalice et al, 2020), sustainable (Cidell, 2017), environmental (McGregor, 2004), climate (Levy and Spicer, 2013), economic (Jessop, 2010) and sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff and Kim, 2009). The focus of this research is spatial imaginaries, although it does draw on wider imaginaries literature, on occasion. It is given that spatial imaginaries may co-exist with, and contain elements of, many other types of imaginary (Hincks et al, 2017). First, the section introduces the concept of spatial imaginaries. It then turns to the area of overlap between imaginaries and sustainability transitions in Figure 2.1, providing the rationale for applying a spatial imaginaries lens. In this way it argues that taking a spatial imaginaries approach helps us better understand the identified sustainability transition research gaps: desired destinations, legitimacy, agency and spatiality.

Spatial imaginaries are the collective understanding of spaces based on ideas, perceptions and 'lived experiences' of the spaces themselves (Lefebvre, 1991; Nerlich, 2015). They are defined by Simin Davoudi as "*tacit, taken-for-granted understandings of spatiality that give sense to, enable and legitimate collective spatial practices. They are socially held assemblages of stories, images, memories and experiences of places*" (Davoudi, 2018). Spatial imaginaries are created when ideas – initially held by individuals or small groups – become more generally accepted through action and practice. The idea and the reality are mutually reinforced and maintained and actors are ascribed agency (Watkins, 2015; Davoudi, 2018). Spatial imaginaries can become powerful visions or "self-fulfilling prophecies" of what comes next, if adopted by enough people (Massey 2005; Watkins, 2015). So whilst they neither predict nor determine the future, they have the power to inform and influence our decision-making (Haughton and

Allmendinger, 2015; Kristensen et al, 2016), shape policy and practice (Levy and Spicer, 2013) and create expectations, driving innovation (Bergman, 2017). This substantiates the view of Watkins and others that spatial imaginaries are “*more than discourse*” (Watkins, 2015). Davoudi’s point above about the inferred nature of spatial imaginaries is interesting (Davoudi, 2018). It raises questions not only about the nature of spatial imaginaries themselves, for example why some come to dominate while others fade, but also the processes by which these unspoken understandings evolve through time.

The research considers the interplay between three types of spatial imaginary: places, idealised spaces and spatial transformations (Watkins, 2015). This can be expressed as the relationship between what makes places distinctive or unique (place imaginaries), what places should be like (idealised space imaginaries, such as the ‘food city’, ‘smart city’ or ‘eco city’) and how places could or should evolve (spatial transformation imaginaries, for example relocalisation or gentrification). Watkins goes on to outline an ontology of spatial imaginaries, which he classifies as semiotic orders (development of linguistic systems that *may* be acted on), worldviews (ideologies that justify material action), representational discourse (linguistic representations used to justify material practices) and performative discourse (imaginary constructed through repeated and collective performance). The research aligns with Watkins’ interpretation of spatial imaginaries as performative, created and modified by the interaction between language and repeated and collective practices. It also responds to his call for research that considers how spatial imaginaries are modified by material practices.

The research makes a distinction between individual visions and shared imaginaries. The exact point of transition from vision to imaginary is hard to pinpoint, though several papers underline the importance of imagination and story-telling. Frans Sengers asserts the process is dependent on the creative capability of individuals to imagine different and better futures through the telling of “*persuasive stories*” (Sengers, 2017). Noam Bergman discusses how visions or “*stories about the future*” become shared imaginaries when they are sufficiently powerful in public discourse and policymaking to shape expectations and

stimulate action, in the context of technological innovation (Bergman, 2017). Thus, one could assume that imaginaries are normative, insofar as they i) provide a shared sense of meaning and relate to how institutions and activities (and for the purposes of the research – how space) ought to be structured (Levy and Spicer, 2013) and ii) include shared assumptions, for example about desired behaviours, economics and developments (Bergman, 2017). I also subscribe to the position that multiple, contested imaginaries exist simultaneously, and that imaginaries are not static (Levy and Spicer, 2013).

Attention is now turned to the benefits of combining the concepts of sustainability transitions and spatial imaginaries. Figure 2.1 highlights the intersection between spatial imaginaries and transitions is an area under-served in literature: the literature review did not identify any examples of a spatial imaginaries lens being applied to food system transitions. Nevertheless, in recent years there has been an increasing focus on the combination of various (mostly socio-technical) imaginaries and energy transitions (Jasanoff and Kim, 2013; Smith and Tidwell, 2016; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). There are also papers linking spatial imaginaries and energy transitions (Chateau et al, 2021) and urban imaginaries and sustainability transitions (Sengers, 2017). So there is opportunity to draw on this small set of papers, firstly to build the rationale for combining sustainability transitions and spatial imaginaries concepts, and secondly, to begin to explore how this combination could be applied to address gaps in food systems thinking. This section reflects back to the under-researched areas in sustainability transitions identified in section 2.1 – the geographies, destinations, agency and legitimacy of transition – to consider how spatial imaginaries could be applied to engage with these themes. This line of enquiry provides a means to draw out questions and potential lines of investigation for this research.

A central argument for combining the two concepts lies in the potential for spatial (and/or other) imaginaries to bring about transformative change, highlighting the notion that imaginaries define and steer the **desired destinations of transition**. This process is described and emphasised in slightly different ways. Frans Sengers highlights the role of envisioning in bringing about transition, and seeks to study how *“vague conceptual images inspired by far-flung ideals”* can coalesce

and mobilise to influence transition processes (Sengers, 2017). Meanwhile Jessica Smith and Abraham Tidwell argue that notions of ‘better futures’ are grounded in current realities. This raises interesting questions about the limits of the transformational power of imagination and the extent to which visions and imaginaries are tempered by what is experienced/what pre-exists in the material world. The performative nature of visions, in other words their ability to change the future trajectory by shaping decisions and commitments in the present, are also stressed as critical to understanding transition (Sengers, 2017; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). Collectively these observations raise questions about the role of imaginaries in shaping the goals of transition, and how imaginaries are in turn modified by the material practices of ‘doing transitions’.

Several authors recognise the relationship between the spatial and social components of imaginaries, calling for greater consideration of the role and influence of **scale and geographies** to add richness to our understanding of how sustainability transitions occur (Hodson and Marvin, 2009; Sengers, 2017; Chateau et al, 2021). Not only does this help us understand transitions as socio-spatial projects, it also casts light on how the spatial politics and scalar dynamics of imaginaries influence the promotion of certain transitions over others (Chateau et al, 2021). Jessica Smith and Abraham Tidwell offer a fascinating insight into how some (sociotechnical) imaginaries are bounded at the ‘local’ scale and fail to exert national-level influence (Smith and Tidwell, 2016). The drive to understand the influence of scale raises questions about why certain scales are favoured over others in pursuing sustainability transitions and the extent to which imaginaries conform to or push against established political, administrative, geographical, cultural and historical borders and boundaries. Questions around rescaling are further developed in the next section.

Smith and Tidwell’s example of locally bound imaginaries in the paragraph above also segues into themes of **transition agency and legitimacy**. They attribute the failure to exert national-level influence to the presence of dominant elites, raising questions about “*who does the imagining*”, the risk of under-representation where communities lack political power to enact imaginaries, and why some localised imaginaries fail to translate more widely (Smith and Tidwell, 2016). By contrast,

Sengers (2017) stresses the pivotal role of agency and the characteristics of actors, identifying cycle campaigners as ‘change agents’ capable of unlocking imagination – a crucial first step in breaking the structures inhibiting transition. This raises questions about whether agency, imagination and vision are potentially capable of breaking down the socio-spatial constraints Smith and Tidwell describe. Longhurst and Chilvers (2019) stress the value of examining multiple and competing perspectives rather than dominant imaginaries. The latter, they argue, are the focus of most research. Instead, they examine a range of formal, documented energy strategies across different institutional settings, an approach that highlights several important points. Firstly, it recognises the potential for multiple, potentially conflicting visions to exist beneath seemingly ‘accepted’ imaginaries. Taking this one step further, one may speculate that the ostensibly ‘shared’ documented energy strategies used in Longhurst and Chilvers’ study may in turn obscure multiple, competing, individual visions of the actors contributing to (or excluded from) the creation of these documents. Collectively these papers raise questions about how and why certain imaginaries are legitimised and carried forward over others, which voices are heard, and which voices and imaginaries remain socially and spatially ‘bounded’. They also encourage us to look beneath seemingly shared spatial imaginaries to better understand individual and organisational visions, and the extent to which there is consistency (or dissonance) between them.

To summarise, there are several key elements from this section that are drawn out and taken forward in the research: the idea that spatial imaginaries are performative; the notion of the three imaginary types (Watkins, 2015); and the need to better understand the relationship between individual visions and more widely held spatial imaginaries. The benefits of combining imaginaries and transitions in ongoing energy research discussed above also relevant to the study of food transitions. Furthermore, the dearth of research linking spatial imaginaries and food system transitions deserves to be addressed. The ‘transitions geographies, destinations, agency and legitimacy’ themes – identified as understudied areas in section 2.1 – are also present in the papers reviewed in this section. This lends weight to the argument that they can serve as a structure or

framework to bring new perspectives by combining sustainability transitions and spatial imaginaries concepts.

2.4 Investigating the politics of scale in food transition imaginaries

Section 2.2 identifies an opportunity to better understand the role of scale in food systems transitions. Section 2.3 examines how applying a spatial imaginaries lens will help to bridge some identified gaps in sustainability transition research. This section brings scale, imaginaries and transitions together. Firstly, it identifies some relevant examples of how imaginaries and scale have been combined in research to date. Secondly, it builds the case for using spatial imaginaries as a point of access to explore the relationship between imaginaries, transition and scale. Thirdly, it identifies and outlines two complementary literature sets that can be used to inform the research methodology (Chapter Three) and help interpret the findings (Chapters Five to Seven).

There is an identified need to bring together thinking on imaginaries and scale (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). To this end, researchers have generally explored the politics of rescaling through specific spatial imaginaries including new regional spaces (Boudreau, 2007), the city region (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021), cross-border regions (Varró, 2014), nation states (Jessop, 2009) and localisation (Prové et al, 2019). So there is 'room' to look more broadly across multiple socio-spatial scales (Yap, 2022). Several authors have drawn on the spatial imaginaries concept to examine the politics of rescaling and how particular scales become institutionalised (Boudreau, 2007; Prové et al, 2019; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). While the 'fuzziness' of the boundaries of these newly scaled spaces may vary, the concepts of scale framing, negotiating, matching and fixing (Prové et al, 2019) are all relevant to understanding how spatial imaginaries are created and legitimised (and by whom), in the context of my research. While rescaling doesn't guarantee increased justice and democracy (Boudreau, 2007; Nunes, 2017; Prové et al, 2019), it demonstrates a desire to challenge existing political boundaries to better reflect societal needs (Hincks et al, 2017). These ideas are further developed in Chapter Five. Several authors construct different ways of

explaining how scale is restructured. Julie-Anne Boudreau views spatial imaginaries (building legitimacy), spatial practices (everyday behaviour) and spatial tools (relaxing existing borders and boundaries) as instruments in the creation of new political space (Boudreau, 2007). This maps consistently with the approach of this research, exploring the links between the legitimisation of certain spatial imaginaries and the spatial practices associated with 'doing transitions' (Chapter Seven).

This research presents an opportunity to build on and extend existing literature by weaving in transitions thinking, using spatial imaginaries as a point of access. It is worth reflecting again on the three imaginary types (Watkins, 2015): place imaginaries, spatial transformation imaginaries and idealised space imaginaries. The research connects these imaginary types with both sustainability transitions and the food system rescaling narratives outlined in section 2.2. In this way, the food system rescaling narratives may be positioned as spatial transformation imaginaries (e.g. re-regionalisation, localism) or idealised space imaginaries (e.g. the foodshed, the city-region food system). The spatial transformation imaginaries speak to the process of transition towards the idealised space imaginaries reflecting the desired destinations of transition. In this way, the drive to rescale our food systems forges a link between the spatial imaginaries concept and sustainability transitions theory.

Thirdly, this section identifies two additional and complementary bodies of literature to help investigate the relationship between transition, imaginaries and scale. At its core, the research seeks to study the unique perspectives spatial imaginaries bring to understanding food system transition through rescaling. The approach relies on identifying and understanding the imaginaries themselves before positioning them within the context of scalar transitions. Thus it is important to consider how spatial imagination – the development, manifestation and influence of individual visions and collective spatial imaginaries – could be studied. Because of the inherently scalar, spatial nature of the research, it makes sense to use maps as a mechanism or tool to explore the 'relational triangle'. To this end, the research draws on literature reflecting a long history of spatial imaginaries, maps and map-making in geography and planning. This is split into

two subsections below. The first subsection relates to the use of spatial imaginaries in planning. The second subsection explores the utility of map-making in identifying and understanding spatial imaginaries. At this juncture, it is important to recognise that many of the planning-related research papers referenced throughout this section connect with wider regional geography literatures through their consideration of scale (Section 2.2) in connection with power and politics and/or imaginaries (Zonneveld, 2005; Boudreau, 2007; Brenner, 2009; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009 and 2010; Haughton and Allmendinger, 2015; Hincks et al, 2017; Davoudi, 2018 and 2019; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021).

2.4.1 Spatial imaginaries in planning literature

Some notable planning imaginaries have painted vivid pictures of the possibilities of alternatively scaled food systems. These include the Garden City movement (Howard, 1902), Broadacre City (Lloyd Wright, 1932), 'agropolis' (Friedmann and Douglass, 1975 and 1978; Friedmann, 2013) and Sitopia (Steel, 2008). Yet is not always possible to attribute imaginaries to an individual. Some imaginaries (e.g. the 'smart city', 'sustainable city', 'global city', food city') are based on an assemblage of ideas from a variety of sources that may influence planning policy and practice as they coalesce in the public consciousness (Davoudi, 2018). While recognising there are a variety of ways in which imaginaries are created and solidified in the public conscious, there are good reasons to draw on planning literature to inform the research.

The planning body of literature offers insights into the ways in which imaginaries may be bounded, drawing attention to the relationship between imaginaries and rescaling. The literature also offers some insight into why certain spatial imaginaries prevail over others. 'Soft spaces' is a potentially helpful concept that emerged from spatial planning and economic development literature. It explores how governance initiatives may create alternative geographies, rather than working to established territorial boundaries such as local government (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009 and 2010; Hincks et al, 2017). This raises a question around the extent to which successful food systems imaginaries

overwrite territorial boundaries and spatially constrained thinking (Sonnino, 2016 and 2019). This question is examined further in Chapter Five. Planning research also has something to say about the process by which one imaginary 'wins out' over others. For example, Hincks et al (2017) take a regional development focus to discuss how efforts to consolidate competing spatial imaginaries are made through institution building. They highlight the importance of logics, tactics and actor alliances to *"build momentum and secure legitimacy around preferred imaginaries"*. This research responds to their call for greater understanding of this process and associated tensions that arise (Hincks et al, 2017).

There is also a practical relationship between planning and food system rescaling that deserves unpacking. It is, after all, through the planning system that urban land use tensions are negotiated and managed (in the UK). Urban food growing is often promoted as an opportunity to shorten the supply chain and reconnect producers and consumers. But there is often friction between the desire to increase urban food production and other priorities. This is an arena where the desire to enact food systems imaginaries (local growing options, urban farms, house design compatible with the ability to grow and prepare food) butt up against the need for additional housing stock, green belt preservation, energy production and so on. Planning and land use is identified as an under-examined point of leverage for food system transformation (Cabannes and Maracchino, 2018; Yap, 2022). While this research does not specifically focus on planners over other actors, it may identify possibilities to increase the level of food partnerships' involvement of spatial planning. It has already been argued that the growth of food policy groups across North America provides opportunities to re-establish food systems as a planning issue (Mendes et al, 2011). Similarly, a report on the City of Bristol outlines the potential for far-reaching planning powers within the areas of 'growing, production and processing', 'distribution and retail', 'consumption' and 'waste' (Carey, 2011). Current realities, however, point towards more modest planning influence, as reflected in a review of London and New York food strategies (Morgan and Sonnino, 2010), and failure to manage this interface can lead to tensions between food and other planning priorities (Horst et al, 2017; Nunes, 2017). Thus, there is an identified need to better align spatial imaginaries narratives (politically, administratively, geographically) with

the planning system. This need is reflected in a call for more research to make concepts fit-for-purpose for future planning agendas (Cabannes and Marocchino, 2018). Of course, there are other important synergies alongside planning, highlighting the importance of connecting and embedding food strategies within a broad range of policy streams (Sonnino, 2016). To this end, the research agenda is positioned in relation to both the English planning system and the wider context of the UK, see Chapter Four. To summarise, there are ongoing conversations between planning and food system transformation. Planning literature may help interpret the research findings; and the findings may, in turn, highlight ways in which planners could play greater role in reimagining, rescaling and implementing more desirable food systems.

2.4.2 Map-making literature

Early in the research's evolution it was determined that map-making techniques could be a helpful tool to gather insights into the relationship between spatial imaginaries and the politics of scale in food system transitions. This subsection examines relevant literature and begins to unpack how mental mapping could be applied. A spatial mapping approach is cemented in Chapter Three and critiqued in Chapter Eight. This chapter has already highlighted the potential to study the relationship between individual spatial visions and more widely-held spatial imaginaries. Here, I begin to review the precedents and potential benefits of using some kind of mental mapping to examine the relationship between individual (personal and single organisation) visions, the written-down visions and priorities of food partnerships and collective spatial imaginaries. It is anticipated there may be a lack of consistency, or even disconnects between the three types of 'vision'. This raises questions about where the 'true' goals or desired destinations of transitions may be found. Are these carefully worded, negotiated documents more or less powerful than the visions embedded and potentially shared in the hearts and minds of food partnership actors that may (or may not) coalesce to form more widely-held spatial imaginaries? Research often assumes the documented strategy reflects the dominant imaginary (Sonnino, 2016; Bergman, 2017; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). This research does not assume this connection. The approach seeks to deliver fresh insights into how spatial visions

and imaginaries are formed and negotiated, scaled and shared, and their power to shape food system transitions. The research should also benefit practitioners. By being explicit about the similarities, differences, tensions and conflicting needs underpinning ‘shared’ spatial imaginaries, there is greater potential to negotiate stronger, more inclusive and ‘thoughtful’ spatial visions of the future. It should also help identify and build relationships with stakeholders who can effect change.

Exploring the value and potential role of map-making is the first step towards deploying a suitable approach to better understand the dynamic described above. Spatial planning maps present images of desired spatial structures (Zonneveld, 2005), and we can draw parallels with food systems visions which are often concerned with how land should be used. When mapping any desired future, it is important to recognise such maps are partial, representative and socially constructed, rather than a reproduction of reality (Faludi, 1996; Zonneveld, 2005; Kitchin and Dodge, 2007). Zonneveld (2005) argues the idea of a single vision is overstated, describing visioning and mapmaking as *“complex social and political processes that might – but not necessarily will – lead to unifying concepts and images”*. The research seeks to test Zonneveld’s ‘map paradox’: that spatial visions often lack maps because actors are unable to agree what they should look like. And it responds to his call to study these multiple visions to identify and examine conflicting issues instead of covering them up under a *“seemingly consensual image”* (Zonneveld, 2005). Far from there being anything wrong with multiple visions, there is value in uncovering biases, exclusions and socio-political dimensions to *“offer a more humble, reflexive and responsible foundation for practices of future-making and sociotechnical transformations”* (Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). In addition to the map-making traditions in geography and planning, there are several examples of research using mental maps to explore food imaginaries. Participants of one study generated mental food maps to explore the geographical imaginary of Nunavimmiut food systems (Lamalice et al, 2020). Kimberly Libman used mental maps (alongside other methods) to study how participants perceive, navigate and use their neighbourhood and city-wide food environment (Libman, 2012). Both focus on identifying and understanding

present imaginaries, whereas this research is concerned with desirable food futures.

If maps are, in a sense, “*the pinnacle of conceptualisation*” (Zonneveld, 2005), the process of generating a map should help the creator(s) crystallise their ideas and ideals. It is anticipated the act of mapping desirable futures will focus the mind and make clear ideas, tensions and conflicts that may not otherwise arise in conversation. This raises questions in the realm of food systems planning. For example, to what extent are maps currently used, not only to represent ‘what is’, but also ‘what could be’? What is the relationship between spatial imaginaries and the visions of individuals seeking transition? To what extent do themes and/or dissonance between the ‘individual’ and the ‘shared’ shed more light on the (potentially) contested nature of transition destinations? Chapter Three builds on this thinking, devising a means to identify and assess individual visions, which may support or contest more widely held spatial imaginaries. The relative success of the selected mapping method is assessed in Chapter Eight.

Exploring spatial visions and the role of rescaling through maps is a means to examine the ‘soft spaces’ referenced earlier in this section (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009; Hincks et al, 2017). In other words, the extent to which emergent food system imaginaries conform to or push against established political, administrative, geographical, cultural and historical borders and boundaries. While academics have examined pre-existing maps to inform research on spatial imaginaries (Harvey et al, 2011; Haughton and Allmendinger, 2015; Hincks et al, 2017), few have facilitated the creation of maps to explore the relationship between individual spatial visions and wider, shared imaginaries. There are a handful of exceptions, including Bryonie Reid’s collaborative mapmaking (Reid, 2018). There is opportunity, through this research, to learn more about the connections between rescaling, transition and imaginaries by deploying some kind of mental mapping exercise to examine visions of the future (alongside perceptions of the present).

2.5 Food partnership movements

After providing a general introduction to food partnerships, this section examines how studying food partnerships' spatial imaginaries of rescaled food systems makes an original contribution to knowledge. It responds to a call to examine *“how the new urban food agenda builds an imaginary of what is a sustainable food city”*, and the risks associated with the unchallenged reproduction of one imaginary in multiple locations that may not take account of place-based circumstances and needs (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017). The section is organised in three parts, drawing on both scholarly and grey literature. The first subsection introduces food partnerships. It reflects on the diversity of their arrangements and positions them within a wider group of food-related networks. Since this research is UK-focused, it also includes an overview of food partnerships in the UK and the role of the Sustainable Food Places (SFP) network. The second subsection identifies a research gap in relation to the food partnership movement. It carves out the theoretical space for a spatial imaginaries approach, positioning the research within a recent body of literature linking food partnerships and the politics and governance of food system transformation. The final subsection examines the role of food partnerships as agents of transition in the UK. It uses agency as a prism through which to explore ways in which food partnerships interact with, shape or relate to aspects of transition destinations, legitimacy and spatiality. In doing so, it introduces some key literature that is applied later in Chapter Six. Collectively this section justifies the UK food partnership focus. It also provides the backdrop to Chapter Four, which more thoroughly situates and frames the research approach within the UK.

2.5.1 Introduction to food partnerships and networks

Food partnerships or food policy councils – also variously called food (policy) alliances, committees, coalitions, associations, advisory groups or networks (Schiff, 2008; Caraher et al, 2013; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019; Schiff et al, 2022) – bring together actors in the private, public and/or civil society sectors to develop more sustainable, secure, healthy and fair food systems (Harper, 2009; Moragues-Faus, 2020). While the ‘food policy council’ label is perhaps most prevalent in literature, there are questions about the extent to which such councils

engage in ‘policy’ work (Schiff, 2008; Gupta et al, 2018). This research therefore uses ‘food partnership’ as a generic term. The reason for this nomenclature is discussed further in Chapter Six. Food partnerships emerged as part of a broad movement experimenting with diverse and wide-ranging activities seeking to disrupt the food system. Changes have been sought at multiple levels, ranging from grass roots, localised campaigns to more systematic efforts to transition from a globalised food system towards more sustainable, healthy, secure and just alternatives.

First appearing in the United States in the 1980s, food partnerships quickly gained momentum in the global north, notably North America, Europe and the United Kingdom and Australia (Mendes et al, 2011; Bassarab et al, 2019; Schiff et al, 2022). Food partnerships in both the UK and North America often consider themselves to be members of broader networks. The Food Policy Network (FPN) is a loose affiliation of mostly US (and to a lesser extent, Canadian) food policy councils, coordinated by the Johns Hopkins Centre for a Livable Future (CLF). Meanwhile, Sustainable Food Places (SFP) performs a similar (though not identical) role in the UK (Moragues-Faus, 2021). The nature and function of SFP is examined in more detail below. It is important to note the FPN and SFP sit within a wider group of differently scaled and configured initiatives seeking to challenge and change food systems. These incorporate international endeavours including (but not limited to) the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)⁹, the ICLEI-RUAF CITYFOOD network¹⁰ and the Organic Cities European Network¹¹; and national collaborations including Spain’s Red de Municipios por la Agroecología¹² and Germany’s Bio-Städte Netzwerk¹³ (Moragues-Faus, 2021).

⁹ International agreement of mayors seeking to tackle food-related issues at the city level
<https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/the-milan-pact/> (Last accessed 07/02/2024)

¹⁰ https://iclei.org/cityfood_network/ (Last accessed 07/02/2024)

¹¹ <https://www.organic-cities.eu/> (Last accessed 07/02/2024)

¹² <https://www.municipiosagroeco.red/> (Last accessed 07/02/2024)

¹³ <https://www.biostaedte.de/> (Last accessed 07/02/2024)

Food partnerships may be organised in a variety of ways. Indeed, much of the research on food partnerships to date has been concerned with better understanding their governance structures and networks (Schiff, 2008; Scherb et al, 2012; Bassarab et al, 2019; Prové et al, 2019; Levkoe et al, 2021). A number of organisations and individuals seek to assess food partnerships' activities and impacts. North American food policy networks have attracted research attention (Clayton et al, 2015; Bassarab et al, 2019; Levkoe et al, 2021; Schiff et al, 2022) while the Johns Hopkins Center for a Liveable Future regularly surveys FPN members (Bassarab, Santo and Palmer, 2019)¹⁴. Within the UK, research has been conducted by or on the SFP network (Prosperi et al, 2015; Davies, 2017; Hills and Jones, 2017; Moragues-Faus and Marceau, 2018; Jones and Hills, 2023; see also Section 2.5.3). These studies and reports collectively reinforce the diversity of structures and approaches. For example, food partnerships may operate as independent entities or located within public sector or civil society organisations, and are underpinned by a variety of funding and membership structures (Davies, 2017; Bassarab et al, 2018; Hills and Jones, 2019; Jones and Hills, 2023). It is noted SFP has a greater grant-giving capability in comparison to the FPN project (Jones and Hills, 2023). As alluded to above, food partnerships display a varying level of emphasis on the development of food policy compared with programme implementation (Schiff, 2008; Gupta et al, 2018; Schiff et al, 2022).

Since the research focuses on UK food partnerships, it is worth more closely examining the movement in the UK. Note Section 4.1 examines the role of food partnerships within the UK food policy context in more detail, thus building upon this introduction. The last decade has seen a surge in the formation of food partnerships across the UK, with numbers increasing from five to 51 in the period 2009 to 2017 (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019) and reaching 66 by the start of 2022 (Jones et al, 2022). Food partnerships use a number of different titles in the UK including networks, partnerships, boards or simply 'Food [insert place name]' or 'Good Food [insert place name]'. As highlighted in Section 2.5.1, a key

¹⁴ <https://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/> (Last accessed 05/02/2024)

differentiating factor is a food *systems* focus. Thus, food partnerships are distinct from single-issue groups, such as the Feeding Britain¹⁵ and Food for Life¹⁶ networks in the UK. UK food partnerships' activities are generally some combination of strategy, delivery, advocacy, educating, influencing and/or emergency response¹⁷. UK food partnerships reflect a diversity of arrangements in relation to their structures, functions and networking capabilities: they may be structured in a variety of ways (Davies, 2017); underpinned by different types of legal frameworks (Davies and Messer, 2023); and funded by a range of sources (Jones and Hills, 2023).

Most – if not all – active UK food partnerships are affiliated to and supported by SFP, which plays a key role in setting both the collective vision and agenda. SFP is a partnership between the Soil Association (a UK charity campaigning for healthy, humane and sustainable food, farming and land use¹⁸), Food Matters (a national food policy and advocacy charity¹⁹) and SUSTAIN (a national alliance for better food and farming²⁰). SFP is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, one of the largest grant-makers to UK-based charities seeking to build an inclusive, creative and sustainable society²¹. Constructed as a model to drive food system change, its original aims were to support the establishment of cross-sector partnerships, promote the integration of healthy and sustainable food objectives in policy and facilitate the development and implementation of city-based strategies and action plans. Within this model, it established a process, set of tools, awards scheme and a support network to facilitate the creation and development of food partnerships. Often pre-requisites to participating in the SFP network, these processes, toolkits and awards have collectively defined and shaped food partnership priorities (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Santo

¹⁵ <https://feedingbritain.org/about-us/where-we-work/> (Last accessed 02/02/2024)

¹⁶ <https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/> (Last accessed 05/02/2024)

¹⁷ <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/about/what-are-sustainable-food-places/> (Last accessed 08/02/2024)

¹⁸ <https://www.soilassociation.org/about-us/> (Last accessed 17/07/2023)

¹⁹ <http://www.foodmatters.org/about-us/> (Last accessed 1/07/2023)

²⁰ <https://www.sustainweb.org/about/> (Last accessed 1/07/2023)

²¹ <https://esmeefairbairn.org.uk/about-esmee/> (Last accessed 1/07/2023)

and Moragues-Faus, 2019), and thus created and reinforced a spatial imaginary of a 'sustainable food place'. The programme was set up in 2011 under the name Sustainable Food Cities (SFC) and was adapted and rebranded in 2020 as part of a new 5-year funding package. The name change from 'Sustainable Food Cities' to 'Sustainable Food Places' is significant, marking an extension of the original SFC model to include a broader range of community types and scales. While SFC and SFP are used interchangeably in this document, references to SFC relate to activities or data collection conducted before the 2020 name change. References to SFP are indicative of the present time and/or ongoing activity.

2.5.2 A theoretical space for spatial imaginaries

This subsection positions the research within an existing body of work broadly focused on the politics of rescaling food systems through the transformative potential of food partnerships and networks. It highlights and draws on a particular body of literature to discern a theoretical gap, thus justifying the value of a 'spatial imaginaries' approach. The papers reviewed in this section consider a variety of food partnerships based in Canada, Europe, the UK and/or the US. The papers were selected because they both draw on and reflect an evolving scale-related conversation initiated largely (but not wholly) by Cardiff University academics. Figure 2.2 below takes the 'inner' two circles of Figure 2.1 (the Venn diagram relating to food systems transitions and food systems imaginaries) and positions a third group of papers in the 'food partnerships' circle. These papers are not an exhaustive list, but capture some of the key thinking in this area and highlight questions that have the potential to build on and inform the work done to date. As highlighted, there is at least some degree of overlap between the Venn circles. Specifically, the 'food partnerships' papers speak to the desire to transform food systems towards more sustainable, secure and/or just alternatives through rescaling. This alludes to, although doesn't directly draw on sustainability transitions thinking. The papers also contain peripheral references to spatial imaginaries, although the term is never explicitly defined. Figure 2.2 indicates while there has been recent academic interest in the role of food partnerships in rescaling the food system, there is space to better understand how their spatial

imaginaries of food system transitions and created, developed, justified and contested.

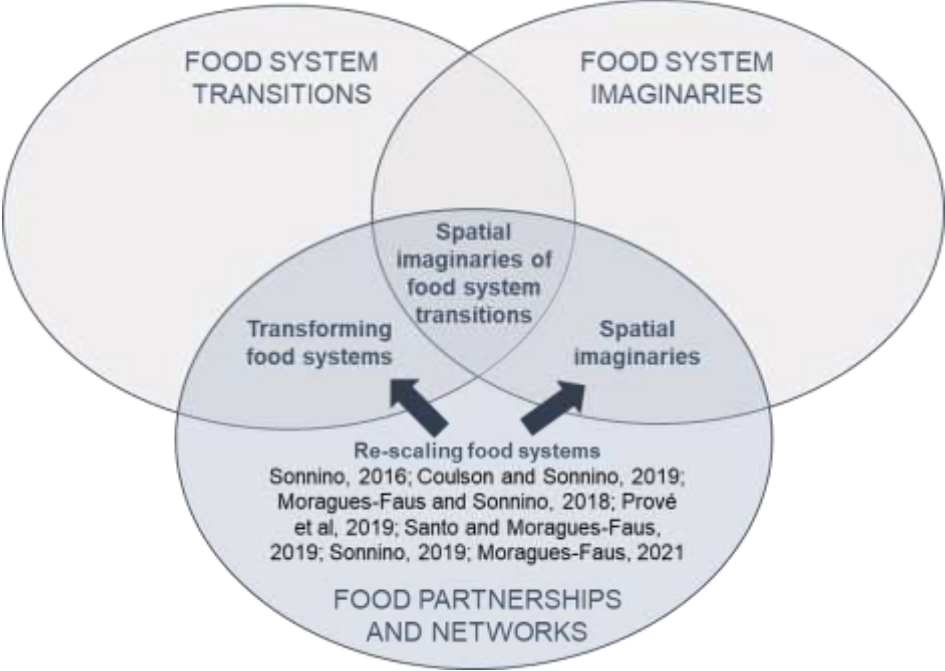


Figure 2.2 Carving out a niche: exploring the role of food partnerships in imagining food systems transitions

Figure 2.3 graphically shows the overlapping themes across the ‘food partnerships’ papers highlighted in Figure 2.2. They coalesce around the idea that rescaling and adopting ‘alternative’ imaginaries has the potential to transform the food system and are collectively concerned with the influence of politics, governance and power on rescaling. The papers suggest ways in which future food systems could or should be reimagined and term ‘spatial imaginary’ is used loosely. Examples of commonly used terms that could be interpreted as spatial imaginaries include the ‘relocalised food system’, ‘new localism’, ‘translocalism’ and ‘sustainable food city’. These terms are examined in more detail in the next section. Figure 2.3 also identifies gaps and opportunities to give greater consideration to the role of spatial visions and collectively-held spatial imaginaries in food system transition. The papers generally frame the desired outcomes of transformation (transition) to be more sustainable, fair and secure food futures, for example, the Sustainable Food Cities (SFC) umbrella takes sustainability as a ‘consensus frame’ (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018).

Moving beyond such platitudes, we might investigate how certain spatial imaginaries gain traction in (the collective act of) reimagining what more desirable food systems could and should look like, while others wither or are rejected. Are these imaginaries similarly or differently interpreted by actors working within and around food partnerships? And to what extent do any differences cause tension and discord? Figure 2.3 becomes a starting point to develop questions to hone in on the nature of spatial imaginaries and explore their role in the desired rescaling and relocalisation of food systems.

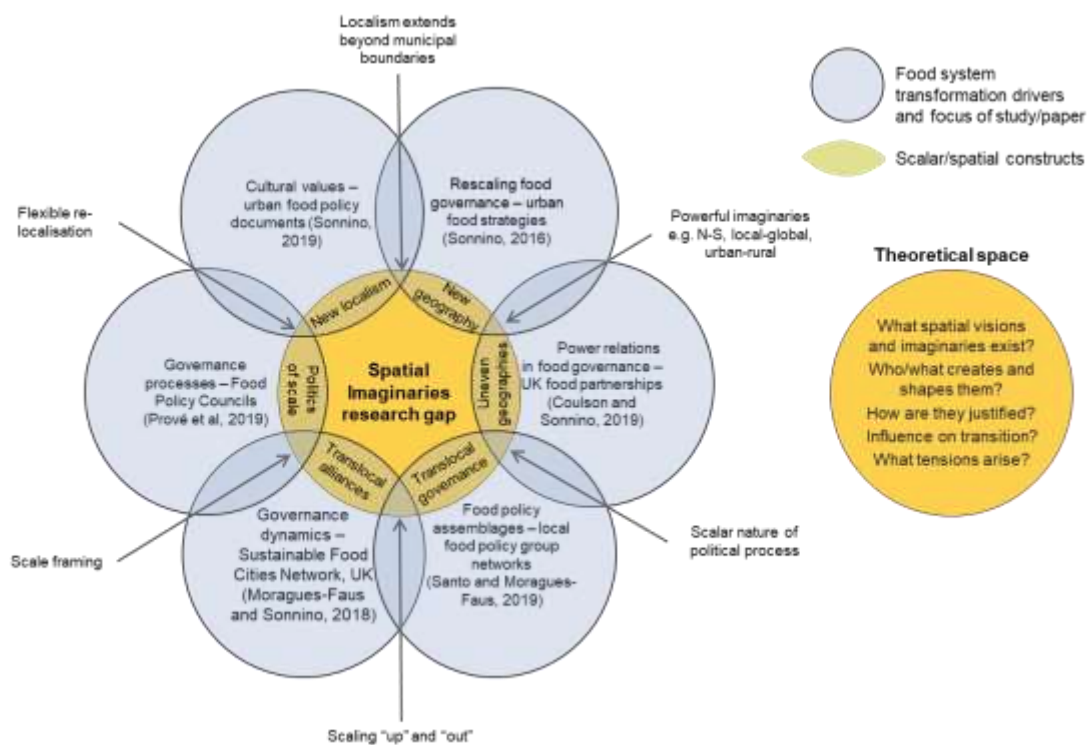


Figure 2.3 Theoretical space for spatial imaginaries (updated Figure 1.1)

Figure 2.3 above distils two ideas of particular interest to this research. The first relates to nature of spatial imaginaries and their role as a driver of transition. Some initial questions are framed in the ‘theoretical space’ circle. The second considers the ways in which food partnerships and associated networks seek to transition or transform the food system through rescaling. Having established a broad remit, the next section drills down further into these ideas. It draws on the earlier themes of transition destinations, agency, legitimacy and spatiality and makes the case for centring this research on the role of spatial imaginaries in transitioning food systems through rescaling. It should be noted the papers

referenced in Figure 2.3 are part of a wider set of food partnership-focused literature. More analysis is contained in Section 3.5, for example Table 3.3 provides an overview of their different areas of focus and methodological approaches.

2.5.3 Food partnerships as agents of food systems transition

This subsection positions the food partnership movement as a potential disruptor of conventional spatial imaginaries in its ambition to transition food systems through rescaling. It unpacks the body of literature reviewed in subsection 2.5.2, with reference to the sustainability transitions research gaps identified in section 2.1. Specifically, it highlights how food partnerships and their associated networks have been legitimised and promoted within academia and by certain influential national and international organisations. This has helped boost food partnerships' agency to disrupt the 'regime' by seeking transition towards alternatively scaled spatial imaginaries. Still, there are open questions about the extent to which such alternative spatial imaginaries overwrite established borders and boundaries. Furthermore, it is unclear whether we can rely on food partnership documentation as accurate reflections of either individual visions or more widely held spatial imaginaries.

Food partnerships are increasingly recognised in academic circles as ideal vehicles to drive transition towards more sustainable, secure and just food systems (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Prové et al, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019). Moreover, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) has promoted the establishment of multi-stakeholder food partnerships. This is latterly positioned as a structured response to Covid, and a means to improve the resilience of urban food systems (FAO, 2020). By contrast, the relatively high concentration of civil society-led food partnerships in the UK (compared to more government-oriented approaches elsewhere) and the relatively high level of funding available (Moragues-Faus, 2021) places the UK's SFP network in a unique position. In the UK there is some evidence that SFP and food partnerships are transitioning away from 'niche' and towards 'regime'. For

example, the Royal Society of Arts Food, Farming and Countryside Commission highlights the vital role of the SFC network and food partnerships in bringing about policy, practice and food culture changes (RSA, 2019). At the same time, the diffusion of food policy responsibility across multiple government departments²² (Parsons, 2020; National Food Strategy, 2021) and a lengthy absence of national food policy (Lang et al, 2005; Lang and Heasman, 2015) has enabled SFC to fill a policy vacuum. Building on the idea of devolved responsibilities (Hodson and Marvin, 2009), it is asserted the historical absence of a national food strategy has pushed responsibility away from the national and towards the 'local' and 'urban', fuelling the work of SFP and encouraging the growth and proliferation of food partnerships. If food partnerships have the potential to democratise the food system and amplify the voices of those with limited access to power (Harper et al, 2009), there is an imperative to understand what transitions are sought, how the visions of transition are legitimised and the extent to which a full range of voices are heard.

It is argued food partnerships and associated networks (e.g. SFP) collectively seek to rescale food systems in ways that disrupt, shift and/or transcend traditional spatial imaginaries. Indeed, the papers referenced in Figure 2.3 draw on scale-related terms evoking ideas of spatial transformation (Watkins, 2015), including re-localisation, new localism and translocalism. The discussion below reflects on the assertion that the food partnership movement is blurring the boundaries between urban and rural, local and global, regional and national (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019). In this way, one could argue the food partnership movement is challenging current spatial dichotomies by re-imagining desired destinations ('idealised spaces') through a set of spatial transformations.

As already highlighted in Chapter One, relocalisation is a recurring spatial imaginary in many academic conversations about 'fixing' the food system.

²² Government departments include (but are not limited to) Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Public Health England (PHE), Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and Health and Social Care

Roberta Sonnino adopts the term 'new localism' as a "*flexible and inclusive approach to relocalisation*", rather than a "*retreat to localism*" (Sonnino, 2019), indicating relocalisation to be more than simply a return to past practices. She is careful to position new localism as means to an end rather than end in itself, thus avoiding the 'local trap' (Born and Purcell, 2006; Sonnino, 2019). Translocalism refers to the process by which differently scaled and located food partnerships are drawn together, strengthening relationships between cities and fostering a collective identity (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019; Sonnino, 2019). Translocalism also, it is argued, encourages the development and implementation of common agendas (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2018). Yet the transformative power of translocalism is constrained by uneven geographies (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019), and thus may create barriers as well as opportunities. Coulson and Sonnino (2019) question whether a combination of power, political and spatial imaginaries and priorities may shut down alternative knowledge and marginalise certain actors or pathways, thus creating uneven geographies. They use the example of a spatial imaginary positioning some south of England cities as "innovative and crucial" compared to more marginal outliers. This assertion of constraint raises questions about the role of spatial imaginaries in overcoming or exacerbating these uneven geographies.

Relocalisation and translocalism, it is asserted, work together to stretch and flex the boundaries beyond the municipal and territorial, for example to connect producers and consumers and the urban with the rural (Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Sonnino, 2019). It is thus argued food partnership strategies construct relational local visions, rather than working to specific, defined scales (Sonnino, 2016). It implies these imaginaries help to bend, mutate, dissolve and re-make established borders and boundaries. The literature also ascribes weight to written documentation: one paper notably explores the 'foodscapes' envisioned within urban food strategies (Sonnino, 2016). But how much purchase do these documents really have? And how do their contents 'sit' in relation to individual (personal or organisational) visions and more widely-held spatial imaginaries? These assertions and implications will be tested by applying a spatial imaginaries lens.

Since UK cities and food partnerships are already challenging the dominant model (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019) and given the historical absence of a coherent UK food strategy (Lang and Heasman, 2015), there is an opportunity for food partnerships to shape and influence the future of food in the UK. The food partnership movement literature examined in this section has made considerable progress in examining the politics of rescaling our food systems. But there has been little study of the spatial imaginaries themselves. Therefore there is both room and requirement to consider how spatial imaginaries are created, solidified and embedded, how some imaginaries are favoured over others, and the extent to which they are shared by individual actors and organisations seeking food system transition. Moreover, there is scope to deepen understanding of the relationship between spatial imaginaries, the drive to rescale and the process of 'doing transitions'.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter approaches the literature review in two key ways. Firstly, it builds a theoretical argument for applying a spatial imaginaries lens to better understand the role of rescaling in food system transitions. Secondly, it makes a case for anchoring the research in the UK food partnership movement. The theoretical argument develops over sections 2.1 to 2.4. Section 2.1 demonstrates several gaps in transition research relating to transition destinations, agency, legitimacy and spatiality. Section 2.2 examines key scalar narratives around desirable food system transitions. This raises questions around why some transition destinations are favoured and justified over others, and by whom. Section 2.3 establishes the value of examining food systems transitions through a spatial imaginaries lens. It does so by building on a small body of work combining spatial imaginaries and energy transitions, finding compelling reasons to apply and expand this thinking in relation to food systems. Section 2.4 establishes the need to combine scale, imaginaries and transition thinking. It highlights several additional bodies of literature potentially useful to selecting a suitable methodology and interpreting results. The section conclusion points to an opportunity to develop a future-oriented mental mapping method to examine

connections between rescaling, transitions and imaginaries. To summarise, the review indicates that if we accept spatial imaginaries influence transitions (Chateau et al, 2021), there is a powerful case for exploring how these spatial imaginaries are constructed, negotiated and contested. Furthermore, there is room to better understand the relationship between the process of ‘doing transitions’ and the desired destinations of transitions in the context of food systems, a hitherto under-researched area. This gives rise to some broad questions relating to how the desired destinations of transition are imagined; how spatial politics and scalar dynamics influence the promotion of certain imagined transitions over others; whose voices are heard, and whose voices remain socially and spatially ‘bounded’; and the relationship between spatial imaginaries and the delivery of transformative change. To this end, Table 2.2 reflects on research gaps and opportunities for further investigation.

Table 2.2 Research gaps and opportunities

Transition destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are (individual) visions and (shared) spatial imaginaries of transition created? • Are spatial imaginaries the normative goals of transition, or are they underpinned by multiple visions/tensions? • What is the relationship between spatial imaginaries and written-down visions? And who writes them?
Transition geographies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does place influence understandings of sustainability transitions? • To what extent do spatial imaginaries conform to/break from established borders and boundaries? • How are desirable scales re-imagined?
Agency and transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do actors share compatible visions? • Who shapes and legitimises transition destinations, and to what extent are they representative? • How do agents and organisations seek to shape and manage the process?
Transition legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are competing visions consolidated to form spatial imaginaries? • How are these spatial imaginaries legitimised? • Which imaginaries are supported and which are passed over? • How do spatial imaginaries legitimise particular methods and tools over others? • Are maps used to promote one spatial imaginary over others? • What is the role and influence of funding/funding organisations?

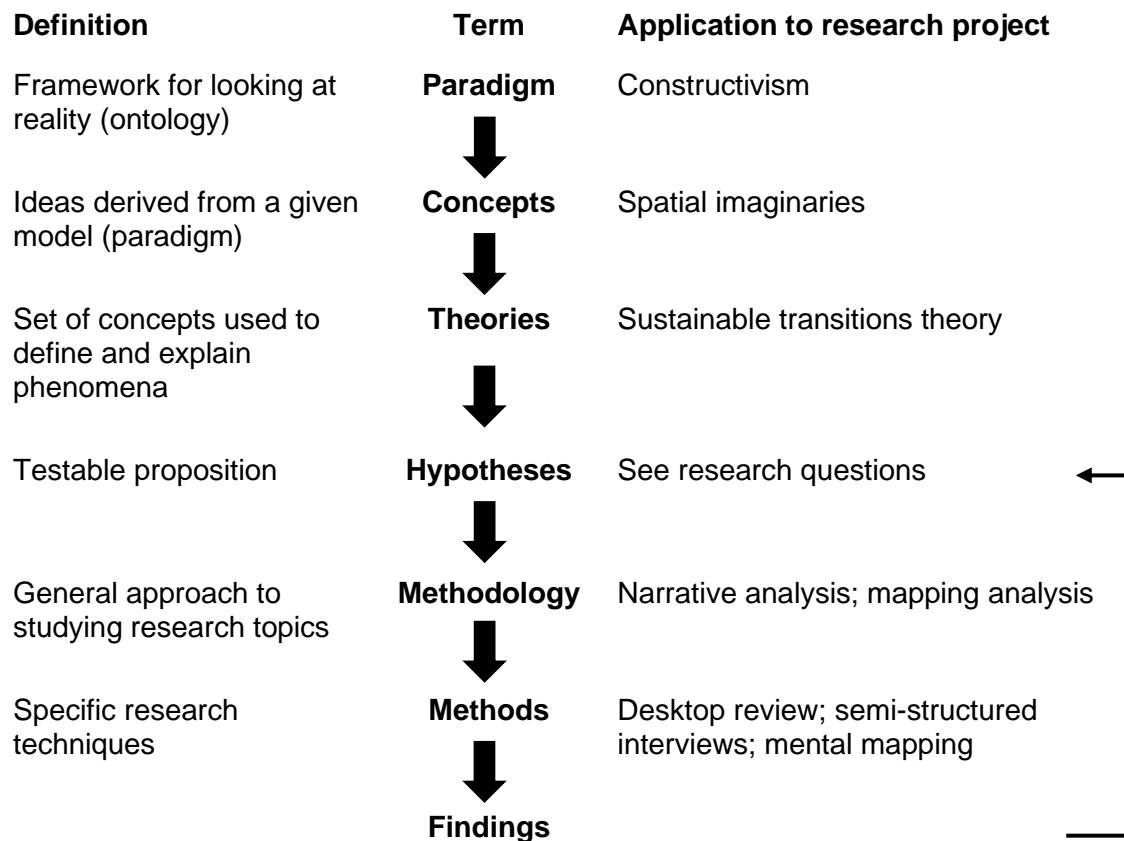
Section 2.5 explores how the sorts of questions presented in Table 2.2 can be applied and examined in relation to food partnerships in the UK. The section highlights how the growing role (and agency) of food partnerships and historical lack of national strategies in the UK creates an imperative to better understand what transitions are sought and legitimised, how they are scaled, and whose voices are heard. Of course, food partnerships and SFP do not operate in a vacuum. To better understand their role as agents of transition, they also need to be positioned and understood within the wider UK context. This is covered in Chapter Four.

3. Research design and methods

The research took a qualitative, mixed methods approach with experimental elements, applying a spatial imaginaries lens to bring a new perspective to rescaling food systems through sustainability transitions. The approach was subsequently adapted to meet the challenges of a global pandemic. The chapter is broken down into six sections. The first section positions the research philosophy and introduces the research strategy, design and methodological framework. In doing so, it provides the structure or 'scaffold' of the research and explains why choices were made. The second section outlines the research process. It considers the strength and limitations of the approach and the updates required to adapt to Covid-related challenges. The third section frames the research aims and objectives. This includes a breakdown and explanation of the research questions outlined in Chapter One. The fourth section discusses the case study selection process, and the circumstances leading to the total being reduced from five to three – Bristol, Calderdale and Leicestershire. The fifth section outlines and justifies the three data collection methods, reflecting on how and where they were applied. The final section concludes the chapter.

3.1 Methodological framework

Figure 3.1 provides a schematic of the research framework, developed at the outset, which also forms the structure for this section.



Source: adapted from Silverman, 2017

Figure 3.1 Applied theoretical and methodological structure

In epistemological and ontological terms, the research falls within the **constructivist paradigm**. This paradigm recognises multiple realities (relativist ontology) and the role of both the subject and researcher in creating shared understanding (subjectivist epistemology) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). It enables the researcher to move beyond defining the situation/the ‘lived experience’ (the ‘what’) to understand how meanings are socially constructed and sustained (the ‘how’) (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008; Silverman, 2017). This is consistent with some of the key questions of the research, for example, how are spatial visions formed, shared and justified?

As already discussed, the research applies a **spatial imaginaries** lens to the theory of **food systems transitions**. It lends itself to case study use, for example because it asks “how” questions (see above) and is concerned with “a contemporary (rather than historical) phenomenon (the “case”) in a real world context where the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014). Case studies can relate to single or multiple ‘cases’ (units of analysis). Here, the ‘food partnership’ is the unit of analysis, recognising the case study boundary is likely to relate to the actors involved rather than a pre-defined geographical area, given there are likely to be scalar and spatial differences between each food partnership’s perceived area of concern. Part of their appeal is that rather than being representative of a wider sample, case studies increase our understanding in a manner that is replicable by other researchers (Becker and Bryman, 2005; Yin, 2014).

I opted to use a series of **qualitative, mixed methods** comprising a desktop document review, semi-structured interviews and a mental mapping exercise to develop a deeper understanding of the material and triangulate between multiple data sets (Ritchie et al, 2014; Yin 2014). These are covered in more detail in Section 3.5. Data analysis involved a mix of narrative and visual methodologies. Each of these elements are summarised below in the context of the research philosophy and framework to explain why they were selected. Section 4.4 details the analytical approach.

Narrative analysis strives to bring understanding and meaning to individual stories and accounts. Growing out of literary and folklore traditions, narratives are usually linear and essentially ‘tell a story’, connect events and provide insights into the world and how people experience it (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997; Elliot, 2008). Narratives can represent an individual or collective view, and there is scope to accommodate multiple realities (Becker and Bryman, 2005). It therefore sits comfortably within the constructivist paradigm, and there is also scope to recognise the validity of multiple food partnership imaginaries. Narrative analysis is usually based on interviews but can also be applied to documents. The research applied narrative analysis in the first instance to publicly sourced

food partnership documents in order to synthesise and make sense of the scales and types of spatial imaginaries and food system narratives within them. At least one paper (combining transitions and imaginaries) sets a precedent for applying narrative analysis specifically in relation to strategic documents (Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019), while another opted for discourse analysis (Feola and Jaworska, 2019). Although narrative analysis is positioned as relatively uncritical (Becker and Bryman, 2004), a benefit of applying the methodology in this instance is to define what food partnerships aspire (on paper) to be and do. This initial analysis provides a springboard from which to move beyond 'on paper' visions. Combining document and interview narratives allows the exploration of the level of harmony or dissonance between individual visions, written documentation and more widely-held spatial imaginaries. It also tests the assumption that actors share compatible visions (Feola and Jaworska, 2019). All this facilitates the construction of a story or series of stories from the raw data and enables the consideration and collation of a diverse mix of data. Furthermore, the focus on studying 'themes across narratives' (as opposed to individual stories) is deemed a valid approach (Becker and Bryman, 2004).

The mapping exercise adds another dimension to the document and interview narrative analysis. Both the mapping exercise and **mapping analysis** were experimental. I considered using a more formal 'visual analysis' methodology, but what I read didn't seem to resonate with the data. I turned instead to a handful of research papers using mental mapping studies (Giesecking, 2013; Libman, 2015; Lamalice et al, 2020), with a view to generating a bespoke approach to analysing the material. A review of relevant papers highlighted a structured approach to analysing maps. Giesecking, for example, devised analytical categories incorporating mechanics of method (how the map is drawn, number of items drawn, landmarks, edges, drawing skills etc.); drawing elements (spatial analysis of how the map is drawn e.g. what's in the middle, borders orientation and scale, use of symbols and key); narratives of place (interaction between remembered, physical and imagined space e.g. natural vs built elements, edges, districts, landmarks, out-of-the-ordinary omissions or inclusions); personalisation (analytics techniques revealing deepest emotions and experiences e.g. first and last drawn elements) (Giesecking, 2013). Meanwhile, Lamalice et al adopted a

multi-criteria (qualitative and quantitative) map analysis, applying community-based and participatory action research (CBAR and PAR) methodologies to their study of imagined and actual dietary patterns of the Inuit (Lamalice et al, 2020). I knew I would need to find a way to ‘make sense of’ individual maps and their relationship to more widely-held spatial imaginaries. On the other hand, the uniqueness of mapping approach, not least because of the need to adapt to Covid conditions, presented both challenges and opportunities in determining a methodological approach. The methodological approach to analysing the mental maps is detailed in Section 3.5, and further discussed in Chapters Four and Eight.

3.2 Research process and limitations

The data collection process was designed around three methods: a document review of publicly available information from active UK food partnerships and Sustainable Food Cities (SFC), semi-structured interviews with participants drawn from three case studies, and a mental mapping exercise conducted as part of the interview process, Figure 3.2. The document review was used to frame and direct the research, providing input to the case study selection. The case study interviews provided deeper insight into individual and organisational ideas, motivations, aspirations and visions of what the food system could and should look like, and practical responses to food system issues. Finally, the mapping exercise sought to look beyond verbal and written narratives to shed light on individual, deeply-held visions and the extent to which administrative, political, geographical, cultural and historical borders and boundaries have shaped imaginaries of more desirable food futures. Ethics approval for the interviews and mapping was gained in October 2019, and pilot interviews commenced in November 2019. Case study participants were given an information sheet and consent form prior to the interview. Signed consent forms were collected at or prior to the interview. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using NVivo. All the participant data has been securely stored on password protected devices as per the data management plan.

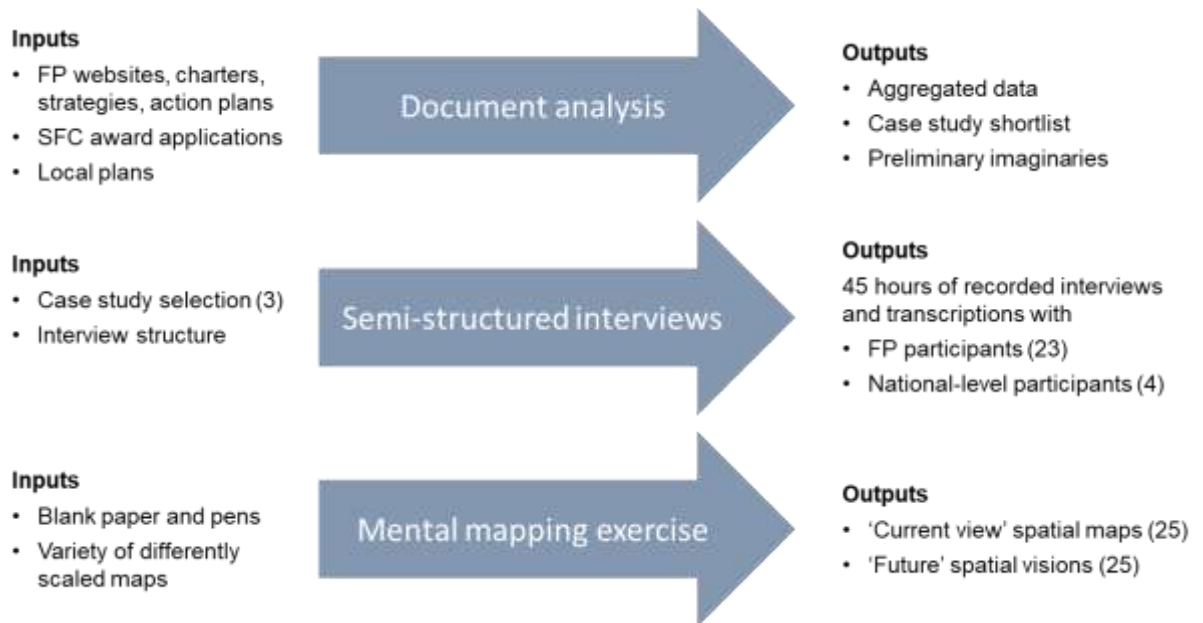


Figure 3.2 Data collection methods

It is important to consider the limitations of the research epistemology, theory and methodology. There were also restrictions and opportunities imposed by real-world events. This section begins to unpack these limitations and possibilities in relation to the methodological framework, researcher positionality and the impact of Covid.

There are limitations to every methodology. When conducting a document review, there may be disconnections between food partnerships' 'written down' strategies and practices. Furthermore, data availability may not be consistent across food partnerships, so activities may be ongoing but undocumented. Turning to the interviews, participants may not be representative (see 'snowballing' below); discussions may be subject to interviewer bias (see 'positionality' below); participant views are 'of a time and place' i.e. are liable to vary over time. In addition, changing circumstances can affect the best laid plans. For example, the impact of Covid on the mental mapping exercise further amplified the role and influence of the researcher in generating participants' spatial visions; and there were no methodological analysis precedents for the revised spatial mental mapping exercise (Chapter Eight). Despite best efforts, every methodology and method is fallible. The strength of this approach lies in the ability to triangulate between three data streams, see Section 3.5.

It is worth reflecting on some of the challenges of researching politics and power – and specifically agency (see Chapter Two) – in the context of food partnerships. Methodologically speaking, there may be difficulties in identifying a full suite of actors that have agency and those who are potentially under- or unrepresented in the discussion (Section 3.3, research question 2). The snowball sampling procedure, also known as the snowball technique or snowballing, is used widely across the social sciences, including in food systems governance research (Prové et al, 2019; Roosendaal et al, 2020; Cifuentes and Gugerell, 2021; Emas and Jones, 2022; Soubry and Sherren, 2022). The technique is most often used to identify and select interview participants. It relies upon interviewees suggesting additional prospective participants until the process becomes repetitive and the supply of names is exhausted. The technique brings both benefits and potential pitfalls. It is a useful way to explore and tap into social networks. While there is a risk of encountering sample bias through the exclusion of broader networks (Prové et al, 2019), the technique can also engage socially and/or politically isolated stakeholders that might not otherwise have been identified (Soubry and Sherren, 2022). It is noted that access to different (for example ‘hidden’ or ‘privileged’) populations is contingent on trust-building (Noy, 2008). Noy goes on to assert that snowballing, when mindfully applied as a ‘tactic’ (rather than in the absence of alternatives), generates a “*unique type of knowledge*” and therefore can be applied on its own merit. He argues the interconnectivity between data access (who is identified – snowballing) and data collection (what they say – interviewing) can provide insights about agency and power dynamics (Noy, 2008). This is built upon in Section 6.1. This research applies the snowballing technique to extend participation beyond food partnership and/or national network coordinators – actors already the subject of a number of studies (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019; Giambartolomei et al, 2021). Thus, the research engages with a wider range of actors seeking food system transition, working variously within and on the fringes of the food partnership movement.

It is also important to recognise the positionality of the researcher. This has caused me to reflect on my own privilege and view of the world through the lens

of a white, middle-class woman and parent, influenced by experiences including my upbringing, education and generation. These biases are reflected in the way the research was constructed, and the methodological framework is consistent with my own belief system. For example, the interview and mapping methods recognise the existence of multiple realities (relativist ontology) that may be specific to individuals or groups (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). I also acknowledge the way in which I conducted myself and related to others had some level of unavoidable impact on data outcomes. While steps were taken to minimise researcher influence, the research appreciates the role of both the participant and researcher in creating shared understanding (subjectivist epistemology) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). For example, outputs from case study interviews and mapping exercises are a product of a particular time, place and conversation between participant and researcher. In this way, the outputs are not directly replicable. Furthermore, even solitary decisions including the extraction of relevant material from documents depends on researcher discretion. So it is important to recognise the role and potential influence of the researcher in the construction and analysis of narratives (Becker and Bryman, 2004).

Finally, the advent of Covid created a fault line through the both the data collection and subsequent analysis. The world began to change when the virus SARS-CoV-2 first came to attention in the Chinese Province of Wuhan. On 23 March 2020, the UK government announced its first lockdown. This necessitated a review of data collection methods leading to some significant adjustments. At this stage I had conducted fifteen in-person interviews over three case study areas. I took some time to reflect on and revise the data collection methods. This led to several significant changes: moving face-to-face interviews online, adapting the mental mapping approach and reducing the number of case studies from five to three. Furthermore, the increased workload to compensate for Covid-induced method adaptations led to the scaling back of future plans. For example, it stymied the use of case study focus groups to gather feedback on initial findings. The impacts of Covid (risks and opportunities) on the research are discussed in more detail in Section 3.5. There are also further reflections within Chapters Four and Eight.

3.3 Research aims and objectives

The research investigates how a spatial imaginaries lens can help us better understand the role of rescaling in food system transitions. Chapter Two has highlighted how combining food systems imaginaries and transitions sheds new light on both the spatial imaginaries concept and sustainability transitions theory. Furthermore, their combination brings greater understanding of the power of imaginaries to shape and influence how transitions are envisioned (Sengers, 2019; Chateau et al, 2021) and how spatial imaginaries in turn are enhanced and modified by the material practices associated with 'doing transitions'. In the context of UK food partnerships, this opens up an interesting opportunity to explore the spatial and scalar framings deployed in the construction, negotiation and contestation of visions and imaginaries associated with desirable food system transitions. This tells us not only about the role of scale in reimagining more desirable food futures – but also how place-based factors may influence or inhibit the development of certain transition pathways over others. While the research recognises scale to be just one element of the relocalisation movement, this work is a step towards better understanding the relationship between spatial imagination and material practices and constraints associated with transforming our food systems through rescaling.

The approach is broken down into three research questions (RQs) outlined below. RQ1 is interested in the 'what' and the 'where' – what spatial visions and imaginaries exist in different locations? RQ2 focuses on the 'who' – which actors are engaged with the process of reimagining our food systems, and who is excluded? RQ3 is concerned with the 'why' and 'how' – why do some spatial imaginaries take hold over others, and how is the feedback loop between imagination and practice constructed, reinforced and challenged? The approach pre-supposes that sustainability transitions, spatial imaginaries, place and scale are inextricably linked: that spatial imaginaries constitute the desired destinations of transition, and that the process of transition towards these sought outcomes is driven or supported through rescaling. The research focuses on the food partnership as the 'unit of analysis'. Addressing these questions enhances our theoretical understanding of managing sustainability transitions and provides

some points of reflection for practitioners. I took an iterative and reflexive approach to the research questions, revisiting them periodically to ensure the emerging outputs from data collection were able to meet the research demands.

RQ1. What visions and spatial imaginaries of food system transitions are present within and across food partnerships?

RQ1 seeks to identify and explore the desired destinations of transition. It is concerned with what future food systems should look and feel like in spatial terms, or more specifically ‘where should our food come from?’ It examines the extent to which collectively held spatial imaginaries coalesce within, around and across active UK food partnerships and examines relationships, disconnects and tensions between three ‘layers’: the high level spatial imaginary; the written-down visions of food partnerships and the visions embedded in the hearts and minds of individual actors seeking food system transition, thus extending thinking beyond the ‘foodscapes’ envisioned by documents (Sonnino, 2016). In doing so, it tests the hypothesis that seemingly coherent and shared spatial imaginaries may be underpinned by dissent, conflict and/or compromise. RQ1 is broken down into three sub-questions:

- a) *What spatial imaginaries are reflected in food partnership narratives?*
- b) *To what extent is there alignment between individual spatial visions, food partnership visions and wider spatial imaginaries?*
- c) *How are desirable scales re-imagined?*

RQ2. Who creates the visions and spatial imaginaries of food system transitions (and who is excluded)?

RQ2 relates to the role of agency in transition, and responds to “*questions about whose voice and vision are encapsulated in the notion of a ‘sustainable food city’*” (Coulson and Sonnino, 2019) and other ‘idealised space imaginaries’ (Watkins, 2015). It examines who is involved in creating and shaping spatial visions and

imaginaries, what motivates them, and considers which groups are over- or under-represented in decision-making. This provides greater insight into who creates and influences food partnerships' transition goals, which actors and institutions seek to shape and manage the process, and how this may this effect both the quality and direction of the vision.

RQ3 How are these visions and spatial imaginaries formed, shared, prioritised and validated ('legitimising transitions') and implemented and practiced ('doing transitions')?

RQ3 examines how and why some spatial imaginaries are created, justified, elevated and institutionalised over others. It is concerned with the conditions required for one spatial imaginary to take hold, and the point at which visions become imaginaries. Is it possible to identify nascent spatial imaginaries? What is the tipping point? Exploring how such imaginaries are socially and spatially constructed provides insights into the extent to which the desired destinations of transition are ideological, evolutionary, political, contentious and/or pragmatic and fluid. Chapter Two discusses the value in identifying how spatial imaginaries are modified by material practices, and conversely how such material practices – the everyday activities and behaviours of individuals and organisations seeking to transform the food system – influence imaginaries. This will help unlock our understanding of the relationship between visioning and food partnership politics, identities and actions, providing greater insight into the role of place, rescaling and imagination in sustainability transitions.

My three research questions were broken down into six objectives over two stages of desktop research and fieldwork (A – C), see Table 3.1. Ongoing review of relevant literature has ensured the research has been informed by emerging developments in academic and policy discourse. Furthermore, information, lessons and results gathered from each stage were fed back into the design and execution of subsequent stages.

Table 3.1 Method matrix

Stage/Data collection	Objective/Data analysis	RQ
A. Conduct a desktop review of publicly available material of <u>all UK food partnerships</u> , including food partnership websites, strategies, action plans, food charters and other supporting documents	1. Explore and provisionally map a series of narrative and visual spatial imaginaries, that reflect the direction(s) in which food partnerships seek to transition food systems and illustrate the extent to which there are shared spatial commonalities between food partnerships	RQ1
	2. Build a profile of documented food partnership aims, strategies, activities and actors and identify any interrelationships and interdependencies with other urban priorities	RQ2 RQ3
Select three contrasting case studies. For each:		
B. Conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with a range of participants working to change the food system	3. Test and refine the case study imaginaries identified through activity A and investigate whether/how food partnership actors develop and commit to a shared spatial imaginary	RQ1 RQ2 RQ3
	4. Investigate how different agendas, disciplines and potential tensions are handled within food partnerships and between food partnerships and other key organisations	RQ2 RQ3
C. Conduct a mental mapping exercise as a subset of the interview process	5. Produce individual spatial maps depicting the preferred spatial vision to bring about a transition towards a more sustainable food system	RQ1
	6. Use the maps to investigate interdependencies, barriers and limitations to achieving the preferred spatial vision	RQ2 RQ3

3.4 Case studies

This section covers the case study and participant selection process. Case studies form the basis of two of three of the data streams: the semi-structured interviews and mental mapping exercise. Case studies were carefully selected from the list of active UK food partnerships to reflect a range of geographies, approaches and spatial constructs. Data from the desktop analysis were considered, alongside input from two Sustainable Food Places (SFP) representatives. It would have been interesting to include a Welsh case study (Cardiff), for example to consider the implications and impact of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) and the shared geographical region with Bristol based around the Severn River catchment. However, by limiting the selection to England, case studies are subject to the same legal and planning frameworks. Figure 3.3 highlights my case study shortlist (based on desktop study outputs) alongside SFP representatives' recommendations, and the final selection.

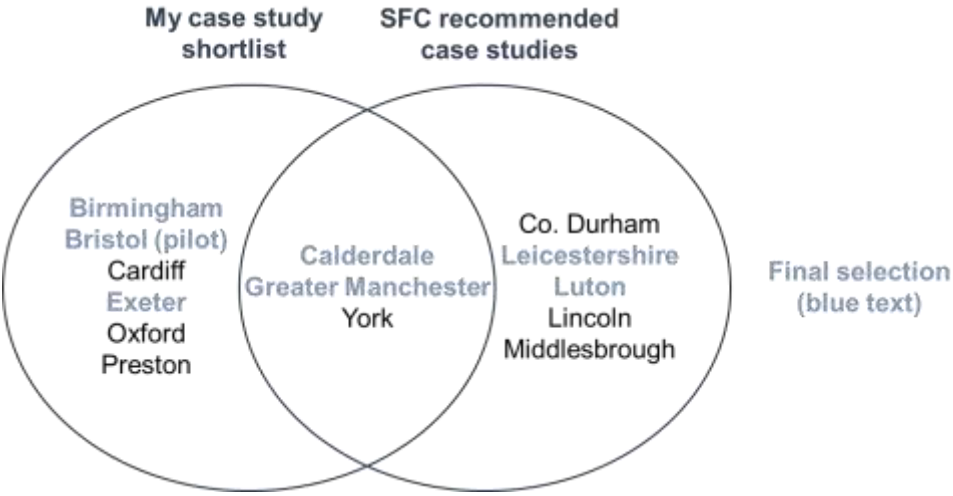


Figure 3.3 Shortlisted case studies, 2019

Bristol was chosen as a pilot to test the process for two main reasons: the strength of its food systems movement and access to key contacts. Although I intended to conduct five case studies, a sixth case study was selected as contingency. Case studies reflected a balance geographical locations, the urban-rural split, administrative structures, food partnership approaches, level of interaction with planners and a range of (preliminary) spatial imaginaries. They were therefore selected both for their unique attributes and their place within a wider portfolio to

tell a more complete story. Practical issues were also taken into account, including travelling times and willingness to participate. Table 3.2 compares characteristics of the final shortlist.

Table 3.2 Case study final shortlist

Case study	Rationale
Birmingham West Midlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radically different approach involving research; thought leadership; the arts; public engagement • Dynamic/visionary leadership • Recognises can't increase food supplies within the city and considers role of demand change • Not aligned with SFC approach
Bristol South West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial considerations raised by influential 'Who Feeds Bristol?' report • Food systems leader • Aligned to SFC but not a slave to the methodology • Established contact
Calderdale North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agglomeration of small and mid-sized towns • History of highly successful community-based local food initiatives • Recognises greater coordination needed to develop more holistic food systems approach (new phase?)
Exeter South West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful approach e.g. priority strategic aims • Explicitly recognises benefits of city-scale approach
Greater Manchester North West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex/competing organisational structures (Manchester Food Board; Manchester Food Futures; Feeding Manchester) • Health/food equality focus • Links to other towns within the metropolitan borough e.g. Stockport and Oldham (recognises its role within GM region, and nationally as part of GM EU-funded project) • GFGM Partnership positions itself as CRFS
Leicestershire East Midlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County-based (Council-led) approach • Rural and food manufacturing base • 'Nested' relationships and potentially SFC memberships – districts/boroughs, county, Leicester city and East Midlands region
Luton South East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health/council-driven • Juxtaposition of local and global elements; position as a 'world town' • SFC recommended – good coordinator, good on planning, "close to London but not London", image problem

In the event, only three case studies were carried forward: Bristol, Calderdale and Leicestershire. The Covid-related reasons for this are unpacked in Section 4.5. Individual case study outlines and a map of their geographical locations are provided in the Chapter Four.

For each case study, contact was initially made with a food partnership coordinator. Subsequent participants were recruited using the snowball sampling procedure, often relying on word of mouth (nuances associated with this procedure are discussed in Section 3.2). It is recognised participants represent a small group within a much wider pool of food system stakeholders. Participants were selected in their capacity as actual or potential food system transition actors. Not all participants are members of food partnerships in a professional or personal capacity, although most have a connection. Care was taken, as far as possible, to represent a diversity of actors, each drawing on different experiences, information, perceptions, opinions and lived realities. However, with seven or eight participants drawn from each case study, the sample is not wholly representative. For example, Calderdale participants are mostly from the upper (rather than lower) valley; and despite best efforts, I was not able to secure planning and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) representation in every instance. Inevitably there were ‘the ones that got away’. Whilst a response rate of 77% was excellent (27 of the 35 people contacted responded and participated), there are some potential gaps. For example, it would have been helpful to speak with the Good Food East Midlands coordinator. However, the individual left their post before the interview could be conducted. Furthermore, there were wider issues around lack of funding and support for a regionally coordinated food partnership at play. This was evidenced by the last-minute cancellation of a (pre-Covid) Good Food East Midlands workshop. This meant it was not possible to study the Leicestershire food partnership nested within the regional food partnership. Despite these shortcomings and disappointments, the approach and research techniques act as a ‘proof of concept’ that could be applied more widely in future. A more detailed participant analysis is covered in Section 4.4.

3.5 Data collection methods

Section 3.4 outlined the selected data collection methods: a document review of UK food partnerships’ publicly available information; and semi-structured interviews including a mental mapping exercise for participants in three case study areas. This section provides more details for each and justifies their

selection. A first step is to position the selected methods within a relevant body of literature. Chapter Two drew attention to a number of papers focused on food partnership food systems rescaling, see Figure 2.2. I used this 'cluster' of papers as a starting point to understand and learn from the methods already applied within this area. Table 3.3 summarises the research methods of a number of papers centred on food partnerships and/or food networks, many of which have a governance focus. Table 3.3 specifically highlights the country (or countries) studied; the study focus (food partnerships and/or national or international networks); and the methods applied. Most studies draw on qualitative methods including document analysis, case study interviews and/or participant observation (Schiff et al, 2022), though two studies use quantitative methods (Scherb et al, 2012; Bassarab et al, 2019). It should be noted that while my research concentrates on publicly available information for the document analysis, other researchers draw on internal documents and emails (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019; Moragues-Faus, 2020). I provide further explanation and justification of my approach in Section 3.5.1 and Section 4.3.1.

Table 3.3 Methods comparison

	Paper focus	Countries	Food partnerships	Inter/national food network(s)	Case study interviews: food partnerships	Case study interviews: Inter/national networks	Document analysis	Survey	Participant observation	Notes
Schiff, 2008	Organisational role of FPCs	Canada, US	• (13)		•		•			>13 interviews targeted FPC chair/coordinator
Scherb et al, 2012	Nature of FPCs	US	• (56)					• (56)		Survey
Clayton et al, 2015	Role of partners in advancing goals	US	• (12*)		•		•			* Plus six participant-recommended policy experts
Sonnino, 2016	Food security	Canada, UK, US	• (15)				• (15)			Government-led FPs
Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018	Translocal governance	UK	• (5)	• (1)	• (5)	•	•			Additional informal interviews
Bassarab et al, 2019	Organisation structure and governance	US	• (222)		•		•			Quantitative FPC analysis; 3 case studies

	Paper focus	Countries	Food partnerships	Inter/national food network(s)	Case study interviews: food partnerships	Case study interviews: Inter/national networks	Document analysis	Survey	Participant observation	Notes
Coulson and Sonnino, 2019	Urban local food governance	UK	• (12)	• (3)	• (12)	• (3)	•			
Prové et al, 2019	Urban agriculture governance	Belgium, US	• (2)		• (55)				•	Government-led FPs
Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019	Food policy assemblages' transformative capacity	UK, US		• (2)		• (22)	•		•	
Sieveking, 2019	Food democracy	Germany	• (1)		•		•		•	
Sonnino, 2019	Urban food governance	Canada, UK, US	• (17)				• (19)			Government-led FPs (17)
Moragues-Faus, 2020	Political and justice elements of governance	UK	• (8)	• (1)	•	• (9)	•		•	Field notes
Moragues-Faus, 2021	City food network comparative analysis	13 national & international networks		• (13)		• (13)			•	National (6) and international (7) networks

Table 3.4 identifies the general trends in the papers’ methods and notes opportunities to address gaps through my own methods selection. Tables 3.3 and 3.4 indicate most of the relevant research to date is based on interviews and/or document analysis from a relatively small number of case studies. Furthermore, UK interview participants generally have strong links to SFP (i.e. the organisation driving the translocal network).

Table 3.4 Consolidated methods and opportunities

Consolidated methods	Gap/opportunity
Interviews and/or document analysis from a relatively small number of case studies	Comprehensive document review of publicly available documents from all active UK food partnerships
Tendency towards one ‘formal’ interview conducted per food partnership	Capture multiple perspectives within each case study
Propensity to interview SFP-funded coordinator/nominated representative	Seek out views potentially less aligned with/supportive of SFC/SFP ethos
Generally targeted towards food partnerships led by public bodies	Diversify focus incorporate and compare partnerships led by the third sector
No mapping	Novel mental mapping exercise

The information presented in Tables 3.3 and 3.4 can be distilled into four main gaps or opportunities. Firstly, there is ‘academic space’ to conduct a document analysis across all active UK food partnerships, which would be the first of its kind in the UK. This approach would speak to the call to expand existing food systems case study-based research by taking a broader, comparative approach to consider scales and spaces (El Bilali, 2019). Secondly, there is a need to widen case study interviews beyond the SFP food partnership coordinator role. Interviewing a broader range of actors working within and alongside individual food partnerships to transition the food system would provide greater insight, for example into the relationships between individual visions, documented strategies and more widely-held spatial imaginaries. Thirdly, there is opportunity to diversify the focus on government-led partnerships by incorporating and comparing partnerships led by the third sector. Finally, Chapter Two has already highlighted the possibility of applying a novel spatial mapping method to move beyond verbal narratives and better investigate the scale – transition – imaginaries ‘relational triangle’. Taking advantage of these method opportunities would help address the

wider challenge of moving from the spatial/scalar 'particular' to provide more general insights into how place matters in transitions, and to identify similarities and differences across places and scales (Hansen and Coenen, 2015). In summary, the combination of document review, interviews and mapping will shed new light on existing research and make an original contribution to research methods.

3.5.1 Desktop review

Document reviews generally focus on content and/or its use and function. The research is more concerned with how the content is created ("document as topic") and what it says ("document as resource") than its translation into practice (Silverman, 2011). This is because food partnership documents (strategies, 'foodprint' studies and action plans, for example) are not the focus of the research *per se*. Rather, the document review provides some initial insight into spatial imaginary thinking in order to gather narratives to test during the interview and mental mapping stages. The approach to document analysis is fundamentally constructivist because it is concerned with the representation of multiple spatial imaginaries, rather than whether one is any more 'true' than another (Silverman, 2014).

A desktop review of publicly available information was designed and conducted between July 2018 and May 2019 with the bulk of analysis taking place between January and May 2019. A total of 61 active UK-based food partnerships were identified via the Sustainable Food Cities (SFC) website and an internet search to identify any non-affiliated organisations. Of the 61, eleven were discounted due to inactivity and/or lack of publicly available information. Unless otherwise stated, data presented in the research relate to the 50 active UK food partnerships identified in the review. Since food partnerships are constantly evolving, a cut-off for inclusion of data was set at the end of May 2019. This includes the late addition of Leicestershire, which became a SFC member earlier in the month, but excludes Preston which joined in June 2019. A full list of food partnerships included in the desktop review is provided in Appendix 1.

Review inputs included food partnership websites (often containing food charters, strategies and action plans), SFC award applications and other key strategic documents (e.g. local plans, Planning Advisory Notes and climate change and economic development strategies). Documents were discounted where they were clearly out of date. Data were categorised to develop a profile of each food partnership, draw out cross-partnership comparisons and identify links between food and other strategic policy areas. The approach was tested for a sub-set of food partnerships, before being consistently applied across all identified, active food partnerships. In order to apply a consistent approach, food partnership documents were taken at face value. In some cases, I became aware of ongoing activities that were not visible in publicly available documentation. In these instances, ad hoc requests for more information/clarification from individual food partnerships were not made, in order to maintain parity across the board. It was anticipated some of the potential differences between the 'public face' and on-the-ground realities could be explored during the interview stage. A further question is whether food partnerships do what they say. The strength of the relationship between strategic intent and action can be explored through the interview process, but for the purposes of the desktop review, the focus was on intent.

The desktop review enabled the provisional mapping of a series of spatial visions that reflect the direction(s) in which food partnerships seek to transition food systems and illustrated the extent to which there are shared spatial commonalities. From the material it was also possible to explore the written-down motivations and interpretations of different spatial approaches. Figure 3.4 provides an overview of the desktop review process, describing the inputs, data collation process and sought outputs.

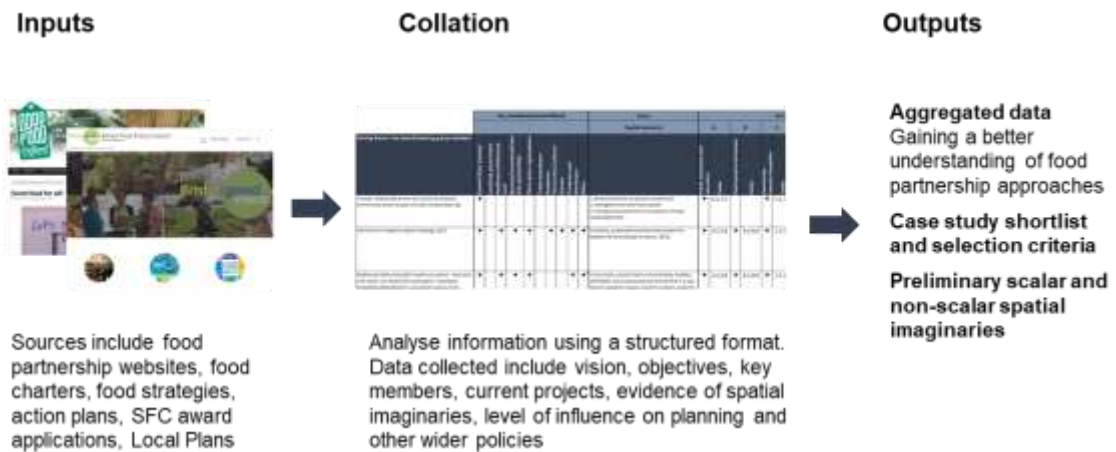


Figure 3.4 Desktop review process

Table 3.5 highlights the framework used to ensure data were consistently captured and collated during the document review. As per Table 3.4, the comparative document analysis adds to existing knowledge by considering *all* active, UK-based food partnerships. Since data are not standardised across food partnerships, a number of food partnerships were excluded from specific analyses (e.g. those without written vision statements). Document identification was restricted to online sources of information to provide a consistent approach. However, data are not entirely taken at face value – questions are asked about how, why and by whom documents were produced (Silverman, 2014). The volume of documents (alongside interview and mapping data) had the potential to make the analysis process rather unwieldy and time-consuming. Therefore the documents were manually reviewed and ‘scanned’ for key themes from which to construct tentative narratives. These narratives were tested and further reviewed during the interview and mental mapping phases.

Table 3.5 Data collection framework

Data	Detail	Rationale
About the FP	Including location; type; date started; level of activity; driving force; contact details; structure and Steering Group membership; funding sources	Develop comparative profiles – what are the structural similarities and differences? Who defines and shapes what the FP is and does?
Strategic aims	Vision (desired end-state) Objectives (goals)	What are the scalar and spatial visions and assumptions embedded in the strategic aims?

Data	Detail	Rationale
	Key drivers (e.g. poverty, health, sustainability)	How are they justified? To what extent are there similarities and differences between FPs?
Activities	Delivery themes (activity areas) Methods (how to achieve priorities) Current projects Awards/award applications	What kind of projects are favoured/prioritised? Do any patterns emerge? Is there consistency between the spatial imaginary and the type of projects selected?
Strategic links	Links to planning policy Links to other policies (e.g. climate change, health, economic)	To what extent are FP visions, objectives and associated spatial imaginaries embedded in planning and other policy and practice?

3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are ubiquitous in social science research and across academic disciplines, and offer “*windows on the world*” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008; Silverman, 2011). Representing a snapshot in time, they range from the highly structured to the unstructured. The research used semi-structured interviews, which allowed for adaptation throughout process to incorporate new topics as they arose or required more exploration. The interviewer required a degree of skill, for example to manage time effectively, ask appropriate questions (such as introductory, follow-up, probing, specifying and interpretation questions (Törrönen, 2002)), “*suppress personal opinion and avoid stereotyping*” (Silverman, 2011), listen actively, build rapport and keep the conversation on-topic whilst being sufficiently flexible to explore unforeseen but relevant avenues. The role of the interviewer should also be recognised: the researcher subscribes to the view that the interview is produced collaboratively to construct a narrative reality and that interviewers are active participants (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008; Silverman, 2011; Silverman, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews were used to test the preliminary, normative spatial imaginary and practical implementation narratives developed during the document review, consider the social context of the narratives and as the forum in which to conduct a spatial mapping exercise. The impact of Covid necessitated methodological changes and adaptations, which are covered later in this and the following section. Key outputs were 23 initial interviews with case study

participants and 21 follow-up interviews and/or email feedback; and a further four interviews with participants representing national-level organisations. This generated 45 hours of transcriptions and 25 ‘current’ and ‘future’ maps with accompanying explanatory text. The participant backgrounds are examined in Chapter Four. Full interview transcripts were produced, including the interviewer’s input. These were subsequently coded in NVivo using key themes outlined in Table 4.2. A semi-structured interview template was constructed and piloted in Bristol. The template was designed to provide an overarching framework for the discussions while minimising leading questions and interviewer influence. Because of the nature of the discussion it is accepted this cannot be eliminated entirely. The prompts themselves were wide-ranging and it was recognised each interview would be led by the participant’s interests, not necessarily touching on all the pre-defined prompts. The pilot template was found to be workable and only minor changes were required. The template, which covers key questions, an interviewer checklist, suggested timings and the rationale for each question is included in Appendix 2. A high-level summary is presented in Table 3.6. There was no expectation to systematically cover all the questions during the interview. Rather, it was intended as a guide to prompt discussion, and wasn’t shared with participants.

Table 3.6 Interview template high-level summary

Topic	Key question	Sub-questions
Scene setting [10 mins]	What motivates you?	What got you into this? Where are you coming from?
Vision mapping exercise [30 mins]	What would a better food system look like?	Please can you highlight your area of interest/concern? What is your vision of a better food system? Where does the vision come from? What are the main challenges to achieving this vision?
Delivery [20 mins]	Material effect of vision?	How is this vision translated into strategies and plans? How are strategies and plans translated into actions? What are the main challenges to translating vision into action?
Wrap-up	Anything else?	

First interviews were scheduled for one hour. Pre-Covid, the interviews typically took the allotted time, although sometimes participants were keen to continue by mutual agreement. One interview lasted two and a half hours and included a walking tour. Interviews took place in cafés, offices and on several occasions, the participant's home. Cafés were selected by the participant. Often the choice of café was not only one of convenience, but also reflected something about the values of the participants themselves. Café locations were sometimes compromised in terms of sound quality, but I accepted the participant's location preference.

The advent of Covid and the first national lockdown in March 2020 required significant adaptations to the data collection process. I took some time to evaluate the changing situation before deciding on a course of action. The first change was to move the interviews online, using Zoom, Teams or Skype. While the impact of the change was most tangible in relation to the mental mapping exercise (explored in more detail in the next subsection), there was clearly an impact on the interview discussion itself. While I applied the same format, there were notable differences. Moving online reduced the background noise, making transcription easier. On the other hand, online conversations made it more difficult for me (and perhaps the participants) to read visual cues, even though video was used in most cases. I also introduced a second interview with each participant, which typically lasted 30 minutes. The purpose of the second interview was two-fold: firstly, to accommodate the revised mental mapping exercise (see the next subsection); and secondly, to ask pre-Covid participants to reflect on the implications and potential legacy of the global pandemic on their 'food future' vision (see Section 4.4). Because of the changes to the interview process, I reduced the number of case studies from five to three. I had already established contacts in three case study areas (including Bristol – originally the pilot) and visited the locations. Establishing new connections with places became trickier at distance. This change allowed for the incorporation of the follow-up participant interview and the adaptation of the mapping exercise. It also enabled me to study the three case study areas in greater depth.

3.5.3 Mental mapping

Chapter Two examined literature on how spatial mapping can help us interrogate the relationship between spatial imaginaries and the politics of scale in food system transitions. This occurs in at least three ways. Firstly, it is anticipated mental maps have the potential to go beyond words to access the deeply held spatial visions of individual participants (Rose, 2016; Lareau, 2021). Secondly, a better appreciation of individual spatial visions will bring greater understanding of the relationship and/or dissonance between individual and collective visions (Zonneveld, 2005). Thirdly, mental maps provide a means to explore soft space imaginaries and the extent to which visions conform to or confront established political, administrative, cultural, geographical and historical borders and boundaries (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009; Hincks et al, 2017). All this presupposes there is value in better understanding spatial imaginaries, given their power to shape the present (Watkins, 2015; Sengers, 2017; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). In the context of this research, the use of mental maps is an experimental approach in some senses. There is a history of using mental maps to explore the past and present (see Chapter Two), but far fewer precedents examining imagined futures (Fenster, 2009). Kevin Lynch popularised the use of mental maps (also called cognitive maps) in his seminal work ‘The Image of a City’ (Lynch, 1960). Jack Jen Giesecking describes a process whereby participants “*draft visual maps derived from their cognitive maps of space and the information, emotions, and ideas they hold, whether real and/or imagined*”. This method provides insights into how people experience and interpret space and can be used to examine human-environment relations (Giesecking, 2013). I was also interested to note the academic papers featured in Figure 3.2 did not directly question stakeholders about their interpretations of scale. This raises a point about the potential value to be gained of discussing spatial and scalar assumptions more openly.

I therefore chose to include a practical, ‘hands-on’ spatial mapping exercise as part of the semi-structured interview process to explore participant visions of more desirable food futures and gain insights into how scale is understood and framed. The aim was to gain insight into the evolution and adoption of food

system spatial visions, their influence on policy, practice and behaviour and potential areas of tension with other pressures e.g. planning, housing, environment, health and food security. Careful consideration was given as to how to frame and conduct this task. Maps may be drawn by hand or computer assisted, created from scratch or by labelling an existing map (Giesecking, 2013). I selected the hand-drawn route. A key decision was whether to present participants with a blank page on which to create their vision from scratch, or provide one or more maps as a base from which to develop their ideas. A key benefit of the blank page is that each participant can work from their own imagination and make personal choices about their use of words, pictures, scale, viewpoint and so on, rather than being presented with spatial, scalar cues (Lamalice et al, 2020). On the other hand, working from maps may be less intimidating to participants. Previous studies indicate that participants usually say they enjoy the experience, but that it is important to position the task in a way that helps participants overcome any potential anxiety when confronted with an unfamiliar activity (Giesecking, 2013). Another consideration was when and how to present the mapping exercise during the interview. Tovi Fenster's 'three steps method' separates the interview, map drawing and researcher-participant dialogue (Fenster, 2009). I opted to 'forewarn' participants in advance of the interview (reducing the element of surprise, and allowing them to mentally prepare) and in practice did not separate the three activities. Rather, the exercise was introduced around 15 minutes into the interview. The participant was briefed, offered a range of pens and pencils (pre-Covid) and encouraged to draw as they talked. In this way, the evolving map was a source of discussion, enabling me to ask questions and clarify points as we went along.

To test the approach, several pilot interviews with mapping exercises were conducted in Bristol. Participants were given the option of starting from a blank page or selecting from a series of differently scaled map 'templates'. Participants working from templates were asked draw on tracing paper placed over their selected map(s) so that individual maps of the same scale could be overlaid, in similar spirit to Libman's composite analysis of neighbourhood boundary perceptions (Libman, 2012). However, reproductions of compiled map layers were of insufficient quality and legibility so the request was dropped. Learning

from the Bristol pilot, I continued with a flexible approach whereby participants could choose between a series of maps and a blank sheet. The approach was sufficiently adaptable to provide a level of structure to both increase consistency and support the participant to complete the task, where required. For every case study, a basic outline map of the UK and Ireland, UK and Europe, UK and the world were provided as standard. In addition participants were offered the following maps:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Bristol | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bristol Wards• West of England• West of England urban/rural areas and road networks• South West region within the UK• South West foodprinting map (from Carey, 2011) |
| Calderdale | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calderdale Wards• Metropolitan Boroughs of West Yorkshire• Calderdale and West Yorkshire within the UK• West Yorkshire within the UK |
| Leicestershire | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leicestershire Districts• Leicester and Leicestershire urban/rural areas and road networks• Leicestershire within the UK• East Midlands region within the UK |

Participants then opted to use a blank sheet or one of more of the maps on offer. They were asked a series of questions to facilitate the task, encouraging them to map out, annotate and explain the spatial and scalar aspects of the desired food system supported by the food partnership and the individual's vision, if different. The request was framed as a ten year view, which was consistent with the concurrent National Food Strategy for England review. Participants were also encouraged to explore relationships between scales, for example between cities, regions and nations.

As previously discussed, the method described above was used to collect approximately half the participant interviews. When England entered its first Covid lockdown, the participant-led mental mapping approach was no longer viable. The mental mapping approach had always been somewhat experimental. The pause enabled me to spend time looking at the data already collected from the first fifteen face-to-face interviews. The map-based interaction brought

something different to the interview. It encouraged a greater level of reflection from participants, leading to thoughts and ideas that might otherwise have not been expressed. On the other hand, the level of engagement in the mapping exercise itself varied greatly. Outputs ranged from intricately drawn, detailed visions to flimsy, sketchy outlines. Two participants didn't wish to tackle the task, but were happy for me to sketch as they spoke. Once I'd reviewed the mental maps, it became clear that a more comparable approach would be helpful.

In order to generate more consistent and comparable outputs and address the limitations imposed by Covid restrictions, I drafted a current and future map for each participant, drawing from interview data, and the original map, where available. This shifted a greater level of control to me, not only as the interviewer, but also as the person who generated the draft maps. Aware of this, I went to considerable lengths to listen to participants' voices and challenge the maps in the follow-up interview. Key questions included: how is the scale? Should we zoom in or out? Have I interpreted what you've said correctly? Does anything need to be added, adapted or changed? What's missing? Participant feedback was requested after each of the interviews. The data consolidation and feedback process is covered separately in Chapter Four.

3.6 Conclusion

The research fits within a constructivist paradigm. It applies a spatial imaginary lens to explore food systems transitions through rescaling, drawing on food partnership case studies within the UK. It uses mixed qualitative data collection methods comprising document analysis, semi-structured interviews and mental mapping and applies a combination of narrative and mapping analysis to interpret the results. The chapter has outlined the theoretical and methodological approach, provided insight into the research strategy and highlighted some of the challenges and choices faced within the research process. It has highlighted the uniqueness of methods combination, a subject I return to in Chapter Eight. Finally, it reflects on the need for an adaptive, intuitive and flexible approach to respond to an evolving situation in uncertain times.

4. Research context

This chapter is a bridge between Chapter Three (research design and methodology) and Chapters Five to Seven (findings, discussion and reflection). It situates and frames the research by drawing on data from the desktop review, interviews and spatial mapping exercise, alongside additional academic and grey literature. In this way, it contextualises the case studies, draws boundaries and limits around the research and provides a foundation on which to build the three Results chapters. It also outlines the process by which data have been collated and analysed, alongside the rationale for the approach.

4.1 Food partnerships and the national policy context

This section starts by building on the introduction to food partnerships and Sustainable Food Places (SFP) provided in Section 2.5. It draws on academic papers and publicly available information, including material on the SFP website²³. It reflects on the evolution of SFP's role and its growing influence. In particular, it considers the ways in which it has shaped the thinking and approach of individual food partnerships. It also demonstrates how SFP has adopted a broad 'local food' imaginary that is embedded in their support material. In this way, it provides the foundation needed to tackle the first research question (RQ1) in Chapter Five. Although the research is focused on the UK food partnership movement, it is also important to gain a sense of its placement within the wider UK policy context. All three case studies are located in England, see Section 4.3.1. This section therefore contextualises food partnerships and SFP within the English policy framework, recognising some elements are may not applicable in UK nations. As per Section 2.5.2, it should be remembered that Sustainable Food Cities (SFC) changed its name to Sustainable Food Places (SFP) in 2020. Thus, the acronyms SFC and SFP are used interchangeably and reflect the timing of the activity or data set being referenced.

The UK food partnership movement has expanded and flourished in recent years, filling the void created by the historical absence of a national framework (Lang et

²³ <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/> (Last accessed 26/05/2022)

al, 2005; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Lang and Heasman, 2015; Hills and Jones, 2019). SFP comprises three parent companies and is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and National Lottery Community Fund. Each 'parent' has its own agenda: healthy, humane and sustainable food, farming and land use (Soil Association), national food policy and advocacy (Food Matters) and improving food and farming (SUSTAIN). Although SFP's own literature emphasises its aim to connect and support²⁴, its unique position has given it a greater opportunity to set the agenda for food partnerships. It has done this by providing a series of resources including a framework developed around six key issues (see Table 4.1 below), a strategy toolkit and a toolbox of local authority food policy levers (Moragues-Faus and Marceau, 2018). SFP resources also contain food partnership examples, thus creating a feedback loop whereby lessons and approaches are disseminated and potentially adopted by other food partnerships. This has the potential to reinforce particular views, methods, activities and imaginaries over others (Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019). Indeed, it is driven by the desire to share good practice and increase the proliferation of actors seeking to transform the food system. So in some ways this largely voluntary network of food partnerships has garnered more influence than either its size or political 'weight' might suggest.

RQ1 investigates the spatial visions of UK food partnerships. As a prefix to this, it is helpful to consider the extent to which SFP channels its influence to promote a particular spatial imaginary. There is an open question about the extent to which SFC plays an intermediary role in negotiating visions (Hodson and Marvin, 2009). SFP website-based narratives signal food partnerships are in control of defining suitable visions, reflecting their place-based unique circumstances. However, a review of SFP documentation indicates a clear presumption towards the local. SFP exerts influence through its framework which identifies and promotes six key issues that require action²⁵. The most recent revision adds greater weight to a local spatial imaginary. The six key issues form the basis for action for most food partnerships, see Chapter Seven. The six issues have been updated (but not

²⁴ <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/> (Last accessed 26/05/2022)

²⁵ <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/> (Last accessed 03/02/2022)

radically changed) since the desktop review was conducted: a summary is presented in Table 4.1 below and Appendix 3 contains a full comparative table. The SFP revised 6 key areas contain increased references to relocalisation, particularly in relation to a ‘good food movement’ (‘fostering food citizenship and a local good food movement’), sustainable food economy (‘putting good food enterprise at the heart of local economic development’) and catering and procurement (‘improving connections and collaboration across the local supply chain’). The more detailed requirements promote the value of ‘lived experience’, challenging food partnerships to look more closely at representation and inclusion, Appendix 3. They also emphasise the need to work over a “larger geographic region” to take a more strategic approach to food procurement and supply, implicitly positioning the West of England food procurement group model as a ‘greater than local’ scale. These observations also connect with wider points of discussion around expanding the spatial scope of affiliated members, optimum scales for transition, the need to adopt strategic (rather than single issue) agendas and the desire to engage with differently scaled organisations to increase leverage. These points are revisited in Chapters Five to Seven.

Table 4.1 SFC/SFP six key areas

	SFC original 6 key areas	SFP revised 6 key areas	
1	Promoting healthy and sustainable food to the public	Food governance and strategy	Establish a broad, representative and dynamic local food partnership Develop, deliver and monitor a food strategy/action plan
2	Tackling food poverty, diet-related ill health and access to affordable healthy food	Healthy food for all	Tackling food poverty Promoting healthy eating
3	Building community food, knowledge, skills, resources and projects	Good food movement	Inspire and engage the public about good food Foster food citizenship movement and a local good food movement
4	Promoting a vibrant and diverse sustainable food economy	Sustainable food economy	Put good food enterprise at the heart of local economic development Promote healthy, sustainable and independent businesses to consumers
5	Transforming catering and food procurement	Catering and procurement	Change policy and practice to put good food on people’s plates

	SFC original 6 key areas	SFP revised 6 key areas	
			Improving connections and collaboration across the local supply chain
6	Reducing waste and the ecological footprint of the food system	Food for the planet	Promote sustainable food production and resource efficiency Reduce, redirect and recycle food, packaging and related waste

Attention is now turned to the emerging policy backdrop to the work and aspirations of UK food partnerships and SFP. The explanation below applies multi-level perspective (MLP) narratives, see Section 2.1, and is used as a 'bridge' to Section 8.2.3 where this line of enquiry is developed further. In one sense, the long wait for national strategic direction is over. An independent review was commissioned in 2019 by the former Secretary of State for Defra Michael Gove, with a view to creating the first national food strategy in 75 years²⁶. This led to the publication of the National Food Strategy: Part One (National Food Strategy, 2020) and National Food Strategy: The Plan (National Food Strategy, 2021). It should be noted the earlier Welsh national food strategy expired in 2020²⁷. Meanwhile, Scotland passed the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act in 2022 in a bid to bring different policy streams into alignment²⁸. Seeking regime-level influence, the new National Food Strategy takes a food systems approach. It generally steers away from endorsing particular spatial imaginaries and/or the need to operate at a particular scale, stressing food system transformation requires change at the structural, cultural, local and individual level. Any notions of relocalisation emerge most strongly in relation to increasing the role of local suppliers in public procurement. One could therefore argue the Strategy (unsurprisingly) reflects an implicit 'national' spatial imaginary. The Strategy certainly has the potential to impact the 'regime' through policy change, although at the time of writing it remains to be seen whether the government acts on its

²⁶ <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/agri-food-chain-directorate/national-food-strategy-call-for-evidence/> (Last accessed 13/06/2022)

²⁷ <https://phw.nhs.wales/about-us/board-and-executive-team/board-papers/board-meetings/2022-2023/30-march-2023/board-papers-30-march-2023/31b-board-20230330-appendix-1-economy-committee-food-wales-bill-phw-response/#:~:text=Wales%20does%20not%20have%20a,a%20vehicle%20to%20do%20this.> (Last accessed 04/07/2023)

²⁸ <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/news/may23-food-policy-landscape-scotland/> (Last accessed 04/07/2023)

recommendations. The National Food Strategy may be seen as part of a broader policy movement to address current and emerging landscape pressures including environmental, agricultural and climate challenges, obesity, the UK's exit from the European Union, Covid, the war in Ukraine and associated global effects on energy and food prices and the 'cost of living crisis' in the UK. Many of these pressures have collectively pushed more people into food and fuel poverty, further ratcheting up the importance of national, regional and local responses. While undoubtedly challenging, periods of turbulence caused by significant landscape shifts are also likely to present transition opportunities (Marsden, 2013).

It is also worth examining niche and regime-level responses to landscape shifts in the UK and beyond. The UK food partnership movement grew concurrently with the development of the Cameron Government's 'Big Society' (smaller state) ideology and the Localism Act of 2011. The ideology sought to concentrate greater decision-making powers into the hands of local authorities, communities and individuals. Tellingly, the Localism Act does not define local (Layard, 2012). More recent regime-level changes include the adoption of national targets and strategies, notably the 25 Year Environment Plan and net zero emissions 2050 target, and new legislation including the Agriculture Act (2020) and the Environment Act (2021), bringing concepts including 'public money for public goods' and Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) to the fore. Concurrently, ongoing and emerging niche activities are grappling to adapt to the new landscape. One documented example relates to responses to the food access and availability issues resulting from (and exacerbated by) the Covid pandemic (Jones et al, 2022; Parsons and Barling, 2022): local community groups (including food partnerships) often acted on these challenges by participating in or even leading the local institutional response, often changing relationship dynamics with local institutions and generating niche-level change. Furthermore, the early publication of Part One of the National Food Strategy – a response to the combined effects of Covid and Brexit – is an example of regime-level change.

4.2 Desktop review

The desktop review identified 50 active UK food partnerships. A complete list is provided in Appendix 1. The primary purpose of the review was to determine the presence of preliminary spatial imaginaries of ‘better’ food futures within publicly-available documents, see Section 3.5.1. The quality, type and scope of information varied between food partnerships. The most common outputs were food partnership strategies, charters and action plans, used as mechanisms to bring together participants and communicate activities. The desktop review revealed 60% of food partnerships had a charter; 48% had an in-date strategy; 36% had an in-date action plan; and 20% had all three. Furthermore, while 86% of food partnerships made reference to a steering group, only 45% disclosed membership. Whenever document review data is invoked in the following results chapters, it should be remembered that the findings are shaped by relative availability of food partnership documentation.

Table 4.2 UK food partnership documentation, May 2019

Available documentation	Number	Percentage
Charter	30	60%
Strategy	24	48%
Action plan	18	36%
All three (charter, strategy, action plan)	10	20%
Steering group	43	86%
Steering group – membership disclosed	21	45%

SFP describes the vision – often expressed as a food charter – as the ‘glue’ that holds the food partnership together²⁹. Several interview participants indicated the charter also has utility as a political tool. One national participant noted that seeking approval of a charter can be a quicker route to putting food on the local authority agenda at a senior level, compared to promoting a fully worked up strategy.

²⁹https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/files/SFP_Toolkit/Developing_a_Vision_and_Food_Charter.pdf (Last accessed 20/07/2023)

4.3 Case studies

Chapter Three covered the selection and justification of the final three case studies (Section 3.4). This section provides an overview of each case study, including an insight into their unique characteristics. Data are drawn from three main sources: the desktop review, wider academic and grey literature and, on occasion, the case study interviews themselves. Figure 4.1 shows the location of each case study: Bristol a city in the South West of England; Calderdale a metropolitan borough in West Yorkshire; and Leicestershire a County in the East Midlands.



Figure 4.1 Case study location maps

4.3.1 Outlines

The outlines below position the three selected case studies with a geographical, administrative, political, historical and cultural context.

Bristol

Bristol is a ‘core city’³⁰ in the South West. Bristol sits within a number of administrative areas. These include the West of England (Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire local authorities); the West of England Combined Authority (West of England catchment minus North Somerset) and the South West Region, covering the counties of Bristol, Cornwall, Dorset, Devon, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire. Both the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) share the West of England catchment. One participant also referenced the Western Gateway, which describes itself as a cross-border economic partnership of local authorities, city regions, LEPs and (Welsh and Westminster) governments³¹.

Bristol has established itself as a leader in UK food systems thinking. The influential Who Feeds Bristol report (Carey, 2011) was funded by NHS Bristol and paved the way for a more active, focused and formalised food movement in the city. The report describes the food system serving Bristol. It positions the city within the national context, the South West region and the ‘city bioregion’ of the West of England (Carey, 2011). It emphasises that Bristol’s food system cannot be viewed in isolation and directly considers the relationship between the city and hinterland, for example by assessing the proportion of the city’s food that could be provided within a 50 mile (‘local’) radius (Carey, 2011), thus reflecting on a self-sufficiency narrative. Similarly, the Good Food Plan for Bristol positions Bristol within the West of England food system (Bristol Food Policy Council, 2013).

³⁰ An alliance of 11 cities seeking to realise the UKs city regions’ potential
<https://www.corecities.com/about-us/what-core-cities-uk> (Last accessed 06/07/2023)

³¹ <https://western-gateway.co.uk/about-western-gateway> (Last accessed 05/07/2023)

The Bristol food partnership movement is driven by two separate but complementary groups – the Bristol Food Network (BFN) and Bristol Food Policy Council (BFPC). There are a number of overlapping members, but each group has a different function. The former has a coordination and delivery focus; the latter defines the strategic view. Emphasis varies between the two groups depending on priorities at the time. The BFN and BFPC have long roots into many organisations, demonstrating ‘institutional thickness’ (Thrift and Amin, 1995; Stewart, 2003) and embedding the food movement within the city’s cultural DNA. I return to this idea in Section 6.2. Bristol and the South West have attracted a lot of food-based research, thus a range of publicly available information is available, including reports and academic papers (for example, Carey, 2011; Carey, 2013; Raffle and Carey, 2018; Vicente-Vicente et al, 2021; Wilkinson et al, 2022). Bristol often seeks to connect ‘outwards and upwards’ to build strategic links. For example, Bristol is one of six UK signatories to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)³², which promotes the role of cities in delivering more sustainable and just food systems.

Calderdale

Calderdale is a metropolitan borough in West Yorkshire. It is bordered by the county of Lancashire to the West, and covers part of the South Pennines and the south Yorkshire Dales. Calderdale’s upper and lower valleys are culturally distinct. The upper valley, including the towns of Todmorden and Hebden Bridge is more rural in nature. Meanwhile, the lower valley to the East is home to around 70% of Calderdale’s population, notably in Halifax, Brighouse and Elland (Calderdale Council, 2023). Some parts of Calderdale also grapple with relatively high levels of social deprivation. 28,000 Calderdale residents (13%) live within areas classified as being in the top 10% of most deprived neighbourhoods in England (Calderdale Council, 2023). Calderdale is unusual in that its administrative border matches that of the River Calder watershed. Furthermore, the geography of the Calder valley, exacerbated by an increase in extreme

³² The MUFPP currently has 260 signatories; 6 are in the UK (Birmingham, Brighton and Hove, Bristol, Glasgow, Greater Manchester, London)
<https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/signatory-cities/> (Last accessed 06/07/2023)

weather events, makes flooding a real risk³³. 'Slow the flow', a Calderdale-based charity promoting natural flood management³⁴, is an example of the community response.

During the interviews, Calderdale participants often offered unprompted insights into culture and values of the area. Thus, a shared narrative emerged around a sea change during the 1970s and 1980s, driven by earlier mill closures and a decline in industry jobs coupled with a wave of incomers, particularly into the towns of Hebden Bridge and Todmorden. Historical isolation within the valley, combined with the brisk handling of changing fortunes and adversity, has built a resilient community. Yet there is also a history of non-conformism (Calderdale Council, 2023), and a level of cultural distinctiveness within the borough, as alluded to in the paragraph above. Thus, there is an argument that Calderdale as an entity is not a community, but rather a set of distinct cultures. These 'micro-cultures' differentiate between the upper and lower Calder Valley; Yorkshire and Lancashire; and even individual towns such as Todmorden and Hebden Bridge. As a broad and rather simplistic generalisation, the lower valley food movement is perceived to be more concerned with food poverty, while the upper valley has a greater focus on food provenance. Like Bristol, Calderdale also attracts research interest, with a particular focus on place-based community responses to food system issues (Heller, 2011; Paull, 2011; Thompson, 2012; Dobson, 2015; Morley et al, 2017; Hardman et al, 2019). Some of these 'niche level' responses have gone on to develop a global reach, notably Incredible Edible (see Chapter Seven) and the Totally Locally movement³⁵. The Incredible Edible movement – and the 'culture of distinctiveness' – are further explored in Chapters Six and Seven.

Leicestershire

Leicestershire is a county on the western edge of the East Midlands region. The city of Leicester, located in the middle of the county, is a separate administrative

³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/21/dams-wellies-and-sleepless-nights-yorkshire-calder-valley-flooding> (Last accessed 09/07/2023)

³⁴ <https://slowtheflow.net/> (Last accessed 09/07/2023)

³⁵ <https://totallylocally.org/> (Last accessed 09/07/2023)

entity. Key towns include Loughborough Melton Mowbray, Market Harborough, Hinckley and Coalville. Leicestershire is urban by population, though rural by area (Lea and Patel, 2018). There is lower deprivation in rural areas compared to urban areas, although there are rural pockets (Lea and Patel, 2018). The county has strong agricultural roots and a rich food heritage, with iconic products including Stilton, Red Leicester and pork pies. Over recent years, districts have sought to increase connections between local producers and consumers. Responses include Edible16 (based around the EL16 postcode on the Leicestershire-Northamptonshire border)³⁶ and Taste Harborough. Chapter Five explores how the local food culture has shaped one district's economic recovery strategy. Food manufacturing plays an important role, and Leicestershire is home to companies including Samworth Brothers, Pukka Pies, Walkers, Cofresh and Geary's Bakery. Good transport links also boost Leicestershire's role as a distribution hub. The county shares a border with Leicester and Leicestershire LEP (LLEP), which prioritises manufacturing and connectivity as key focus areas, see Chapter Five.



Figure 4.2 Case studies: Bristol (from a bridge overlooking the quay); Calderdale (view of Stoodley Pike); Leicestershire (Melton high street)

In preparation for exploring convergence and divergence within case study spatial visions (see Chapter Five), Figure 4.3 summarises the overlaps and differences between the three case study vision narratives, as reflected in their food charters and other key documents (where available). The text below starts to tease out spatial clues. A quick glance indicates that although there is common language between the three (affordable, accessible, sustainable food that

³⁶ <https://store.edible16.org.uk/> (Last accessed 09/07/2023)

benefits health and the local economy), there is also evidence of differing perspectives. Bristol pivots on the ‘good food’ concept; Calderdale celebrates the diversity of local initiatives and Leicestershire emphasises the need to reduce the impact of poverty. At the time of the review there was scant documentary evidence for either Calderdale Food Network or Good Food Leicestershire, aside from their food charters^{37 38}.

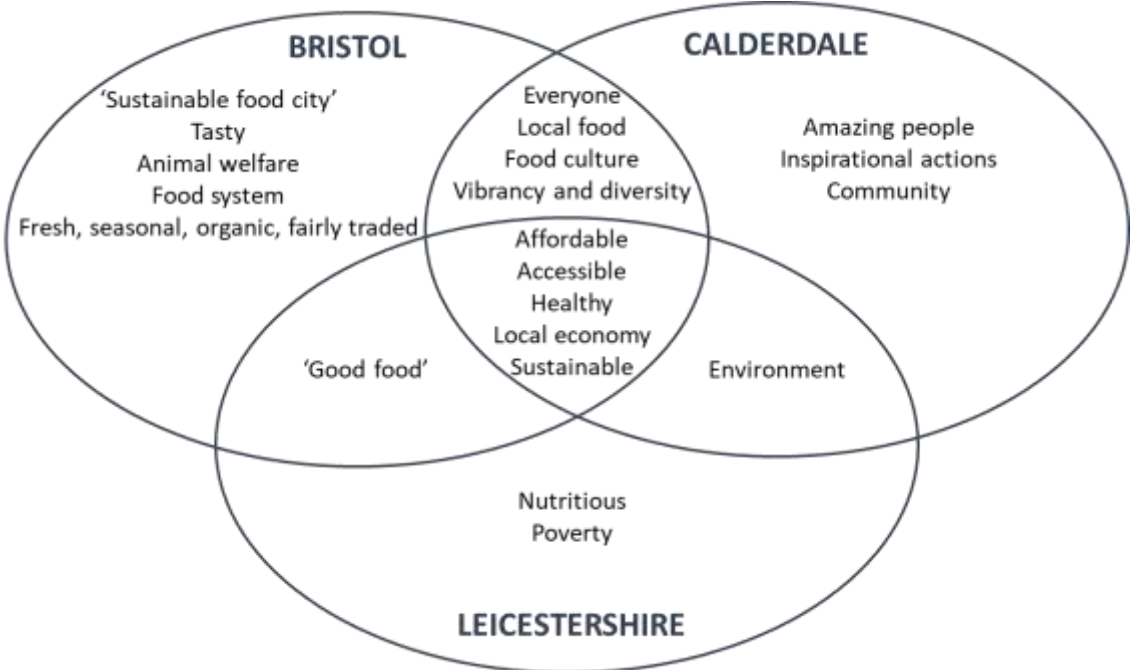


Figure 4.3 Case study vision Venn diagram

It is recognised additional sources of data have the potential to inform the case study analysis, particularly in relation to agency. Examples used by other researchers include participating in meetings, informal conversations and accessing mailing lists and observing participants (Prové et al, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019; Moragues-Faus, 2020; Moragues-Faus, 2021) and conducting surveys (Scherb et al, 2012). Where practicable I have drawn on these additional sources. In some instances, opportunities didn’t come to fruition, despite best efforts. For example, the Good Food East Midlands workshop I

³⁷ http://calderdale.gov.uk/v2/sites/default/files/calderdale-food-charter_0.pdf (Last accessed 15/12/2021)

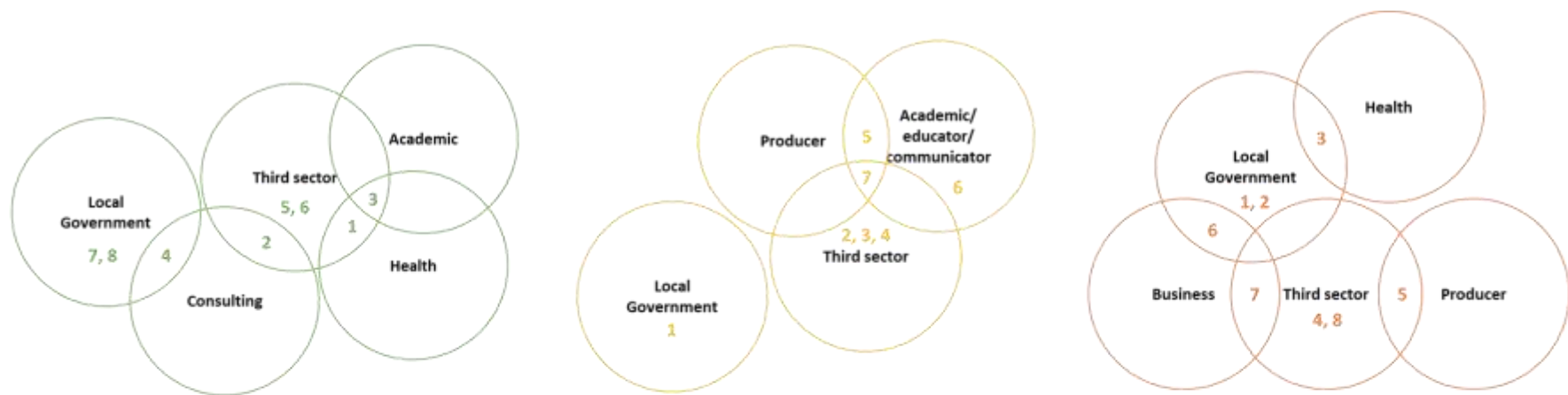
³⁸ <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2021/8/12/Good-Food-Charter-Leicestershire.pdf> (Last accessed 15/12/2021)

planned to attend was cancelled at short notice, see Section 3.4. I also participated in a 'Feeding Regions: turning plans into action' workshop in Manchester (October 2019) with a view to developing a fourth case study. Although the Manchester case study was shelved as a result of Covid (see Section 3.4), attending the workshop allowed me to make helpful contacts in my (final) case study areas. During the interview process, some participants provided additional written information, including meeting minutes, attendance lists, organisation-specific and draft strategies. These were used to supplement and cross-reference the interviews. In addition, I made field observations and/or notes during interviews, informal discussions and phone calls, and sought email clarification of particular points on several occasions. These sources have also informed my thinking around and interpretation of the data.

4.3.2 Participants

The research draws on interviews with 27 participants across three case studies, and four representatives of national-level organisations. As discussed earlier, participants are not claimed to be representative of the areas they cover. Figure 4.4 highlights how participants may represent more than one interest. For example, one Bristol participant chaired a private-public third sector partnership and also crosses into the academic and health realms as a professor of public health. In practice, many of those seeking to transition the food system wear multiple hats, reflecting their varied professional and life experiences.

An interesting distinction is that while many of the Bristol and Leicestershire participants approach food system transition through their professional occupations (e.g. via the local authority, public health) the majority of Calderdale's participants have moulded their working lives around a desire to shape the food system in some way. In other words, Calderdale participants are more likely to directly engage with the food system rather than via an organisational interface. This could be a feature of the participant selection process. However, the snowball method was applied to each of the three case studies; most people were happy to participate; and each case study received a similar number of refusals.



Bristol

Part.	Background
1	NHS public health consultant; founder member Bristol Food Network (BFN) and Bristol Food Policy Council (BFPC)
2	Food consultant; founder member BFN and BFPC
3	West of England Nature Partnership Chair; Professor of Public Health
4	Procurement specialist and consultant
5	Food activist; Blue Finger Alliance
6	Feeding Bristol*
7	Local plan manager, Bristol City Council*
8	Sustainable cities team, Bristol City Council*

Calderdale

Part.	Background
1	Planning Services, Calderdale County Council
2	Co-founder Incredible Edible Todmorden
3	Calderdale Food Network
4	Pennine Crop Share*
5	Farmer and anthropologist*
6	Food writer
7	Local food hub creator, grower and journalist*

*Post lockdown first interviews conducted remotely

Leicestershire

Part.	Background
1	Leicestershire Food Partnership, Leicestershire County Council
2	Harborough District Council representative
3	Health representative, Leicester City Council
4	Leicestershire Programme Manager, Food for Life
5	Farm Manager, Game Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) Allerton Project*
6	Economic Strategy Manager, Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP)
7	Melton Mowbray Food Partnership*
8	Melton community representative

Figure 4.4 Case study participants

4.4 Analytical approach

Chapter Three has already discussed the adaptations required to respond to the first Covid lockdown in England which occurred during the data collection process. This section details and reflects on the approach and structure used to consolidate and interpret the data. For the purpose of this section, the analytical approach focuses largely on the case study interviews and mapping exercise. Developing an analytical approach proved particularly challenging. The analysis phase coincided with the second lockdown. For a number of reasons, it was impossible to carve out sufficient time or headspace to internalise the data and develop a considered analytical framework at the outset. Thus, the approach was iterative and intuitive, and evolved during three distinct phases. Phase one sought to develop a framework to organise both verbal and visual data collected via the interviews and spatial mapping exercise. The framework needed to reflect and adapt to the quickly-changing circumstances, and involved two distinct activities. Firstly, I sought to resolve the challenge of consolidating a range of differently-generated outputs from the spatial mapping exercise, created before and during the pandemic. Secondly, I used NVivo software to code the transcribed interviews. Phase two brought together the verbal interview and visual mapping outputs to provide a coherent and comparable summary for each participant, based around a set of key themes. Phase three focused on constructing the analytical framework. This connected the key themes with the three research questions (see Section 3.3) and ultimately to the three results and discussion chapters (Chapters Five to Seven). An overview of the three phases is presented in Figure 4.5. Each phase is now unpacked in turn.

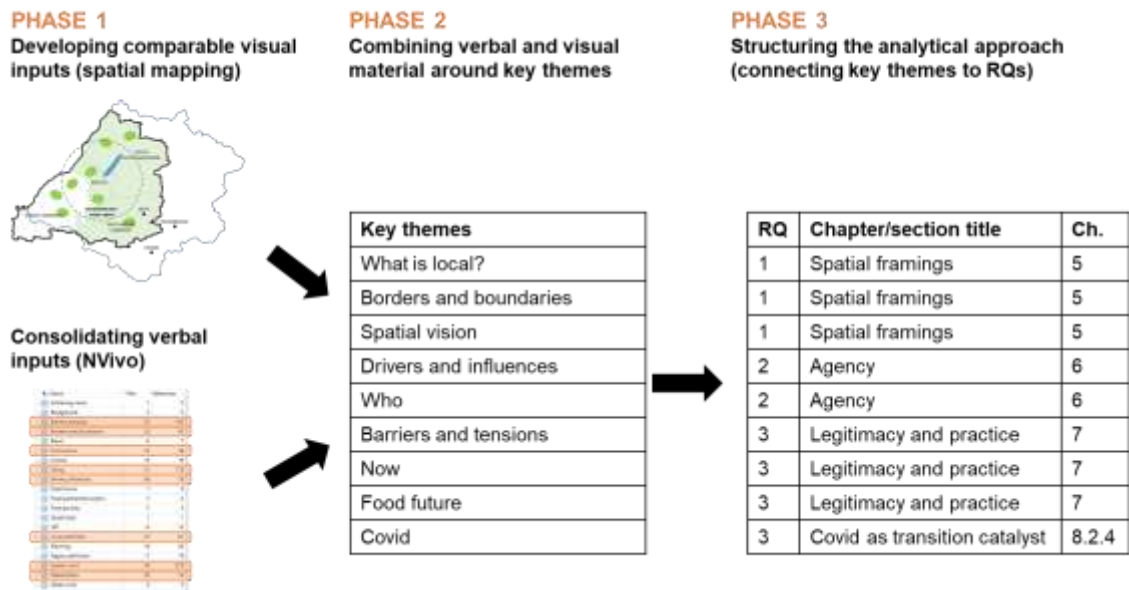
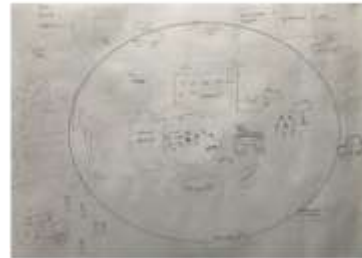


Figure 4.5 Developing the analytical framework – an overview

The ‘pre-Covid’ spatial mapping exercise relied on participants creating their own mental maps, whereas the ‘Covid’ method required the interviewer to generate a draft on their behalf, based on careful questioning and review. Figure 4.6 demonstrates the process by which the individual spatial visions were created, modified and/or synthesised and signed off by the participant. Figure 4.6 depicts a thoughtful, reflexive approach, with the interviewer and participant working together to create a ‘participant-approved’ image. Occasionally ‘pre-pandemic’ mental maps were retained in their original format, see example 1. More often, they were re-created in PowerPoint and adjusted on the instruction of the participant, see example 2. Spatial maps generated during the pandemic were created remotely though dialogue and draft between interviewer and participant from the outset, see example 3. This approach has brought greater consistency and comparability between spatial visions generated before and during the pandemic. Alternative approaches were considered, for example, jointly selecting and editing the map online during the interview, or even working on a shared iPad screen. However, these were deemed too time-consuming and overly-reliant on owning or having access to specific technologies.

1. 'Pre-pandemic' participant
Map retained in original form (A), annotated but unchanged (C)

A. Self-generated map



B. Interviewer-generated map



C. Mutually agreed map



2. 'Pre-pandemic' participant
Interviewer recreated or interpreted map (B) based on the original hand-drawn version (A) and interview discussion. Map finalised following participant feedback (C)



3. 'Pandemic' participant
Draft map created by interviewer, based on interview discussion (B). Map finalised following participant feedback (C)



Figure 4.6 The process of using mental maps to generate individual spatial visions

Phase two tackled the issue of how to combine the spatial mapping outputs and interview narratives. I recognised the need to develop an interview ‘template’ – combining verbal and visual elements – to consolidate outputs and assist comparability during the analysis phase. Each interview was fully transcribed and uploaded to NVivo. The interview coding structure was developed from the ‘bottom up’. I worked through individual interviews, developing preliminary NVivo codes until key themes emerged, see Figure 4.7. Note the ‘Covid legacy’ code was added to reflect the second/follow-up participant interviews (Section 3.5.2). In addition, a handful of more specific sub-categories were used to identify additional potentially interesting material including (but not limited to) references to planning, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), ‘good food’, the urban-rural relationship and regionalism. The approach ‘worked’, but it was not what I had originally envisaged. I subsequently investigated several additional (uncoded) narratives in more detail using Excel. This could potentially have been avoided with a more granular NVivo coding structure. Under different circumstances I could also have developed a more structured approach to analysing the spatial mapping exercise, as per the examples discussed in Section 3.3 (Gieseking, 2013; Lamalice et al, 2020).

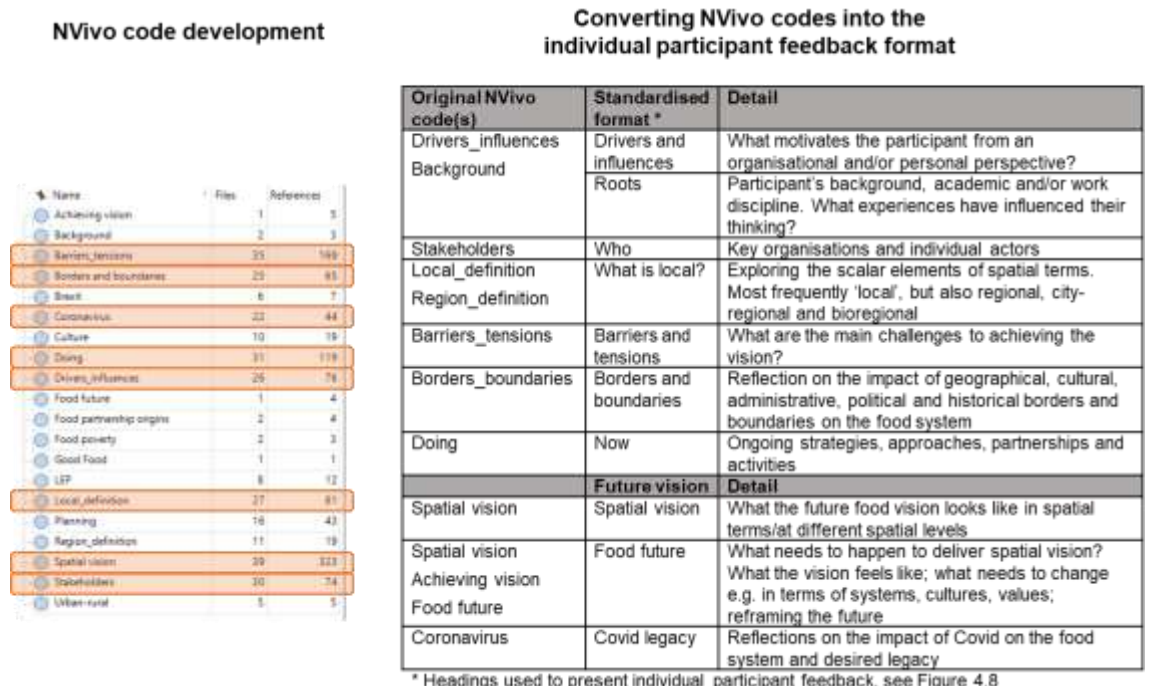
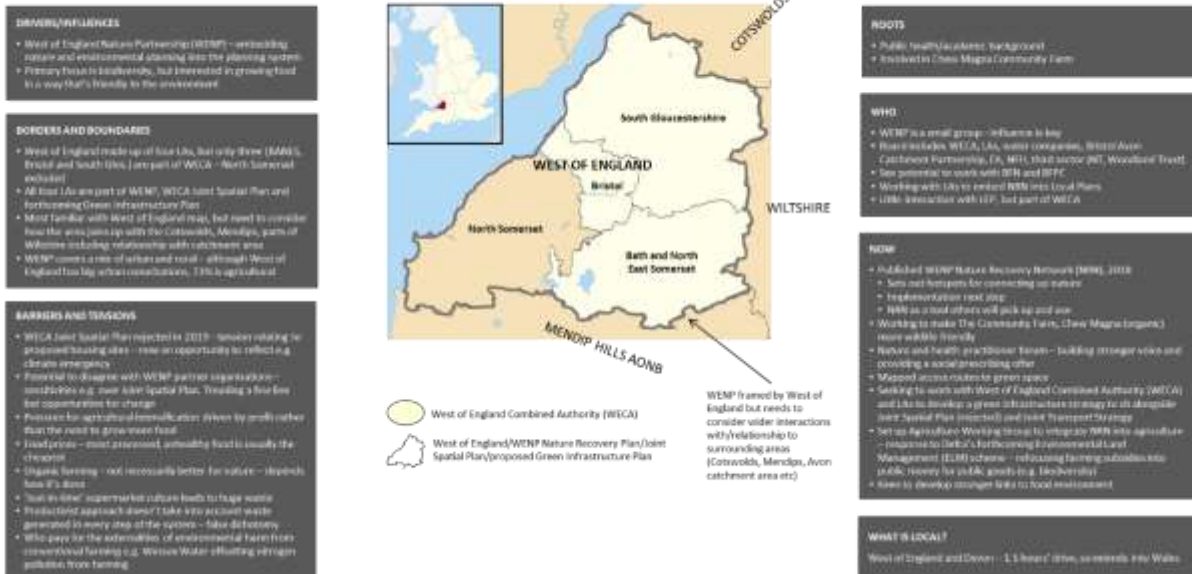


Figure 4.7 NVivo coding approach

A standardised format was developed, concurrently with the coding approach, to consolidate outputs, test understanding with the participants and assist comparability. A summary for each participant (generally combining two interviews and the mapping exercise) was created around two images: a spatial map of the 'current' view of the participant's area of interest (as defined by the participant), and a spatial map of their desired food future. Each 'current' map includes summaries under the headings 'drivers and influences', 'stakeholders', 'borders and boundaries', 'barriers and tensions', 'current activities' and personal definitions of 'local' and/or 'regional'. Each 'food future' map includes a written summary of the participant's spatial vision, sought food future and predicted coronavirus legacy. An example of the standardised format is presented in Figure 4.8. The draft maps and written summaries were then reviewed and updated based on participant feedback. It is important to state the outputs are reflective of the views expressed by participants 'on the day' and may vary over time. This was highlighted in practice when several participants made substantive changes to their visions during the second interview. This point is picked up again in Chapter Eight. I also often stressed the temporal nature of the process to participants to help them focus on their priorities, rather than feeling pressured to develop a complete and comprehensive view.

CURRENT West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) representative

FINAL, Martha Cross, University of Reading



FUTURE West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) representative¹

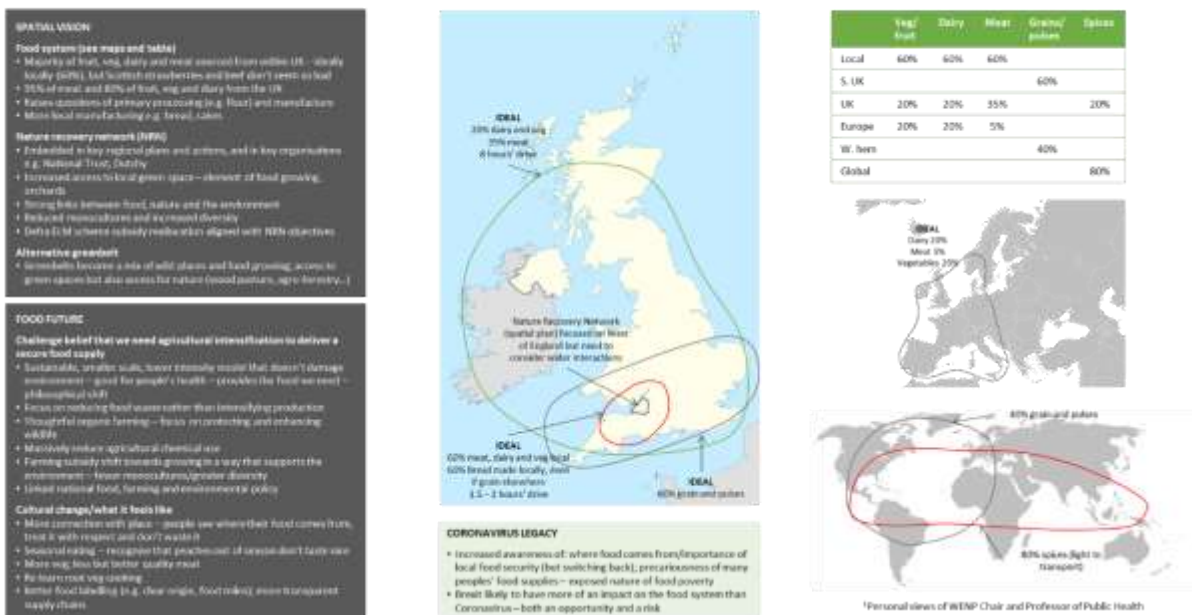


Figure 4.8 Standardised format example

The standardised format provides a set of rich pictures in order to share and compare individual stories within each case study. The supplementary weight lent to the process by the mapping exercise is examined in Chapter Eight. In addition, a range of data from participant interviews were collated in Excel. Specifically, a framework was developed to identify common narratives within a range of broader questions including how is the spatial vision described; what hinders

progress; what motivates this person; whose interests are represented; who is involved/doing the work; and what are the solutions? These common narratives are detailed in Appendix 4. The outputs of this analysis – including word counts and common narratives – are drawn upon in Chapters Five to Seven.

The organisation of the results and discussion chapters (Chapters Five to Seven) are particularly influenced by two analytical frameworks (Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019; Prové et al, 2019). The Longhurst and Chilvers study assesses the on-paper visions of energy transitions. Their analytical framework is based on four dimensions of sociotechnical transitions – meanings, knowings, doings and organisings (Longhurst and Chilvers 2019). Prové et al (2019) examine the politics of scale in urban agriculture through the scalar practices of scale framing, negotiating and matching in two case study food partnerships. Of particular interest to my research is the practice of scale framing, or how actors engage with geographical scale to frame policy issues and create visions for improvement (Prové et al, 2019). I held these five dimensions (meanings, knowings, doings, organisings, and spatial framings) in mind when developing the structure to analyse and present the findings and discussion. Thus, the next three chapters are organised around spatial framings; agency; and legitimacy and practice, see Table 4.3. This approach allowed me to combine outputs from the desktop review, interviews and mapping exercise to directly address each research question in turn.

Table 4.3 Analytical approach

Chapter	Inspiration	Research objectives	Links to RQs
5. Spatial framings	Scale framing (negotiating and fixing)	What spatial imaginaries are reflected within and around food partnerships' food system visions?	RQ1 Transition destinations
6. Agency	Knowings and organisings	Who creates these visions and spatial imaginaries (and who is excluded)?	RQ2 Transition agency
7. Legitimacy and practice	Meanings and doings	How are these visions and spatial imaginaries formed, shared, prioritised and validated ('legitimising transitions') and implemented and practiced ('doing transitions')?	RQ3 Transition legitimacy

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter forms the bridge between the research plan outlined in Chapters Two and Three (literature review, research questions and methodology) and the findings and discussion presented in Chapters Five to Eight. It has positioned the research within the wider UK context, drawn a boundary around the study of the UK food partnership movement and provided necessary context – in relation to the desktop review, case studies and analytical framework – to support the subsequent findings and discussion.

Please note, references to specific findings in the remaining chapters are abbreviated to 'C' for Chapter and 'F' for Finding, for example, C5/F3.

5. Spatial framings

The research uses spatial imaginaries as a point of access to explore the 'relational triangle' between imaginaries, transition and scale. The first step is to discern the spatial imaginaries present and the extent to which they are shared. To this end, this chapter (the first of three results chapters), speaks to the 'transition destinations' aspect of transition theory and addresses **RQ1 What visions and spatial imaginaries of food systems transitions are present within and across food partnerships?** Chapters Two and Four highlight a widely-held view within the UK that transitioning food systems towards a more desirable state generally involves a spatial shift in where our food is grown and processed. This view is also reflected in the objectives of Food Matters, The Soil Association and Sustain (Sustainable Food Places' 'parent' organisations), see Chapter Four. But how is this shift interpreted within food partnerships' imaginaries? And to what extent are these imaginaries aligned with the spatial visions of individuals working within and around food partnerships? This chapter explores the spatial framings used by individuals and food partnerships to identify, challenge and deconstruct the normative spatial imaginaries of food system transition. It draws on narrative analyses of the desktop review and case study interviews, and the spatial mapping outputs. Sustainable Food Places (SFP) takes a pragmatic view, encouraging food partnerships to build influence in the absence of direct political control. Yet we see how SFP also influences the scales at which food partnerships seek to operate (Chapter Four). This chapter considers the spatial imaginaries of the food partnerships themselves, before looking beyond the written documentation to explore how actors working within and around food partnerships express their personally-felt spatial visions. This seeks to answer a basic question: where should our food come from? More specifically, it aims to understand how individuals and groups seeking to transition the food system imagine more desirable food futures, and the extent to which there is congruence or divergence between these views.

The findings presented and discussed in the next section are aligned with RQ1's sub-questions:

a) *What spatial imaginaries exist within and across food partnerships?*

Finding 1. Food partnerships' written documentation collectively presents a seemingly harmonious spatial imaginary reflecting the desire to transition towards local food systems

b) *To what extent is there alignment between individual spatial visions, food partnership visions and wider spatial imaginaries?*

Finding 2. Convergent and divergent spatial narratives are interwoven beneath case study food partnerships' seemingly shared local food imaginaries, exposing tensions and conflicts underpinning common transition goals

c) *How are desirable scales re-imagined?*

Finding 3. Food partnerships' shared desire to relocalise masks more nuanced interpretations of how local food systems should be rescaled

Section 5.1. introduces the key concepts applied in this Chapter, explains the analytical approach and highlights how the findings contribute to key academic debates identified in Chapter Two. Section 5.2 outlines a series of preliminary, normative spatial imaginaries reflected in food partnership documentation. It demonstrates that active UK food partnerships have coalesced around a relocalisation imaginary, which is interpreted in a variety of scalar and/or spatial ways. It draws on written documents, participant interviews and mapping outputs from the three case studies to consider the extent to which visions converge and diverge both across and within the case studies. Findings support the presence of a series of place-based imaginaries underpinning a seemingly shared relocalisation imaginary. It then unpacks how the 'local' is scaled in food system visions and imaginaries. It considers how the term local is defined and interpreted before exploring the extent to which scale is 'fixed' within food partnerships' desired transition destinations. The discussion and reflection section draws the first three findings together to reflect more broadly on RQ1, before the chapter is concluded.

5.1 Concepts and approach

The purpose of this section is three-fold. Firstly, it provides a reminder of the key concepts relevant to the findings presented in Section 5.2. Secondly, it details the analytical approach underpinning each finding. Thirdly, it pinpoints where the findings make a contribution to and/or connect with arguments discussed in the literature review (Chapter Two). In this way, it provides the necessary structure and positioning for the rest of the chapter.

Since this chapter focuses on the interpretation of spatial scales and ‘the local’, there is value in revisiting how these concepts are defined. Chapter Two has already highlighted academic debates around scale as contested and socially constructed, and ‘local’ as a similarly contested concept (Brenner, 2001; Marston, 2005; Hinrichs, 2003; Born and Purcell, 2006). This research embraces the contested nature of these concepts and examines some specific/individual interpretations in the following section. Meanwhile, Table 2.1 has already identified key scalar narratives in academic literature popularised as alternatives to the global food system – localism, re-regionalisation, city-regionalism and foodsheds. Thus, Table 2.1 became the starting point in the analysis of food partnerships’ spatial scalar visions (expanded below). The analytical focus on scalar and local concepts collectively sheds light on three of the nine emergent research themes presented in Figure 4.5 – what is local, borders and boundaries and spatial vision.

The structure of Section 5.2 sequentially links Findings 1-3 to RQ1’s three sub-questions. So there is value in summarising the analytical approach to each sub-question in turn. RQ1(a) seeks to identify what spatial visions and imaginaries exist within and across UK food partnerships. I examined food partnerships’ written documentation for evidence, using the food system scalar narratives identified in the literature review (Table 2.1) as a starting point. Three out of four of Table 2.1’s scalar narratives are present in UK food partnerships’ documentation – the local; the region and the city-region. I also created national and global (local-global) categories to reflect additional scalar narratives, see Table 5.1. Conversely, the food partnership documentation did not reference

'foodsheds'. This could be because the foodshed concept – popular with US food partnerships – is less compatible with the UK's administrative, political, spatial and cultural structures. This line of argument is developed in Section 7.3. After assessing each partnership's written material, a primary and secondary (where applicable) spatial vision was identified for each active UK food partnership, see Figure 5.2. I included supplementary notes on the analysis spreadsheet to justify each decision. The analysis reveals UK food partnerships have overwhelmingly adopted a local imaginary. Simply put, they seek to rescale and transition the food system through a process of relocalisation. Identifying the high level (written-down) food partnership spatial visions and overarching local imaginary prepares the groundwork for RQ1(b).

RQ1(b) investigates the extent to which there is alignment between individual participant spatial visions, food partnerships' written visions and the seemingly normative 'local' imaginary. Focusing specifically on the three case studies, the analysis drills into the interviews and individual maps to compare and contrast individual spatial visions, written visions and the broader 'local' imaginary. Section 4.4 has already explained how participant interviews and maps were combined to overcome Covid-related challenges and identify nine key themes. Appendix 4 documents the narratives underpinning the nine key themes and records to the data source(s) for the tables and figures presented in Chapters Five to Seven. The analysis collectively demonstrates that individual spatial visions both converge and diverge around the local food imaginary, highlighting tensions and conflicts beneath a common transition goal.

As indicated above, the concepts of scale – including the local – are contested and socially constructed. RQ1(c) explores definitions of 'local' – and how 'the local' is scaled – in the context of UK food partnerships. The document review revealed just under 25% of food partnerships provide a written scalar interpretation of 'local'. Meanwhile the interviews and spatial mapping exercise indicate re-localisation is more nuanced than simply shifting the proportion of food grown within a spatially distinct area, highlighting complexities around the kinds of food deemed 'local', who 'local' is for, and how the 'local' scale is fixed (Davoudi, 2019; Prove et al, 2019; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). This section of

analysis draws primarily on a visual comparison of participant spatial maps, presented in Appendix 5 (Map A). Participants all 'fixed' local below the national scale and often gravitate towards administrative borders and boundaries. The most common narratives are presented in Table 5.3 and Appendix 4.

RQ1 uses spatial imaginaries as point of access to explore how UK food partnerships – and the people working within and alongside them – envision better food futures through rescaling. In doing so, the analytical approach and findings intersect with and contribute to several academic debates. Firstly, the approach challenges an (often implicit) assumption that written-down, documented visions are analogous with deeply-held spatial imaginaries (Sonnino, 2016; Bergman, 2017; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). It provides evidence to support the claim that normative desired destinations of transitions are underpinned by negotiation, divergence and conflict (Berkhout, Smith, and Stirling, 2004; Hodson and Marvin, 2009), in the context of UK food partnerships. Secondly, the novel spatial mapping method plays a key role in teasing out points of convergence and divergence between individual visions, written strategies and seemingly shared spatial imaginaries. In this way, both the method and analytical approach provide a practical means to uncover biases and better understand multiple visions (Zonneveld, 2005; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). Adopting this approach therefore has potential to identify and celebrate the nuanced scalar thinking underpinning seemingly normative spatial imaginaries. This idea is further developed in Section 8.1. Thirdly, several academics have asserted the ways food partnerships seek to rescale food systems flex traditional territorial and municipal borders and boundaries (Sonnino, 2016; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Sonnino, 2019; see also Section 2.5.3). My findings suggest while there are some leanings towards 'soft spaces' (Hincks et al, 2017), there are limits to such flexing. The tension between what is desirable and practicable is tackled in Chapter Seven.

5.2 Findings

This section presents evidence to support three key findings that align with RQ1's three sub-questions.

Finding 1. Food partnerships' written documentation collectively presents a seemingly shared spatial imaginary reflecting the desire to transition towards local food systems

Finding 1 responds to **RQ1 (a) What spatial imaginaries exist within and across food partnerships?** As highlighted in Chapter Four, Sustainable Food Places (SFP) and its parent organisations have championed a spatial imaginary that involves shortening food supply chains, necessitating a spatial shift in where food is grown and produced relative to where it is consumed. Therefore RQ1 (a) seeks to test the extent to which a relocalisation imaginary has been institutionalised by food partnerships as the dominant desired transition pathway. Finding 1 draws on desktop review data covering active UK food partnerships to identify the preferred scale(s) at which food 'should' be produced, processed, distributed and consumed, reflected in food partnership literature. RQ1 (a) builds on Chapter Four by unpacking how food partnerships i) organise themselves in spatial terms by defining and 'operationalising' their boundaries (I refer to these as 'areas of concern') and ii) communicate the spatial imaginaries underpinning the drive to relocalise. This builds a picture of how active UK food partnerships frame and imagine both themselves and their desired food futures, in spatial terms. This provides the 'baseline' before exploring the individual visions underpinning these seemingly shared spatial imaginaries in the RQ1 (b). Finding 1 is broken down into two sub-findings:

- Food partnerships largely seek to operate within their 'areas of concern' delimited by administrative boundaries
- Food partnerships generally adopt a local spatial imaginary, centred around shorter supply chains, increasing benefits to the local community and reconnecting producers and consumers

Finding 1(a). Food partnerships largely seek to operate on behalf of their ‘areas of concern’ delimited by administrative boundaries

UK food partnerships are spatially organised according to administrative boundaries. Figure 5.1 compares food partnerships’ spatial ‘areas of concern’ at the time of the desktop review with after the 2020 review which sought to diversify food partnerships by moving beyond the city focus. 60% of food partnerships affiliated to SFP represented cities at the time of the desktop review, although SFC had already informally started to expand its remit to accept food partnerships seeking to transition the food system of smaller-than-city units (e.g. London boroughs, towns) and larger-than-city units (e.g. counties). The 2020 review formally extended the idea of what constitutes the desirable scale(s) of operation to drive transformational change. It should be noted SFP has a significant influence on how food partnerships structure and organise themselves, acting as a gatekeeper to both network membership and funding, see Chapter Six. Following the 2020 review, SFP’s focus has been on “reaching up” (raising the bar) and “reaching out” (extending the SFP model to a broader range of places including towns, boroughs, districts and counties). This has extended the opportunity for affiliation and funding into areas with more rural coverage, notably counties. It is interesting to note that food partnerships have, thus far, largely resisted regional structures. This point is expanded in Chapter Seven.

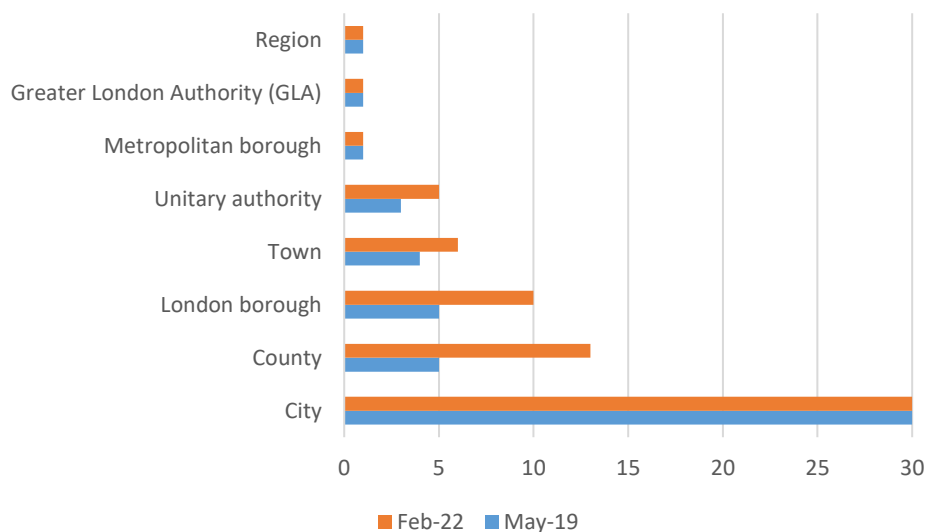


Figure 5.1 UK food partnership spatial areas of concern

Interview evidence suggests that the broadening of SFP's focus beyond the city is at least partially opportunistic, giving greater flexibility to food partnerships to find workable scales, within limits. National-level participant interviews indicated that while district-level partnerships have been considered, there may be difficulties in expanding from a 'single issue' focus to embrace a more strategic agenda. Embracing a broader range of scales may also create potential issues with 'nested' memberships in the SFP allocation of grants, with a need to balance funding between district, city, county and/or regional levels. Additionally, SFP actively encourages food partnerships to connect 'upwards' and engage at regional levels, notably via Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPS). Arguably the SFP position merely recognises an approach food partnerships were already moving towards. But it does raise questions about how working at a greater range of scales is imagined, and the extent to which food partnerships seek to extend their influence beyond their immediate administrative boundaries. This point is further developed within Finding 3.

A clearly defined 'area of concern' is also reflected in food partnership narratives, with many linking their vision statements to provisioning for and delimited by territorial boundaries (*"every person in Aberdeen"*; *"BANES is a place where"*; *"make life better for Doncaster residents"*). There are a few exceptions including Wells Food Network which seeks to extend benefits to *"the surrounding towns, villages and countryside"*. Furthermore, Good Food York's vision explicitly recognises the city's inability to produce all its food, acknowledges York's place *"at the heart of Yorkshire"* and commits to work with food producers across the county to increase food supply³⁹. A few food partnerships position themselves relative to other areas, for example, Carlisle aspires to be *"the most sustainable food city in the region"*. A handful of food partnerships seek to define to whom the vision relates. As well as residents, some visions explicitly include transitional visitors to the area including workers (e.g. Winchester, York) and tourists (York). All this opens a debate about who transition is for, and who shapes the desired destinations of transitions, See Chapter Six. In summary, the document review

³⁹<http://www.goodfoodyork.org/what%20were%20doing.html><http://www.goodfoodyork.org/what%20were%20doing.html> (Last accessed 26/11/2021)

highlighted a common narrative amongst food partnerships to operate on behalf of those living (and occasionally visiting or working) within an administratively defined area of concern. A minority explicitly stated an intention to seek influence beyond their immediate territorial boundaries.

Finding 1(b). Food partnerships have generally adopted a ‘local’ spatial imaginary centred around shorter supply chains, increasing value in the local economy and reconnecting producers and consumers

The document review sought to identify the extent to which food partnerships share commonly-held spatial imaginaries (and supporting narratives) that describe transition through rescaling towards more desirable food futures. Using the scalar narratives identified in Chapter Two (Table 2.1) as a starting point, the review identified five spatial vision narratives present in varying degrees across food partnerships – local, regional, city regional, national and global. These are described in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 UK food partnership spatial vision narratives

Classification	Spatial vision narratives
Local	Increasing proportion of local food enhances environmental, economic and societal benefits Short supply chains Keeping value in the local economy Reconnecting producers and consumers
Regional	Engaging producers and consumers at local and regional levels Inadequacy of local supply More robust/less prone to supply interruptions (than local) Key role in developing regional economy Regional network role Regional sense of connection Celebrating regional food heritage
City-region	Cities cannot be viewed in isolation Food requirements cannot be delivered within city limits Framing primary city within the city-region/bioregion Defining territory (urban/peri-urban area and surrounding hinterland); or administrative area Increasing city-region resilience
National	Boosting national economy (Wales) Part of a national (and global) system

Classification	Spatial vision narratives
	Increasing national resilience (after Brexit) Prioritising food grown within UK
Global (local-global)	Recognising position within global food system and global community Minimising adverse impacts of global food trade (importance of fair trade) Celebrating culinary traditions of all cultures (improving social cohesion) Food provision to reflect population and food culture diversity

Table 5.1 narratives draw out some tensions and spatial inconsistencies. There is a question around the extension of localism beyond municipal boundaries, or what Roberta Sonnino calls the “*regionalisation of the local*” (Sonnino, 2016). While “*local food does not recognise administrative boundaries*” (County Durham Food Partnership, 2014), some partnerships explicitly frame their imaginaries around administrative borders (e.g. Good Food Leicestershire⁴⁰). The reasons for these decisions are explored in more detail in Chapter Seven. Cardiff takes this one step further, equating Wales with ‘local’ in its Food Charter⁴¹. This could be deemed the ‘nationalisation of the local’. One partnership’s ‘local’ can have a bigger scalar footprint than another partnership’s ‘regional’. For example, Greater Manchester is generally positioned as a region, whereas Peterborough defines local as being within a radius of one hundred miles, see Figure 5.10. Distinguishing between regional and city-region imaginaries in food partnership documentation was a particular challenge. Regional imaginaries emphasise the need to reconnect what we eat and how it’s produced on a ‘larger than local’ scale. City-region imaginaries also do this, but generally place a greater emphasis on the role of the city and its relationship with the rural hinterland and defining and understanding the ‘foodprint’ in territorial terms (Zasada et al, 2017). Conversely, food partnerships may also use the term ‘city region’ to denote an administrative (rather than productive) territorial area. For example, Bournemouth and Poole food partnership expresses a vision for the city region, aligning with

⁴⁰ <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2021/8/12/Good-Food-Charter-Leicestershire.pdf> (Last accessed 26/11/2021)

⁴¹ <https://foodcardiff.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Cardiff-Food-Charter-English.pdf> (Last accessed 12/06/2023)

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council's broader aspiration to be a "world class city region" (BCP Council, 2021⁴²). Despite efforts to build a city-region imaginary, applications to become a city have not been successful to date. Conversely, Good Food Oxford partnership does not identify with the city-region imaginary, despite consideration of its hinterland and 'foodprint' (Low Carbon Oxford, 2013).

Once the document analysis had revealed the most common spatial vision narratives, I sought to identify a primary imaginary, and a secondary imaginary if present, for each active UK food partnership. The document analysis generated sufficient data to enable a dominant 'primary' spatial imaginary to be detected for 96% of active UK food partnerships. An additional secondary spatial imaginary was detected in 40% of food partnerships. The consolidated primary and secondary spatial imaginary nominations are presented in Figure 5.2. Overall, 98% of food partnerships have adopted a primary or secondary 'local' spatial imaginary. Food partnerships display a more diverse range of secondary spatial imaginaries, where regional and global thinking are more prominent. The global imaginary might be more accurately described as a local-global imaginary: this paring is reflected in the London boroughs of Hackney, Lambeth and Lewisham, the cities of Birmingham and Bradford and in Luton town. Key narratives highlight the desire for local food to reflect multi-cultural populations and a responsibility to minimise harm through global trade, thus positioning the local within the global food system (Swyngedouw, 2004). Regional imaginary narratives express the need for 'more than local' to effectively manage supply and increase resilience, and a sense of regional (re)connection. Of the eight locations with secondary regional imaginaries, four are cities.

⁴² www.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/About-the-council/Our-Big-Plan/Our-Big-Plan-in-full.pdf (Last accessed 16/11/2021)

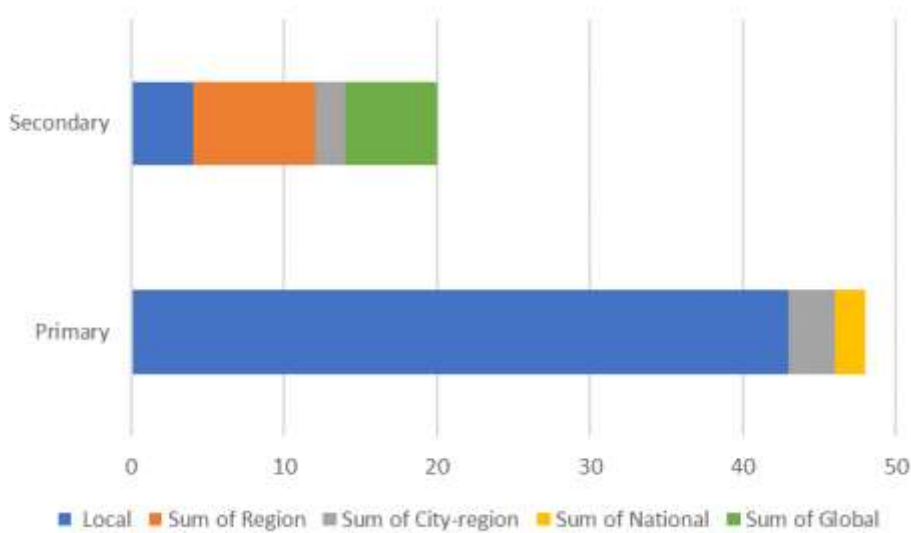


Figure 5.2 Primary and secondary spatial imaginaries of active UK food partnerships

In addition to the classifications above, other spatial visions include the desire to become a ‘sustainable food city’ (linked to acceptance of food partnerships within the SFP programme) and Peterborough’s wider aspiration to become the UK’s ‘environment capital’. There is a strong narrative around reconnecting us with what we eat and how it’s produced, highlighting an implicit desire to link the urban and rural. There is also a spatial element within the ‘good food’ narrative (examined later in C6/F6), often emphasising the benefit to local businesses. A variety of spatial framings are at play at different scales within the locations themselves, including neighbourhoods, food deserts and fast food exclusion zones. So, while the idea of localism dominates, the picture is not straightforward. Overall, the document review reveals most UK food partnerships use the language of the ‘local’ to convey their desired spatial imaginary. This raises questions about the extent to which this seemingly shared relocalisation imaginary is similarly conceived and scaled across food partnerships. Furthermore, given that local narratives are not universally adopted within the wider UK context, there is also value in exploring why a relocalisation imaginary is preferred within the UK food partnership movement (Chapter Four).

To summarise, food partnerships generally seek to benefit those living (and occasionally those visiting or working) within their administrative boundaries. In

other words, they have a clearly defined ‘area of concern’. The majority of food partnerships have adopted a local (as opposed to regional, national etc.) spatial imaginary, centred around shorter supply chains, increasing benefits to the local community and reconnecting producers and consumers. However, these spatial visions are not always fixed to a particular scale. These relocalisation imaginaries are broadly supported and reinforced by SFP establishing relocalisation as the dominant transition pathway. This finding establishes a baseline from which to explore the next two sub-questions within RQ1.

Finding 2. Convergent and divergent spatial narratives are interwoven beneath case study food partnerships’ seemingly shared local food imaginaries, exposing tensions and conflicts underpinning common transition goals

Finding 2 combines case study interviews and individual spatial maps with document review outputs to address **RQ1 (b) to what extent is there alignment between individual spatial visions, food partnership visions and wider spatial imaginaries?** RQ1 (b) starts to drill down into the spatial visions of actors working within or close to food partnerships. Specifically it explores the level of coherence – or dissonance – between the spatial visions of individual and institutional actors, the stated (written-down) visions of food partnerships and the normative spatial imaginaries identified in 1(a). This challenges the research approach that assumes written-down/documented visions are analogous with deeply-held spatial imaginaries (Sonnino, 2016; Bergman, 2017; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019) and sheds light on whether the desired destinations of transitions are truly normative, or mask “*the negotiated and potentially conflictual nature*” of such visions (Berkhout, Smith, and Stirling, 2004; Hodson and Marvin, 2009). This directly responds to calls to uncover biases and better understand multiple visions (Zonneveld, 2005; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019).

Finding 2 combines three strands of investigation: how are individual food partnership and participant visions manifested in primarily spatial terms; to what extent do they converge; and what are the points of divergence? The evidence presented below sheds light on what underpins the seemingly shared spatial

imaginary, identified in the analysis underpinning Finding 1, for each of the three case studies. It also begins to unpack the ways in which borders and boundaries are used to frame spatial visions. In doing so, we find individual spatial visions that demonstrate convergence around common spatial narratives, and also divergence whereby established spatial borders and boundaries are reinforced, remade or rejected.

As a precursor to examining individual case study participant spatial visions, there is value in briefly re-connecting with how the case study food partnerships frame themselves. These visions – outlined in the Chapter Four – can be seen as the food partnerships' broadest statement of intent. It is important to remember Calderdale and Leicestershire have substantively less food partnership documentation to draw on in comparison with Bristol, which has a more established food partnership. While all three case studies share the desire for a more localised food system, the document review indicates the city of Bristol is positioned within the (city) region (Chapter Four). This assessment is reinforced by the participant common word count, see Figure 5.3, highlighting the dominance of the 'local' within all three case studies, but also demonstrating an established region and city-region narrative in Bristol.

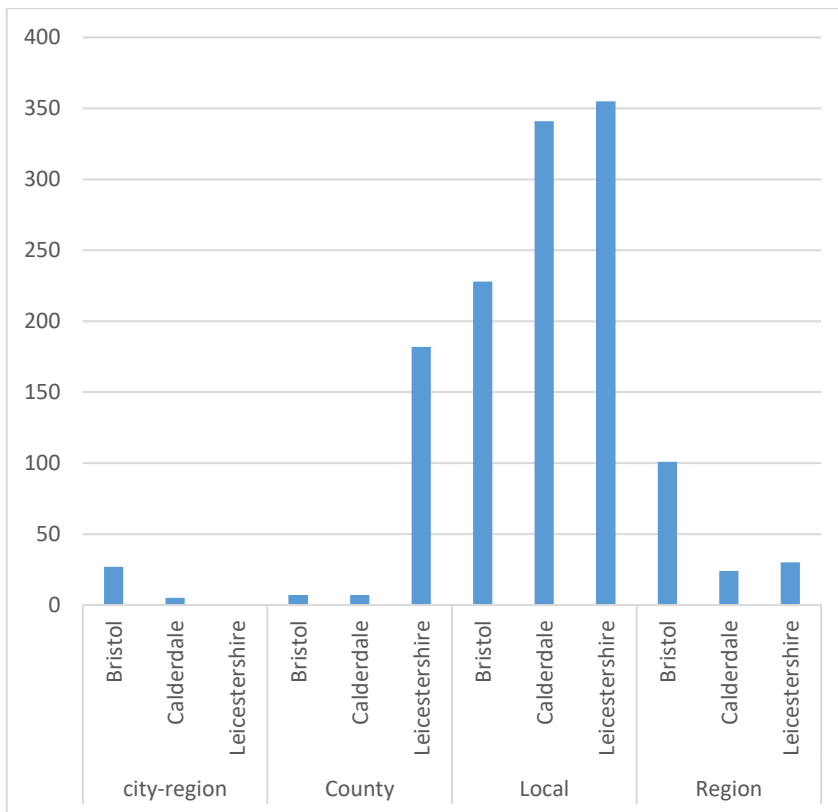


Figure 5.3 Participant common word analysis (case studies)

Bristol, Calderdale and Leicestershire data indicate a level of alignment between the vision narratives derived from food partnership documents and participant interviews. The pyramid in Figure 5.4 demonstrates areas of complementarity. It pinpoints shared narratives within individual participant visions; between food partnership and participant visions; and across case study visions. The pyramid builds towards the primary spatial imaginary (identified through the document review). While the data set (seven or eight interviews per case study) is too small to be truly representative of each food partnership, variations are indicative of place-based preferences. It is hardly surprising to find an emerging, shared narrative around the need for good, local food to deliver more affordable, accessible, healthy and sustainable food systems through increasing local production, shortening supply chains and transforming farming practices, as Figure 5.4 suggests. However, drilling down into the common narratives in each case study begins to expose subtle differences in the expression of priorities.

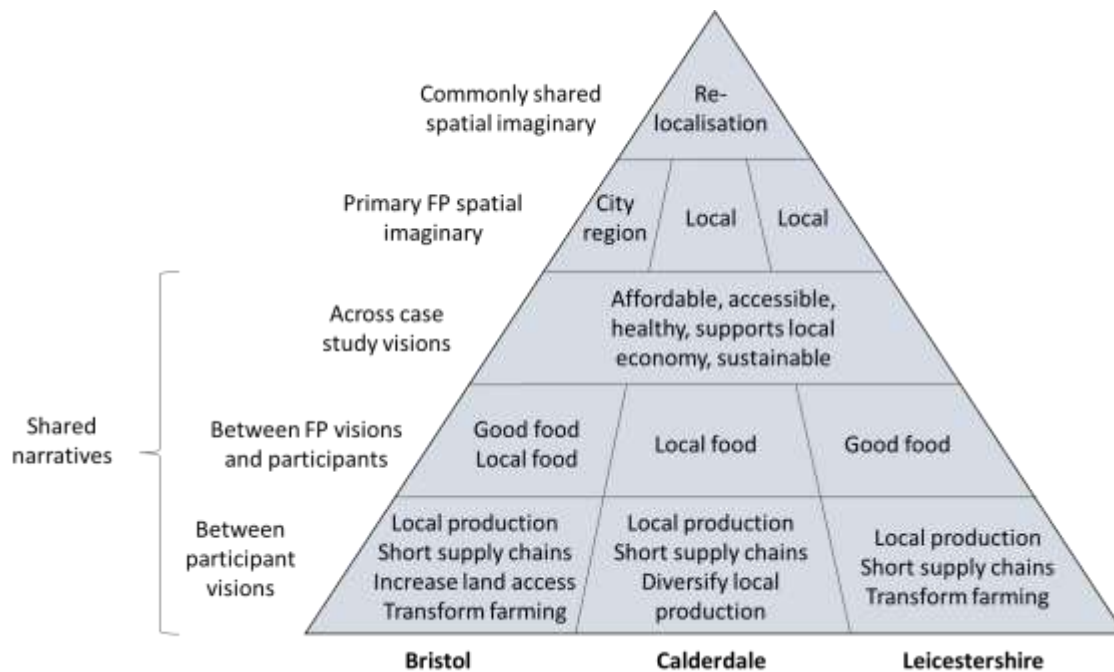


Figure 5.4 Spatial visions – areas of complementarity

In order to glimpse beneath the common narratives identified in Figure 5.4, Figure 5.5 and Table 5.2 provide greater insight into the subtle differences between narratives seemingly shared across the case studies. Figure 5.5 shows the narrative ‘footprint’ for each case study, indicating the extent to which areas of concern are shared. There is indeed a relatively high degree of consistency. Table 5.2 provides greater insight into how each narrative is described within each case study. As a practical example, nearly all participants share a desire to increase local production. Considering each case study in turn, Bristol participants generally coalesced around a shared vision to increase the proportion of food produced within the city and the surrounding city-region or bio-region. Calderdale participants expressed a more general desire to increase the proportion of locally grown food, linking producers and consumers. Meanwhile Leicestershire participants often envisage a future where large county-based food manufacturers increase the proportion of locally sourced inputs. This response demonstrates how visions reflect some of the most prescient local issues. The point of this analysis is that it begins to draw out some subtle differences underpinning the “*seemingly consensual image*” (Zonneveld, 2005) of the relocalised food system. This idea is dissected in the next section.

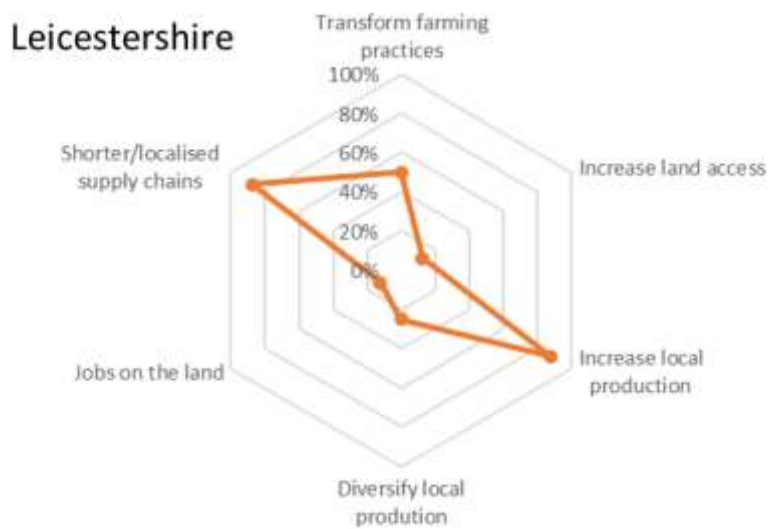
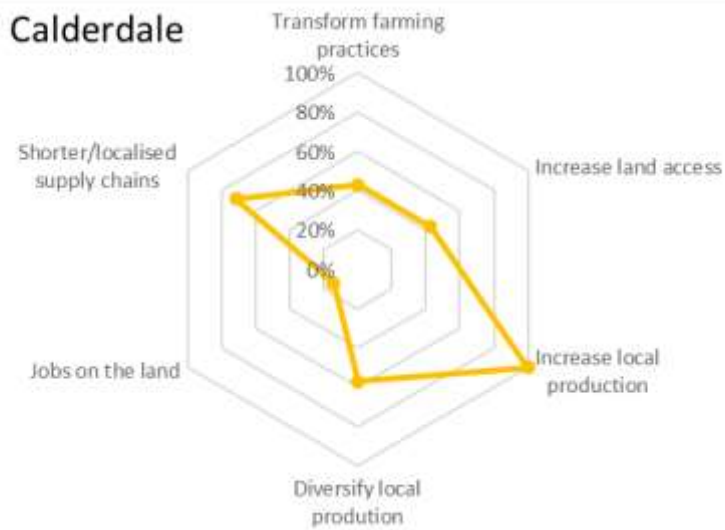
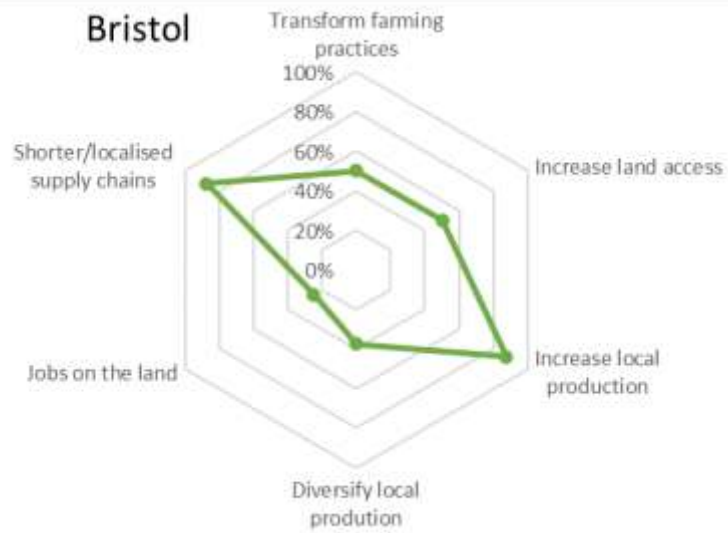


Figure 5.5 Spatial vision narrative 'footprints'

Table 5.2 Spatial vision narratives – top three key themes per case study⁴³

Vision	Bristol	Calderdale	Leicestershire
Increase local production	Innovative urban/city growing	Increase proportion of locally grown food	From peri-urban areas, surrounding counties, UK
Shorter/localised supply chains	Bioregion/region/city region scale	Link producers and consumers	Large scale manufacturers increase local sourcing
Transform farming practices	Agroecology; net zero	Recover lost knowledge	Agroecology; balancing food, environment and carbon priorities
Diversify local production	Understand what can be grown in city region/locally; cultural suitability	Rediscover native varieties; localise ethnic food groups	Understand what can be grown locally; meet changing diets and cultural needs
Increase land access	Retain and identify city and hinterland growing opps.	Identify suitable land; land reform	Access unused land

Figures 5.4 and 5.5 and Table 5.2 illuminate how each case study’s overarching spatial imaginary is interpreted or recast by the individuals and organisations working within or alongside the food partnership. Collectively they reflect place-based approaches to common themes, or **convergent narratives**. Yet examining individual participant spatial maps begins to expose differences and potential tensions in the use of borders and boundaries in rescaling the desired destinations of transition. A selection of **divergent narratives** are now explored.

An examination of participants’ spatial maps – the simplified versions are collated in Appendix 5 – shows them to be personal, rich in detail and often reflective of lived experience. They are an expression of participants’ values, experience, expertise and biases. Furthermore, they reflect the ‘on the day’ conversation between the participant and interviewer, see Chapter Eight. In short, each map tells a unique story anchored in a particular point in time and reflective of the participant’s knowledge set. Chapter Four has already outlined how maps were collated and grouped around narrative themes. Here, a handful of individual visions were selected in order to highlight some key narratives and similarities,

⁴³ Note the greyed out boxes relate to common narratives around key themes that didn’t fall into the ‘top three’ of the case study in question

diversity and divergence within the data set. These examples start to reveal different spatial framings and interpretations of how relocalised food systems – the desired destinations of transition – are being imagined. The maps are a response to the question ‘what would your ideal food system look like for your area of interest?’ The maps evidence how individuals seek to navigate, negotiate, remake or even reject spatial borders and boundaries in the re-imagining of better food futures. The maps help draw out tensions, nuances and indeed opportunities for heightened understanding. While there is ample evidence of how administrative boundaries are used to frame and communicate the desired destinations of transition, there are also examples of alternative, competing imaginaries seeking to connect beyond or even remodel established territorial boundaries. This signals efforts to create ‘soft space’ imaginaries (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009 and 2010; Hincks et al, 2017).

The map presented in Figure 5.6 was selected to explore the interplay between administrative, political and geographical borders in constructing a spatial vision of a better food future for Bristol. Bristol participants most commonly referenced administrative borders and boundaries in their vision narratives, summoning spatial imaginaries including the West of England and the South West region. This is further explored in the next section and illustrated in Figure 5.11. There is an interesting question around the extent to which England’s national neighbour Wales is considered or included. While participants imagining a ‘concentric ring’ around Bristol inevitably dip into Wales, there is division over the extent to which it plays a role in a more localised food system for Bristol. Falling outside some key administrative boundaries including West of England, West of England Combined Authority (WECA), Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the South West region, Wales is geographically close but perceived to be less accessible (due to the position of the River Severn), and falls within a different political ‘catchment’. This separation is highlighted in Figure 5.6. Despite visually representing administrative areas as concentric circles, the participant’s hand-drawn spatial vision places Cardiff, the capital of Wales and less than an hour from Bristol by road or rail, outside the region, country and Europe. Several participants reflected directly on the lack of consideration of Wales, which is after all a short journey across the Severn Bridge. The first quote makes it clear that

food is supplied from Wales but excluded from people’s perceived catchment, which is boundary driven. The second quote highlights the impact of geographical boundaries, but in the wider discussion, the participant alludes to cultural and national differences that creates a sense of ‘otherness’.

“For whatever annoying boundary reasons, people think of the West of England and don’t think radius, and don’t think into South Glos., or Hereford particularly, and certainly don’t think into Wales.” **Bristol participant**

“We tend to ignore South Wales...because of the river, as simple as that...it’s just geographical...Part of it is logistical [moving products over geographical boundaries], but part of it is mental...actually going to Bath can take longer...I think we should be looking towards Wales more.” **Bristol participant**

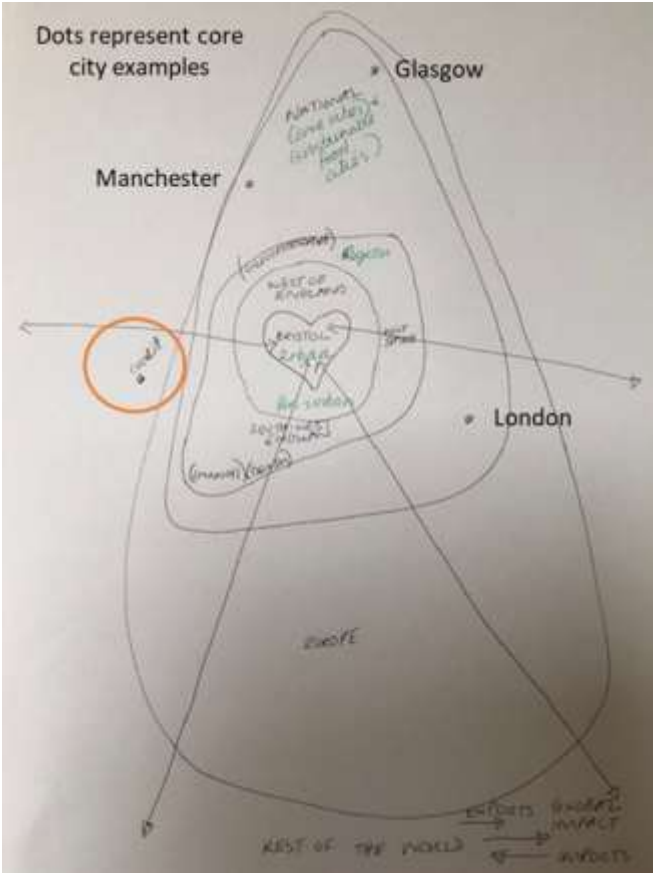


Figure 5.6 Bristol participant spatial vision

Figure 5.6 reflects a potential disconnect between national areas of interest. It indicates how certain places may be discounted if they fall outside more prescient borders and boundaries. In this case, geographical proximity is subverted in favour of established political and administrative framings and physical landscape characteristics (the presence of a river). More widely, it demonstrates how the spatial mapping method can draw out barriers and tensions in spatial visioning that may not be verbally articulated by the participant (or others).

Influenced by their backgrounds and values, participants' imaginaries reflect to a greater or lesser extent the relationship between the urban and the rural, and the desire to balance the needs of people and the ecological systems on which we – and other species – depend. It is a view emerging most strongly from the Bristol case study. While many participant maps reflect administrative scales, there is some recognition that ecological catchments and boundaries need to be considered and respected (although ecological catchments can also be expressed in administrative terms, see WENP). Figure 5.7 reflects the view of one of several participants who see a value in the West of England administrative catchment as a manageable and relatable scale. The participant positions the West of England within a bioregional system using the Bristol-Avon river catchment. This is reflected both in Figure 5.7 and the associated quote below. One interesting facet of the participant's spatial vision is the development of hope spots. The hope spot concept was originally applied to areas identified as critical to the health of the ocean⁴⁴. The participant envisions how community-led spatial plans would drive biodiversity recovery, improve food security and build edible landscapes, in the west of England and beyond. Hope spots would be identified by overlaying maps including (but not limited to) West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) Nature Recovery Plans, food poverty maps and Local Plans. This illuminates the value of drawing on and combining existing mapping to create and enact new spatial visions. It also showcases of how spatial visualisation can be a creative force for challenging the status quo and targeting efforts, either by creating new ways of working, or adapting current approaches to different situations.

⁴⁴ <https://missionblue.org/hope-spots/> (Last accessed 14/06/2023)

“I think that city-region scale is really going to be important, working at that scale. It sort of meets with the bioregional approach. Our food system needs us to understand and regenerate our landscapes, at a landscape scale, a catchment scale. So we’re talking about the boundaries that are set by nature’s functions and not the boundaries set by political red lines.”

Bristol participant

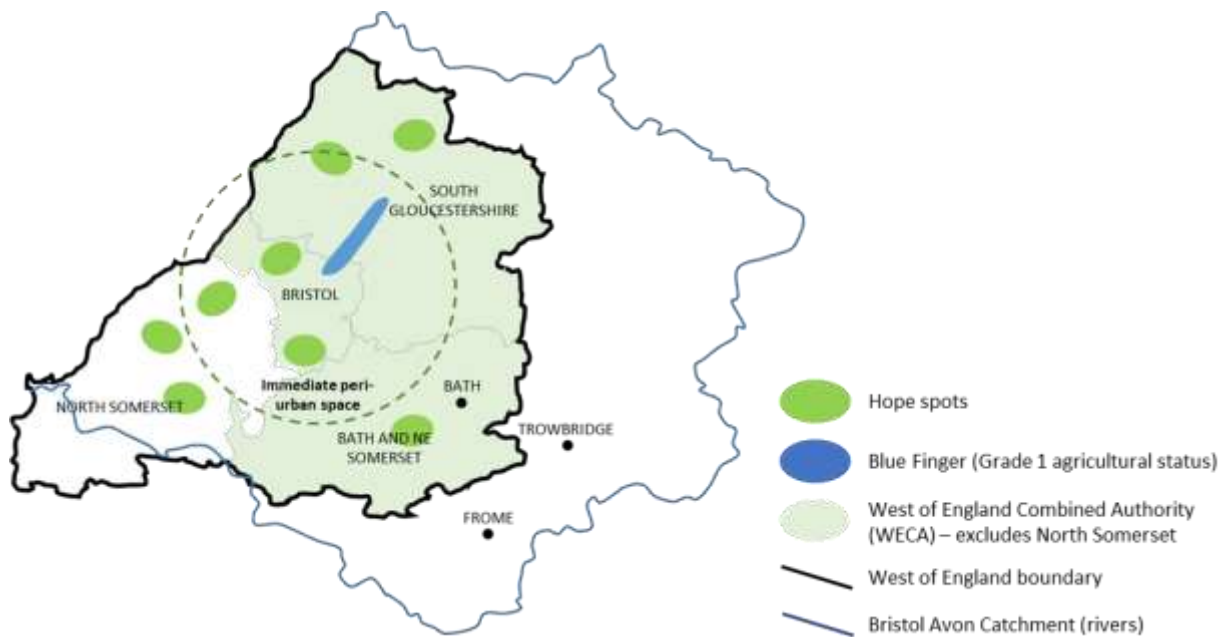


Figure 5.7 Bristol participant spatial vision (an extract)

A linked element is the recognition that one cannot address the food system solely from an urban or city perspective; there is a need to identify ‘workable scales’. One Bristol participant (first quote below) views the city region as “a small enough scale” to enable meaningful communication and involvement, whilst still being able to connect with the place, geography and culture. The second quote raises questions about how far trusted relationships can stretch.

“So the city region is a convenient...still a bite-sized chunk area to think about in relation to a city. Maybe it’s still terribly artificial, but it’s an interesting exercise in thinking about future scenarios.” **Bristol participant**

*“When we did Who Feeds Bristol we talked about the 50 mile radius of Bristol and Bath. And I think it’s sort of an organic thing, so it depends on what’s a reasonable distance across which you can maintain really strong, trusting human relationships, with a number of human beings, that you kind of all know each other. And with distances that a farmer can easily hop in a van and deliver stuff.” **Bristol participant***

Figure 5.7 and subsequent quotes raise interesting questions about scaling more desirable food systems (developed further in the next section): what scales are meaningful in the context of each case study; whether there is a maximum perceived distance over which food chain relationships can be sustained; whether administrative scalar framings are inherently valuable in some way or merely adopted through convenience; whether a propensity to rely on administrative scalar framings is detrimental to respecting and working within environmental limits. It has been argued the institutionalisation of the city-regional imaginary has failed (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). And while this research indicates a propensity to reference administrative boundaries in communicating scalar transitions, individual Bristol participant maps (and interviews) indicate ‘green shoots’ of resistance. These spatial visions recognise the utility of administrative framings but also reach beyond them, demonstrating a desire to connect the urban and rural and create food systems in harmony with ecological limits.

While many of the Leicestershire visions retain clear links to administrative borders and boundaries (Chapter Four), the participant spatial vision expressed in Figure 5.8 is an exception. Figure 5.8 offers two complementary, alternative spatial imaginaries. Both imaginaries are rooted in a response to the area’s economic downturn during the 1990s. The newly formed Melton Mowbray Food Partnership, comprising the Borough Council, FE College, National Farmers Union (NFU), farmers, manufacturers and retailers sought to reverse the economic decline by capitalising on the area’s existing agricultural and manufacturing infrastructure and food culture. Firstly, the town of Melton Mowbray re-framed itself as the ‘rural capital of food’, a moniker that has stuck, despite initial concerns about potential complaints from other market towns.

Secondly, the ‘Meltonshire’ imaginary emerged from a desire to gain recognition for Stilton and Pork Pies under the European Union (EU) food protection scheme. Part of the requirement for EU Protective Geographical Indication (PGI) status is to define a specific geographical area for production. The ‘catchment’ agreed in this case is rooted in history (traditional market catchments), bounded by rivers and roads, but also shaped to include long-term producers, reflecting an area of influence rather than county boundaries. Not everyone was happy about the Meltonshire delineation, which was disputed by at least one producer⁴⁵. However, the quote below positions it as an opportunity to build ‘Meltonshire’ food chains by increasing the amount of local produce supplied to local manufacturers where possible:

*“I sort of look at this [Meltonshire] as a little country...what do we import, what could we actually produce ourselves, and what could we export ourselves in terms of getting value added?” **Leicestershire participant***



Figure 5.8 Leicestershire participant spatial vision

⁴⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/dec/16/food-pork-pie-eu> (Last accessed 02/02/2023)

Figure 5.8 reflects a historic, cultural, pragmatic and contested re-interpretation of boundaries for local economic benefit. Promoting the idea of regional distinctiveness and driven primarily by economic factors, it connects with the notion of commodifying the region (Thrift, 1994). One imaginary positions the Borough of Melton as a 'rural capital', though it is not clear what constitutes this capital's hinterland. Roughly equivalent of the footprint of Leicestershire, Meltonshire reflects the characteristics of a 'soft space' imaginary (see Chapter Two). Led by elite actors (see Chapter Six), it seeks to overwrite pre-existing administrative boundaries through the creation of alternative geographies (Hincks et al, 2017). Moreover, it is an example of the interweaving of spatial imagining and institution building, having secured funding and recognition via the EU. The formation of and justification of the two complementary 'Melton' imaginaries are examined further in Chapter Seven.

The research recognises the mapping exercise encourages participants to frame their thinking in spatial terms. However, occasionally participants articulated a food future vision in a people-centred way. The vision presented in Figure 5.9 is a case in point, reflecting a strong network of groups and individuals and a rooted connection to the landscape. The participant defines 'local' as series of communities, networks and deep personal connections, transcending administrative borders (Lancashire/West Yorkshire) and geographical boundaries (The Pennines). The participant's networks also extend over large distances: having lived in Nepal and noticing climatic and landscape similarities between each area, they brought friends across to help implement Nepalese terracing techniques and experiment with Nepalese crops at their farm on the Lancashire-Yorkshire border. The participant also takes inspiration from the historical landscapes of the Yorkshire Dales which reflect a long legacy of terracing systems in place until the late middle ages. This is one of the more landscape-oriented and implemented or 'lived' visions expressed through the interviews: the terracing was referenced by other participants as a practical example of increasing and diversifying production in the area. The bedrock of this very personal vision lies in cultivating connections and a sense of place: seeking inspiration from and a deep connection with the landscape; connecting with and

learning from disparate places; connections between past and present and visceral connections with food from the area.

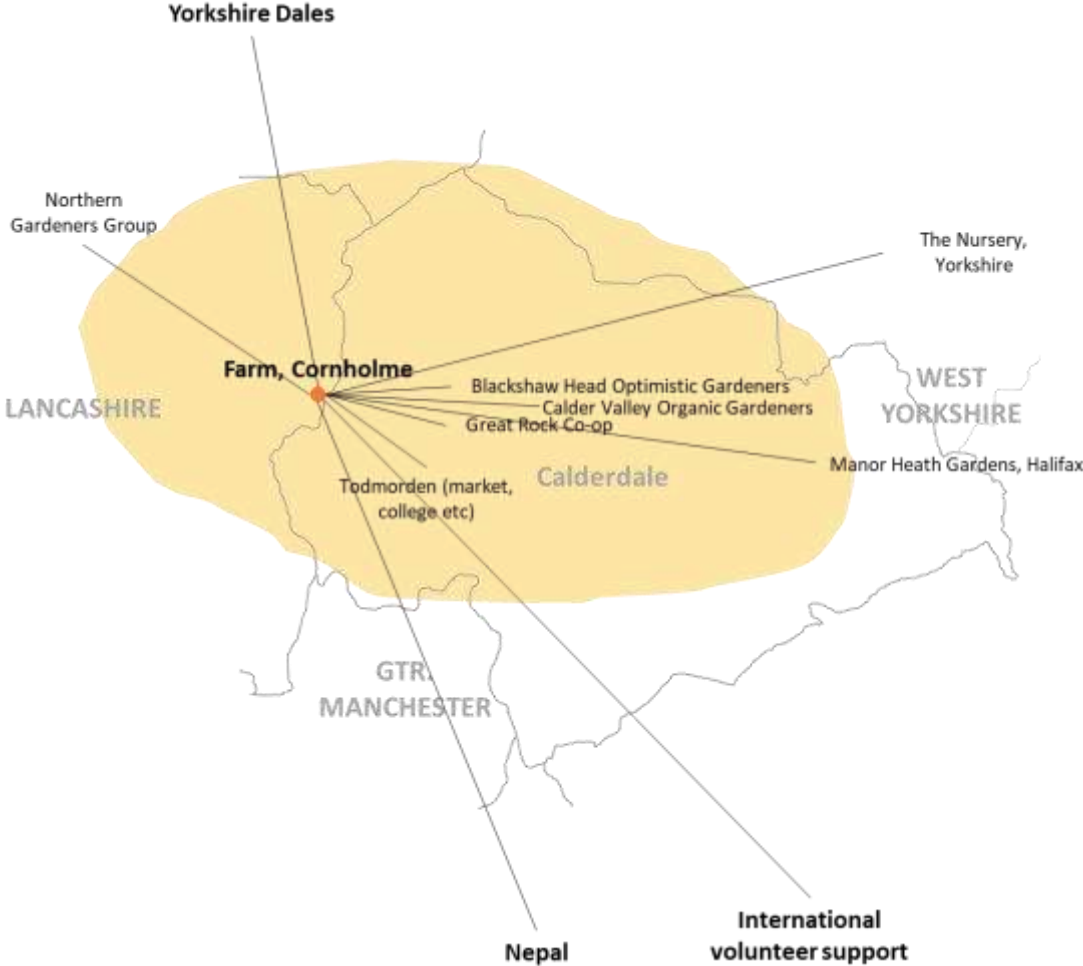


Figure 5.9 Calderdale spatial vision

What can we take from these diverse examples? Each highlights some of the complexities around how ‘better’ food futures are imagined. They collectively allow us to look below the surface – beneath the platitudes associated with ‘re-localising our food systems’ – to see how spatial visions, and the ways in which they are bordered and scaled, may re-interpreted, re-imagined, or rejected altogether. Taking the presented evidence as a whole, we see the collective spatial imaginary associated with transitioning towards local food systems contains a complex interweaving of convergent and divergent spatial narratives. The spatial maps themselves become a vehicle through which to expose potential

tensions and conflicts underpinning common transition goals. The capacity to understand connections between individual spatial visions and shared spatial imaginaries is critical if we are to better understand the role of agency (Chapter Six) in legitimising certain imaginaries over others (Chapter Seven).

Finding 3. Food partnerships' common desire to relocalise masks more nuanced interpretations of how local food systems should be rescaled

Findings 1 and 2 point towards to the prioritisation of the 'local'. Collectively they identify a diversity of individual spatial visions underpinning a seemingly shared spatial imaginary prioritising local food systems. Finding 3 responds to **RQ1(c) how are desirable scales re-imagined?** This sub-question identifies and explores interpretations of scale. It seeks to explore the extent to which actors' visions and shared spatial imaginaries conform to or break from established administrative, political, cultural, geographical and historical borders and boundaries. In this way it connects with literature (Chapter Two) on the nature and extent of scalar fixing (Davoudi 2019; Prové et al, 2019; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021); the creation of alternative geographies through 'soft spaces' (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009 and 2010; Hincks et al, 2017) and the assertion that localism extends beyond municipal boundaries (Sonnino, 2016 and 2019).

The first tranche of evidence explores differences, tensions and open questions in relation to how 'local' is defined and interpreted in the context of the three case studies and wider group of active UK food partnerships. This is organised around narrative themes emerging from the document review and case study interviews: what is local food; and who local food is for. These narratives segue into the question of 'where is local food?' Accordingly, the second tranche of evidence explores the idea of scalar 'fixing' (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021) or 'framing' (Prové et al, 2019), in other words, the notion that particular scales are used to justify and promote certain imaginaries over others. Evidence to support Finding 3 is structured as follows:

- **What is local food – how 'local' is defined**

What food is deemed local; who is local for

- **Where is local food – how scale is fixed**

How is 'the local' fixed/scaled?

How are the desired destinations of transition fixed/scaled?

Local food narratives reveal a complexity and mutability, highlighting how the concept can mean different things to different people. Broadly speaking, the evidence presented below suggests a level of common understanding that local food is currently grown, historically grown or able to be grown within a given area to meet with needs of diverse cultures living within an 'area of concern' (see Finding 1 (a)). Academics have sought to extend characterisations of 'local' beyond the concept of food miles (Schmitt et al, 2017). Yet local food narratives – in the context of this thesis – often focus on growing and producing food, rather than other stages of the food supply chain (e.g. manufacturing and processing). The Leicestershire case study, however, provides a counterpoint, with the concept of 'value added' (or Gross Value Added, GVA) gaining traction. It reflects the desire to generate additional revenue by processing 'raw' food and turning it into something else. The idea crops up multiple times, reflecting a growing conversation between the food partnership, members of a producers' group (convened by the food partnership) and the LLEP. It suggests an emerging imaginary built on Leicestershire's position within the food supply chain, based on its manufacturing and processing heritage.

There is broad recognition that local food should be available and accessible to all, although some interviews point towards a tension between local food and social justice. This tension is revisited in Chapter Seven. Moving on to the question of scalar fixing, evidence suggests that while food partnerships invoke a broadly shared local food imaginary, it is underpinned by a range of scalar expressions. Relocalisation is not perceived simply as a case of shifting food production to increase proportion grown within the 'local' area. Rather, individual spatial vision maps (and interviews) collectively reveal more nuanced, multi-scaled and varied interpretations of the desired destinations of transition.

The first evidence theme considers what local food means, or more specifically, how it is interpreted by food partnerships. This line of enquiry is down into two

sub-themes (see above). Firstly, attention is turned to what food is deemed local. Does it mean the food grown historically in the area (how far should one go back?) and/or locally-grown food that meets the needs of local populations? The document review identified several food partnerships (North Lincolnshire and Oxford) that stressed the need to celebrate food from the area *and* from diverse cultures living in the area. Several case study participants quoted below highlight the problematic assumption of 'local' to mean British or 'traditionally' grown, rather than what is culturally important to a diverse local population. The Calderdale quote alludes to how diets have changed over time and the need to localise ingredients of different ethnic cuisines. In doing so, they open questions around the traditionality of particular foods, calling to localise ingredients of different ethnic food groups in the UK and rediscover native varieties.

"I think local as a term is really controversial...one of the things on the agenda for next year is to incorporate more culturally diverse produce within local growing projects." **Bristol participant**

"You can localise the content of dishes that come from other parts of the world...starting to grow lentils and pulses here. But actually that's going back to a time...that would have been a traditional pea-based, legume-based product." **Calderdale participant**

While there are exceptions, many of the 'what is local' narratives – including the examples above – revolve around food production. However, there is also a sub-narrative around the availability of different cuisines via local food outlets, in other words focusing on 'local eating' rather than 'local growing'. The idea of 'eating local' may relate to a specific ethnic cuisine served within a particular locality, or to a local 'hub' known for a diversity of cooking styles: Lewisham's Food Strategy (2006) draws attention to such zones. Several participants alluded to patterns of consumption blending spatial and cultural identities. This has potential implications for planners in relation to spatial zoning and the prioritisation or discouragement of particular uses. Examples include the growing use of take-away exclusion zones and the rise of 'dark kitchens' providing delivery-only take-away meals. In relation to the latter, negating the need for a 'shop front' may, to

some extent, dissipate local 'centres of excellence'. These narratives illustrate that we not only need to consider what is grown or produced locally, but also whether it is accessible, and to whom. This creates a bridge to the next theme – who local food is for – evidenced below.

Finding 1 (a) has already touched upon perceptions and assumptions about who local food is for. 30% of food partnerships with charters recognise the need to approach food system relocalisation in a way that meets the needs of populations in a culturally appropriate way. This generally involves connecting people and communities by celebrating diversity and developing inclusive food cultures, and is reflected in the narratives of the food partnerships of Aberdeen, Lancashire and the London Boroughs of Greenwich, Hackney and Lewisham. The connection between food projects, cohesive communities and improving social justice is well established (Herman et al, 2018; Blake, 2019), but it becomes more complicated when combining the ideas of local food and social justice (Blake et al, 2010). Local food needs to be both accessible and affordable to make a contribution to improving social justice. Some participant interviews fizzed with tension regarding how this combination might be possible, who or what needs to change, or even whether it is achievable. Some don't see relocalised food systems and social justice as mutually exclusive objectives. For example, one Bristol organisation is working with food clubs to supplement the offer with alternative sources from allotments and growing projects. Meanwhile another social justice-motivated participant took a dim view of the ability of local artisanal producers to make a difference: *"that's not social justice. That's pissing in the wind"*. The tension about whether local food is truly for everyone is examined further in Chapter Seven.

The evidence above points to some of the challenges, issues and tensions associated with defining 'the local'. Recognising 'the local' to be a slippery, contested concept, attention is now turned to how scale is 'fixed' (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021) or 'framed' (Prové et al, 2019) within spatial visions and imaginaries. Again, this tranche of evidence is focused around two sub-themes. The first relates to how food partnerships and case study participants demarcate or fix the 'local'. The second sub-theme considers how the spatial visions

themselves are scaled, and explores areas of agreement and difference between partnerships and participants. The approach facilitates the exploration of the relationship between how 'the local' and the desired destinations of transition are scaled and imagined. The evidence presented below draws attention to interactions between and connections across scales, for example, the local-regional, local-national, local-global, hyper-local and urban-rural.

The document review finds just under a quarter of food partnerships offer a scalar interpretation of 'local', Figure 5.10. These are a mix of concentric circles which range from 15 to 100 miles, county boundaries (County Durham, Oxfordshire and Yorkshire) or a hybrid of the two (30 miles from Bath and North East Somerset). Fewer assess the feasibility of increasing the proportion of local food, and a handful of food partnerships (including Birmingham, Bristol and Oxford) have conducted studies on the amount of land required to sustain the urban population. This means, of course, the majority of food partnerships do not provide an explicit scalar interpretation of 'local'. There are a number of potential reasons for this, including that it was not considered, not deemed important, or not mutually agreed.

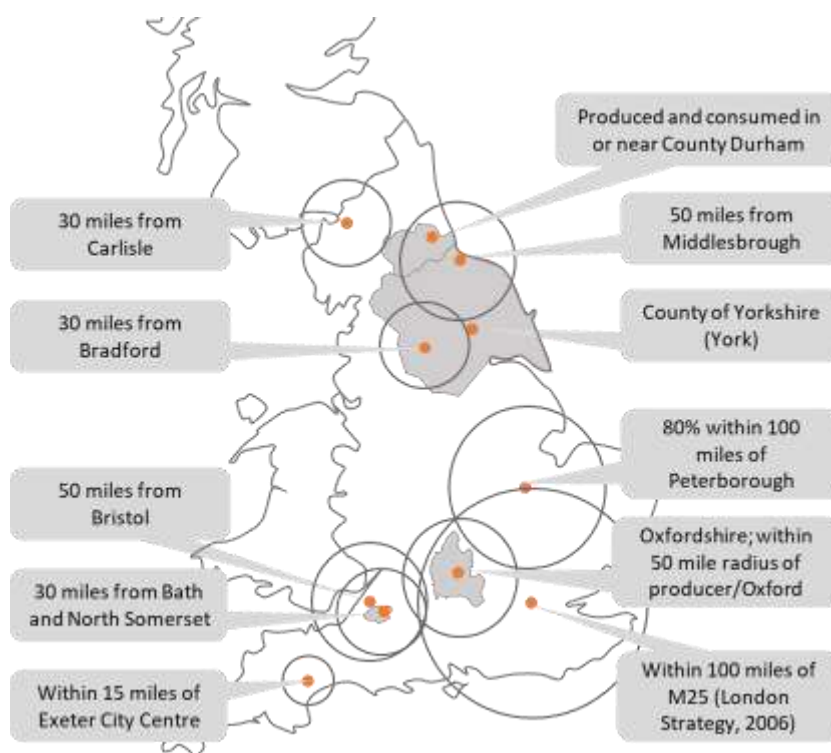


Figure 5.10 Defining local, UK food partnerships

Moving on to the case study interview data, every participant bar one expressed a desire to move to a more localised food system. Participants' interpretations of 'local' are provided in Appendix 5 Map A. The maps collectively demonstrate nearly all participants are thinking and operating below the national scale. In other words, although boosting production within national borders (and thus increasing national security of supply) is often recognised as desirable, participants are more focused on developing sub-national food systems. Participant framings of 'local' are explored below in relation to each of the three case studies, and a narrative summary is provided in the second column of Table 5.3. All except one of the **Bristol** participants represented 'local' relative to the 'West of England' – a combined authority area comprising Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) and South Gloucestershire unitary authorities. Several equate the West of England with local; the remainder use it as a point of reference. The general consensus is that local is 'less than' the South West, which tips into 'regional'. As a West Yorkshire borough bordering Lancashire and Greater Manchester, **Calderdale** participants were generally less inclined to draw on administrative boundaries to define 'local'. Instead, all bar one of the participants who expressed a view imagined the 'local' catchment to cross county boundaries. One participant interpreted local as a series of networks and personal connections, rather than relating to a particular geographical area. The county of **Leicestershire** was described by one participant as an 'administrative doughnut', forming a ring around the City of Leicester which is a separate unitary authority (with its own food partnership). The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) shares the same catchment as the combined areas of Leicester and Leicestershire, which sits within the East Midlands region. Definitions of local are almost all framed in relation to administrative boundaries. For example, the county of Leicestershire, Leicestershire and surrounding counties, the counties of the East Midlands region and/or a concentric circle around Leicestershire or a portion of Leicestershire. There are several exceptions where catchments extend beyond current administrative boundaries, including the alternative imaginary of 'Meltonshire' (C5/F2) and Edible16, Market Harborough's click and collect local food service⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ <https://store.edible16.org.uk/suppliers> (Last accessed 14/06/2023)

To summarise, the evidence presented above indicates the 'local' is often imagined and defined using administrative boundaries and/or reflecting hinterlands captured within variously scaled concentric circles. Yet scaling the local can also be personal. Interviews revealed individuals may accommodate preferred shopping destinations, connections with specific groups, place attachments, frequent journeys or even traffic levels when defining the local scale. Again, these interpretations hint at the soft spaces between the territorial and relational (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009 and 2010; Paasi, 2012; Hincks et al, 2017) and reflect the scalar complexity of the local highlighted above. Nevertheless, the evidence that administrative references are used to 'fix' scale tempers the claim that localism extends beyond municipal boundaries (Sonnino, 2016; 2019).

Table 5.3 Common narratives

Case study	Local scale narratives	Spatial vision narratives
Bristol	West of England as common point of reference Less than the South West 25-50 mile radius from city	Imaginary reflects city-regional/bio-regional scale Build urban-rural connections 'Local' scale is one aspect of the 'good food' definition
Calderdale	Geographically and/or culturally bounded Largely ignores administrative boundaries Importance of social networks 10-30 mile radius from different points	Highly individualistic Reflective of personal/'lived' experience (e.g. food growing)
Leicestershire	Administratively bounded (County; surrounding counties; East Mids.) 25/30+ mile radius Participant references to organisational definitions (e.g. Food for Life; Edible16)	Closest match between scalar definitions of 'the local' and spatial visions Desire to increase locally grown and manufactured products Evidence of emerging imaginary incorporating agricultural, manufacturing and distribution heritage

The focus now shifts towards the wider question of how food system visions themselves (the desired destinations of transition) are imagined and scaled by case study participants. The third column of Table 5.3 summarises the most common scalar and non-scalar spatial narratives and observations from each case study, drawing on both the verbal and mapping interview outputs. Individual participant maps depicting their spatial visions (broadly framed as ‘where should our food come from?’) are provided in Appendix 5 Map B. The maps collectively demonstrate that while common themes emerge (Table 5.3), participants apply a range of scalar interpretations. These interpretations often take scalar cues from political, administrative, geographical, cultural and historical borders and boundaries, although often reflect a greater degree of imaginative interpretation compared to the scaling of ‘the local’.

So what does this tell us more broadly about how desirable scales are reimagined (RQ1 (C))? The presented evidence suggests while there is flexibility in ‘fixing’ the local scale, case study participants often share some common, place-based narratives. This suggests that scale is used to reconceive, shape and validate ideas of ‘the local’. There is more nuance around how ‘the local’ is translated into spatial visions of more desirable food futures. So while there is a common desire to relocalise (finding 1), there is much less consensus around how ‘the local’ – and the desired destinations of transition – should be scaled. Furthermore, many participants are cognisant of avoiding the local trap (Born and Purcell, 2006), in other words, the belief that local food systems are necessarily better than the alternatives.

Rather than demonstrating a desire to move beyond ‘territorial’ borders (Sonnino, 2016; Hincks et al, 2017; Sonnino, 2019), there is evidence of a continuing gravitational pull towards political and administrative boundaries, particularly in defining ‘the local’. While there are examples of pushing beyond the territorial towards ‘soft spaces’, administrative and political boundaries still have weight, enabling participants to ‘get things done’, or at least have more influence over the proceedings. Several interviews also revealed the need to work at scales that are meaningful and relatable. To conclude Finding 3, the language around rescaling is flexible and mutable, although there is a tendency to gravitate towards

administrative boundaries, which form mutually-understood scalar points of reference. Closer examination of the desired destinations of transition reveal additional scalar complexity, although again, there appears to be a level of reluctance to move away from the use of administrative and political catchments. Conversely, a subset of participants seek to 'fix' scale beyond these constructs. The reasons for this are explored further in Chapter Seven.

5.3 Discussion and reflection

This section discusses and reflects on the broader implications of the three findings in the context of the overarching RQ1: *what visions and spatial imaginaries of food systems transitions are present within and across food partnerships?* The section expands the discussion on findings 1 to 3 in turn, before reflecting on wider implications in relation to RQ1. The document review highlights how the dominant (although not the only) UK food partnership spatial imaginary is wrapped in the language of the local. It makes sense to find a relocalisation imaginary at play across UK food partnerships. It is a response to failures within the global food system and connects with the SFP imaginary (Chapter Four), while shared localism narratives express the value of reconnection to place. It does, though, raise questions about whether this “*seemingly consensual image*” (Zonneveld, 2005; Chapter 2) is similarly imagined beyond food partnerships’ written narratives. Furthermore, the document review shows only a quarter of food partnerships provide a scalar interpretation of ‘local’. So there a desire to engage ‘locally’ but a certain reticence to define how the local is fixed within (or extends beyond) established borders and boundaries. Might this be a deliberate or accidental omission? It is possible defining the local is perceived as unnecessary; or perhaps passed over due to a lack of consensus. In any case, interview and mapping data indicate that the spatial visions espoused in food partnership documents do not necessarily reflect the beliefs and actions of individuals working within and alongside them. While there is also evidence of some shared spatial narratives, certainly within two of the three case studies, it appears there are indeed tensions and nuances beneath the shared relocalisation imaginary.

In bid to better understand the multiple visions (Zonneveld, 2005; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019) underpinning the shared relocalisation imaginary, Figure 5.11 summarises the common narratives derived from the combined data sources. We see the emergence of three very different case studies. Bristol participants, often referencing an evidence base, demonstrate a good degree of alignment around the ‘good food’ concept (see Chapter Six) and look beyond the city to the West of England. Calderdale participants’ spatial visions are more dissonant and reflective of personal agendas, and are least administratively bounded. Leicestershire participants, on the other hand, tend to reference administrative boundaries in defining both ‘the local’ and their spatial visions. Due to their food processing heritage, Leicestershire participants are highly aware of the importance of food manufacturing and distribution alongside farming, and there is evidence of an emerging imaginary embracing food supply chain thinking in a way not apparent in the other two case studies. All three are reflective of place-based circumstances. While all three indicate spatial visions are to some extent contained/constrained within existing borders and boundaries, there is some evidence of emerging soft space imaginaries blurring the edges and challenging established territorial boundaries.

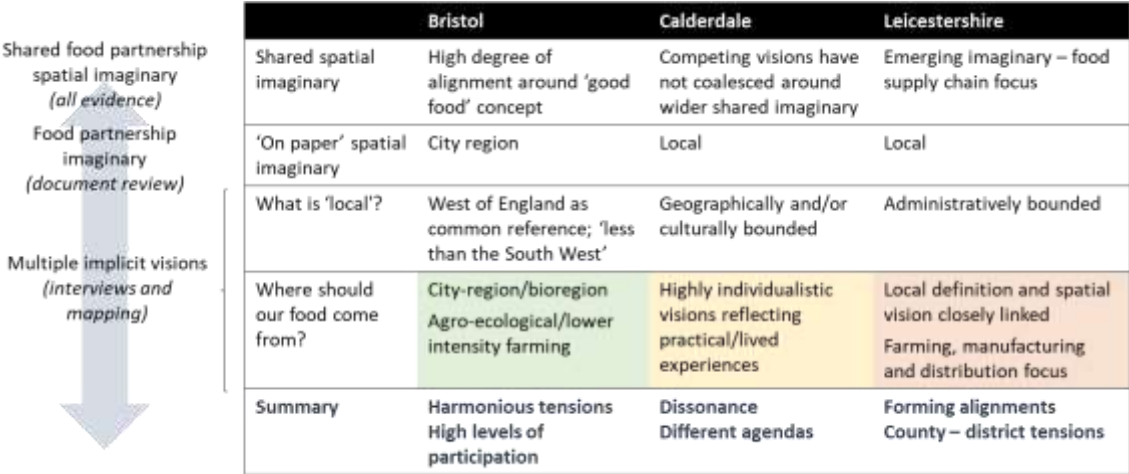


Figure 5.11 Common narratives and connections

Finding 2 reveals uniquely personal spatial visions that reflect participants’ values, lived experiences and aspirations. These visions are also bounded by the limits of our knowledge and their ability to put vision into practice within the

constraints of the prevailing (capitalist) system. A further observation is that some visions are more 'personally enacted' than others. By this, I mean there is a difference between actors working within (often national) organisations seeking to change the food system compared to those taking more direct action to tackle what they perceive to be the inadequacies of the food system. The latter are acquiring land, implementing farming methods, setting up and running local food distribution schemes and galvanising community action, and are the dominant group within the Calderdale participants. It is likely this contributes to tensions between different agendas of some Calderdale participants, highlighted in Figure 5.11 above. The way in which individual spatial visions both converge with and diverge from food partnership written visions leads to wider questions of whether these written visions have the power to unite and motivate – either through their words alone or from participating their creation. Alternatively, might the written visions be merely anodyne statements, examples of 'lowest common denominator' thinking to bring together a broad, limited and/or disparate group of actors. These ideas are progressed further in Chapter Eight.

Evidence presented in Finding 3 reveals a fluidity and scalar complexity to the language of localism and relocalisation. Most food partnerships and individuals draw on the language of the 'local', but some scalar interpretations are more 'sticky' than others. The Literature Review highlighted how the spatial imaginaries concept has been used to examine the politics of rescaling and how particular scales become institutionalised (Boudreau, 2007; Prové et al, 2019; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). Successful institutionalisation, it is argued, requires alignment between political goals ('political projects'), the scale best serving the goals ('scalar fix') and how 'the fix' is pursued and by whom ('scalar imaginaries') (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). Finding 1 highlights how SFP and food partnerships have coalesced around (or 'fixed' on) the local scale, but this raises a wider question: why does localism dominate rather than, say, regionalisation, the city-region, bio-region or foodshed? One could argue food partnerships are not in a position to institutionalise a particular scalar view, since they are reliant on good will and influence rather than political decision-making. It is possible the amorphous nature of 'local' makes it an attractive imaginary to adopt. It potentially reflects the absence of wider political and administrative structures – notably

regions – that would otherwise enable food partnerships to extend their influence beyond their administrative boundaries. The local imaginary communicates intention without creating a direct commitment to engage outside their area of concern. The dominance of one imaginary at the expense of others and the differences between intent and ability to operate is explored further in Chapter Seven.

Another scale-related consideration is how food partnerships – representing predominantly urban units of transition – seek to (re)connect with their rural hinterlands. This is a pre-requisite if we are to embrace ‘new localism’ by blurring administrative and municipal boundaries (Sonnino, 2016; Sonnino, 2019). Thinking around urban-rural connectivity is most advanced in Bristol – perhaps not surprising since the city is dependent on its rural hinterland. It is embedded in the city-regional thinking of the influential Who Feeds Bristol Report, which has captured imaginations and shaped Bristol’s agenda (Carey, 2011). The desire for greater urban-rural connectivity is also reflected in participant visions of shorter supply chains and closer links between producers and suppliers. Thus, there is a need to further explore the extent to which visions that (re-)connect the urban and rural transcend administrative, municipal, historical and cultural borders and boundaries in practice. These ideas are expanded in Chapter Seven. Maps can help in this respect, and we return to this aspect in Chapter Eight.

More broadly, the participant vision maps collectively demonstrate the power of the spatial mapping exercise in shedding light on how we individually imagine food systems transitions. The maps themselves are capable of providing insights that enhance and sometimes extend beyond verbal narratives. In other words, the method has the potential to deepen our understanding of uniquely personal spatial visions. This is important if we are to get beneath “*seemingly consensual images*” (Zonneveld, 2005). Overall, the participant vision maps reflect a general disposition to work, think and imagine within existing borders and boundaries. This could reflect pragmatism, or a desire to “get things done”. Conversely, there are also cases where territorially bounded framings have been rejected or re-imagined. Maps may draw out tensions and conflicts between overarching visions, but also highlight shared ideals and evidence of collective thinking. In any

case, individuals bring multiple perspectives, a fact to be celebrated. Explicitly recognising different viewpoints is a precursor to unlocking imagination, bringing opportunities and tensions out into the open and creating a bridge between individual visions and collective imaginaries. The mapping process can be used as a starting point to inform discussions, help recognise and challenge bordered thinking, and broker negotiations about the kinds of food futures we could/should aspire to. In future there is value in food partnerships applying mapping methods to better understand desired destinations, develop visions that are truly shared and identify and address tensions. These observations are further developed in Chapter Eight.

5.4 Conclusion

Broadly speaking, this chapter has identified and examined relationships between individual visions, written-down visions and more widely-held spatial imaginaries amongst active UK food partnerships. In this way we have moved beyond relying on the 'foodscapes' enshrined in documents and strategies to examine how seemingly coherent, shared spatial imaginaries are underpinned by tensions, conflict and compromise. Unpicking the commonalities, differences and scaling of these spatial visions is a first step to gaining greater insight into the relationship between spatial imaginaries, transition and scale. The chapter has reflected this line of investigation in three findings. Finding 1 identified a common local imaginary amongst UK food partnerships, drawing on written documentation. This opened questions about how a seemingly 'shared' imaginary was envisioned and scaled across partnerships, case studies and individuals. Finding 2 uncovered a multiplicity of individual spatial visions of what a food system transition should look like beneath the seemingly shared imaginary, loosely wrapped up within the 'local' narrative. Finding 3 dissected the local narrative. Although the language around 'the local' was found to be fluid and nuanced, there is a propensity to draw primarily on administrative and political borders to 'fix' and communicate ideas about rescaling. In this way, the finding begins to challenge and test the assertion that 'new localism' extends beyond municipal administrative boundaries to connect the urban and rural (Sonnino

2016; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Sonnino 2019), although there is evidence to suggest a subset of participants seek to move beyond these constructs.

The notion of re-localising food systems implies a scalar shift to encourage and support more desirable outcomes. Yet the concept of 'the local' is sufficiently nebulous that it doesn't directly challenge existing structural constraints, in a way that ideas about a regionally- or city regionally-scaled food system might. In this way, one might argue the fluidity of the local scale is advantageous. There are also open questions about the extent to which embracing relocalisation imaginaries helps us 'think beyond' or challenge existing administrative, political, geographical, cultural and historical borders and boundaries. In order to progress this line of thinking, it is important to understand who shapes (and scales) these imaginaries and how are they are justified. To this end, Chapter Six considers the role of agency in developing spatial visions and imaginaries of desirable food systems transitions. Chapter Seven looks at the spaces where individual visions and collective imaginaries interact and explores how certain spatial framings are justified, legitimised and actioned over others.

6. Agency

The literature review chapter supports the claim that the dynamics of power, politics and governance are relatively well-studied in food systems transitions (El Bilali, 2019). Indeed, a body of research has targeted power relations and the politicisation of rescaling governance in the context of food partnerships (Coulson and Sonnino, 2016; Prové et al, 2019), see Figure 2.3. This body of literature suggests most food partnerships lack the requisite financial, political and human capital to drive transformational change. They therefore depend on building broad networks and alliances to gain sufficient influence and goodwill to leverage power. Any powerbase, however, is subject to change. For example, research has already examined the pivotal role of mayors and the risks of relying on political patronage (Halliday and Barling, 2018; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Parsons et al, 2021), emphasising how food partnerships tread a fine line between seeking out patrons and finding themselves ‘out in the cold’ when the political winds shift. This highlights how the position of food partnerships is often restricted, negotiated, provisional and subject to change. Questions of who has agency – the ability of individuals and organisations to act – are therefore critical to understanding who shapes the desired destinations of transition. Consequently, this chapter focuses on identifying the agents of change within food partnerships, who is excluded, and who food partnerships need to work with to realise their desired destinations of transition. This approach contributes to a wider call to better understand agency in relation to food system transitions (El Bilali, 2019).

The exploration of agency could take multiple directions. For example, it raises questions about representation (do food partnerships reflect the diverse populations they serve?) and knowledge production (are certain types of knowledge valued more highly e.g. professional knowledge or lived experience?) The chapter draws on evidence from the desktop review and case study interviews to address the second research question: **who creates the visions and spatial imaginaries of food system transitions, and who is excluded?** The research question seeks to better understand agency in the context of food partnerships and their interface with Sustainable Food Places (SFP). Specifically

it tackles elements of agency and transition by building a picture of whose knowledge used to construct spatial visions (using steering group membership as a proxy), whose knowledge is absent, and how food partnerships position themselves and their role in shaping the wider food agenda. The research approach is influenced by data availability and decisions about how data were collected, and it is important to recognise limitations. In some cases data were not consistently available across all food partnerships, and any gaps are indicated in relation to specific findings. Furthermore, it should be remembered that interview participants are limited in number and are therefore not representative of a full range of case study actors. Nevertheless, these combined data sets are drawn upon to better understand whose vision matters, and how agency influences the quality and substance of the spatial imaginaries of food system transitions. The findings associated with RQ2 are three-fold:

Finding 4. Actors representing health, sustainability and local food interests are most active in developing and shaping food partnership spatial visions, whereas other actors identified as critical to delivering transition are under- or un-represented

Finding 5. Food partnerships exhibit differing levels of ability (capacity) and willingness (enthusiasm) to collaborate and are more often 'vision takers' than 'vision makers'

Finding 6. Case studies demonstrate three different expressions of agency: collaborative agency, individual agency and emerging agency

Section 6.1 outlines the key concepts relevant to the chapter, the analytical approach and points of intersection with and contribution to literature. Findings 4 – 6 are presented in Section 6.2, and then considered together and contextualised within academic literature in Section 6.3 (discussion and reflection) and Section 6.4 (conclusion). Section 6.4 also highlights recommendations which are explained in more detail in Chapter Nine.

6.1 Concepts and approach

This section positions the findings, discussion and reflection in the chapter by outlining the key concepts, analytical approach and contributions to literature. The chapter is centred on the concept of agency. Section 2.1 has already differentiated between power and agency, making the case that power is already well-catered for in food system transitions research (see also above). Better understanding agency – who (which individuals and organisations) has the ability to act and who benefits – is a pertinent concern in transitions (Shove and Walker, 2007; Lawhon and Murphy, 2012; Markard et al, 2012; Lachman, 2013; El Bilali, 2019; Feola and Jaworska, 2019; Sareen and Haarstad, 2022), imaginaries (Jessop, 2010; Senger, 2017; Sieveking, 2019) and food policy (Certomà and Tornaghi, 2015; Giambartolomei et al, 2021; Cifuentes and Gugerell, 2021; Moragues-Faus, 2021; Emas and Jones, 2022) research.

The analytical approach to RQ2 pursued three lines of agency-related investigation specifically pertinent to food partnerships. These were targeted towards identified research gaps and/or current debates and also shaped by data availability. Specifically, they relate to actor representation (Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019; Schiff et al, 2022); food partnership structures (Davies, 2017; Bassarab et al, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019); and expressions of agency (Giambartolomei et al, 2021; Emas and Jones, 2022). The analytical approach to each line of investigation is discussed in turn. Several caveats need to be placed on the data to position and contextualise the analysis of actor representation. Firstly, the initial analysis focuses on steering group membership by food chain segment and/or primary concern, identified in the document review (Table 6.1). This approach reflects a limited interpretation of ‘representation’ or actor engagement. In future, different data collection methods could provide a broader interpretation of representation – taking into account class and race, for example – to test whether steering groups are reflective of the populations they represent (Schiff et al, 2022). Yet a more nuanced interpretation of representation (‘who needs to be involved?’) was possible by drawing on common interview narratives (see Appendix 4). This approach collectively identified and examined a number of unrepresented or

under-represented groups, highlighting a disconnect between the actors responsible to setting spatial visions and those perceived as critical to delivery. Secondly, it is important to reflect place-based nuances when discussing the potential causes and implications of representation. For example, certain under-represented food chain segments (such as manufacturing) may not be deemed critical to every food partnership, especially those with a city/urban focus. I have therefore also drawn on interview data to examine some of these place-based subtleties and distinctions. Specifically, Figure 6.5 highlights different place-based prioritisations of agent engagement.

The analytical approach to food partnership structures builds on and extends existing research on their governance arrangements (Davies, 2017; Bassarab et al, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019). Specifically, the approach examines how UK food partnerships' adopted roles and modes of operation influence the dominant visions of food system transitions. The document review examined whether food partnerships assume a coordinator role (work with the visions of others) or vision-setting role (actively seek to shape the food agenda), see Figure 6.4. Combining these data with interview perspectives identified food partnerships as either 'vision takers' or 'vision makers'. Finally, three expressions of agency – collaborative, individual, and emerging agency – were identified by examining the interview narratives about how individuals and organisations come together (or not) to develop particular place-based imaginaries, see Table 6.3 and Appendix 4.

This chapter intersects with the food partnership agency debate in several ways. I first outline the ways in which each finding makes a contribution. I then discuss how the adopted methods and analytical approach occupy a unique space in relation to investigating food partnership agency. While recognising that agency is often concentrated into the hands of middle class, educated, privileged backgrounds (Giambartolomei et al, 2021), Finding 4 (place-based representations of agency in transition) connects with recent literature. For example, it reflects on (sought) interactions between niche and regime level actors (Cifuentes and Gugerell, 2021). Findings 5 (food partnership structures) and 6 (expressions of agency) collectively complement and extend recent

research on policy entrepreneurship (Giambartolomei et al, 2021) and policy intrapreneurship (Emas and Jones, 2022). The notion of ‘collaborative agency’ particularly resonates with the development of “*sticky stories*” around shared agendas (Horlings et al, 2018; Giambartolomei et al, 2021), although my findings also suggest that “*sticky stories*” can also be propagated in less collaborative ways. More broadly, the data collection and analysis methods deployed in this chapter draw on a range of actors from each case study. This approach contrasts with an established body of research focused primarily on food partnership and/or national network coordinators (Clayton et al, 2015; Bassarab et al, 2019; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019; Sieveking, 2019; Moragues-Faus, 2021). Thus, the use of snowballing in each case study provides a more nuanced insight into agency and power dynamics at play within a broader interpretation of the food partnership movement (Noy, 2008). While other researchers have used snowballing in food governance studies (Prové et al, 2019; Roosendaal et al, 2020; Cifuentes and Gugerell, 2021; Giambartolomei et al, 2021; Emas and Jones, 2022; Soubry and Sherren, 2022), combining interviews and spatial mapping exercise with a UK-wide food partnership document review bridges between research focusing solely on one type of actor, and individual, place-based case studies involving a range of individuals and groups (Lever et al, 2019; Levkoe et al, 2021; Giambartolomei et al, 2021; Emas and Jones, 2022). All these points of contribution are discussed more fully in Section 6.4.

6.2 Findings

This section highlights three key findings. Firstly the research finds some actor groups’ interests are prioritised over others in defining food partnerships’ spatial visions. By contrast, certain actors are under-engaged or unintentionally excluded, self-excluded or deliberately excluded, for example due to a perception that they are part of the problem rather than part of the solution. This is especially problematic when under-engaged or excluded groups are perceived to be critical to delivering the desired transition. The key groups examined here are ‘big’ food manufacturers and retailers, land use planners and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Secondly, food partnerships more often position themselves as

'coordinators' rather than 'direction setters'. In other words, food partnerships are more likely to draw together and harmonise the work of food-focused subgroups, rather than set the food system transition agenda. Thirdly, there is evidence to suggest food partnerships' place-based expressions of agency reflect political, geographical, historical and cultural influences. This section presents evidence to support each finding in turn. The broader implications of Findings 4 – 6 are then examined in section 6.2.

Finding 4. Actors representing health, sustainability and local food interests are most active in developing and shaping food partnership spatial visions, whereas other actors identified as critical to delivering transition are under- or un-represented

Before unpacking this finding, several caveats need to be placed on the data and supporting analysis. Firstly, the focus on steering group membership by food chain segment and/or primary concern reflects a limited interpretation of 'representation'. As already discussed in the section above, this approach is shaped by data availability. Secondly, it is important to reflect place-based nuances when discussing the potential causes and implications of (under-)representation. For example, certain food chain segments (such as manufacturing) may not be critical to every food partnership, especially those with a city/urban focus. I have therefore also drawn on interview data to examine some of these place-based subtleties and distinctions.

Most food partnerships have a nominated board or steering group (Chapter Four). They also generally have range of members, although participation is more fluid and membership lists are less likely to be published. For this reason, steering group membership is used as a reasonable proxy for participation. This decision is reinforced by SFP guidance (published since data collection). Guidance indicates that while a range of stakeholders are consulted, the vision and aims are usually developed by the lead partners or steering group⁴⁷. Not all food partnerships disclose membership composition, and therefore data presented in

⁴⁷https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/files/SFP_Toolkit/Developing_a_Vision_and_Food_Charter.pdf (Last accessed 09/04/2021)

this section relates to 23 (46%) food partnerships. Individual food partnerships publicly disclosing steering group membership on their websites at the time of data collection are listed in Appendix 1. To facilitate comparisons, representation is broken down by category, see Table 6.1. Note the figures in Table 6.1 reflect the number of organisations represented on each steering group, rather than the number of individuals: there are several instances where two or more people represent one organisation, and conversely, where one person represents two organisations. In cases where an organisation has two or more divisions (e.g. a commercial business with a social enterprise project), a judgement is made on which predominates. Each organisation is classified according to its role within the food chain (if relevant) and its primary area of concern (again, if relevant). There are some cases where organisations are categorised twice (e.g. food redistribution charities are classified as both ‘waste management’ and ‘poverty’) or conversely, not categorised under either (e.g. universities). In some instances, the inability to categorise reflects a lack of information, for example, local council representatives’ departments are not always made known. Breakdowns of ‘steering group organisation’ categories and ‘primary concern’ categories are included in Appendices 6 and 7.

Table 6.1 Organisational representation in steering group membership

Organisation category	Food chain segment							Primary concern							Category total		
	Agriculture/food production	Processing/manufacturing	Wholesale/distribution/retail	Catering/consumption	Waste management	Food systems	NA	Health	Sustainability	Local food/comm. Growing	Communities	Poverty	Economic development	Housing		Other	NA
Business	2	2	10	3	3		4	1	1	9				2	1	10	24
Consulting/research groups/think tanks	1			3	1	4	9	4	7						1	6	18
Educational establishments	1			2		2	14		1		1				1	16	19
Government				1		2	40	12	7			1	5	1	6	11	43
Healthcare providers				2			11	11								2	13
Other	1					1			1		1						2
Third sector	12		3	3	10	17	34	7	14	13	17	12		3		13	79
Trade/industry/business associations	4		1	1		1	3					5				5	10
Total (no. of organisations)	21	2	14	15	14	27	115	35	31	22	19	13	10	6	9	63	208

The most powerful voices coming out of the UK food partnership movement – using steering group membership as a proxy – represent health, sustainability and local food agendas, Table 6.1. This makes sense, given health is often a principle funder of food partnership activity (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019), while SFP funds a number of food partnership co-ordinator positions. The 'local food' concern comprises representatives of community growing schemes and other organisations seeking to produce, process, sell or cook with local produce. Actors representing health interests are predominantly from the health and local government arena. The sustainability and local food agendas are championed primarily by third sector organisations. At least five of the fourteen third sector organisations with a sustainability focus are SFP representatives.

By contrast, there are several under-represented groups and food supply chain segments that are absent from or have limited interaction with food partnerships. Table 6.1 indicates representation in the processing and manufacturing sector is particularly low. However, it is also important to consider the narratives of under-representation that emerged from the interviews. To this end, two further graphs are presented as evidence, Figures 6.1 and 6.2. Figure 6.1 collates the total number of interview references (including words with similar meanings) to each food supply chain segment. Figure 6.1 indicates food production receives the most focus, whereas food manufacturing, wholesale and distribution and waste receive fewest comments.

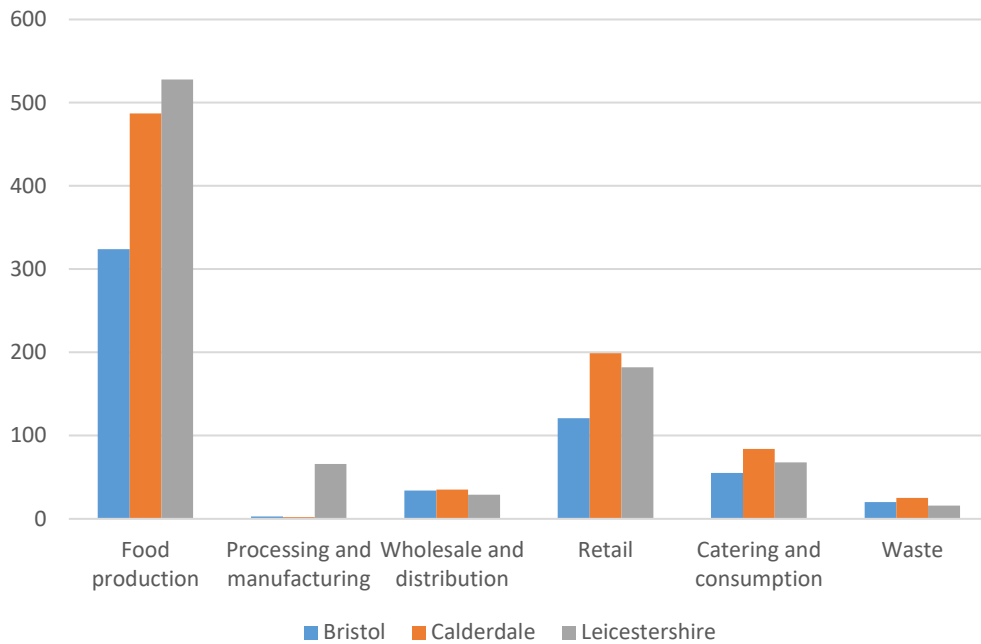


Figure 6.1 Interview references to food supply chain segments (number)

Figure 6.2 reflects the most common narratives around whose involvement is needed to deliver the participant’s spatial vision. It fuses evidence addressing the questions ‘who is currently involved’ and ‘who needs to be involved’. It is important to note the question was not asked directly during the interview, Appendix 2. Who needs to be involved may have been explicitly identified, for example in spatial vision narratives or as barriers to change. In some cases, references are implicit, for example, ‘national organisation’ has been selected where there is an identified need for a national policy shift. ‘Local organisations’ within the broader ‘organisational scale’ category incorporates multiple actor groups including third sector organisations, community organisations and local interest groups. The (sub)regional relates to groupings bigger than the food partnership. For example, Bristol participants variously referenced the West of England, West of England Combined Authority (WECA), West of England Nature Partnership (WENP), Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership, Great Western Cities and the South West region.

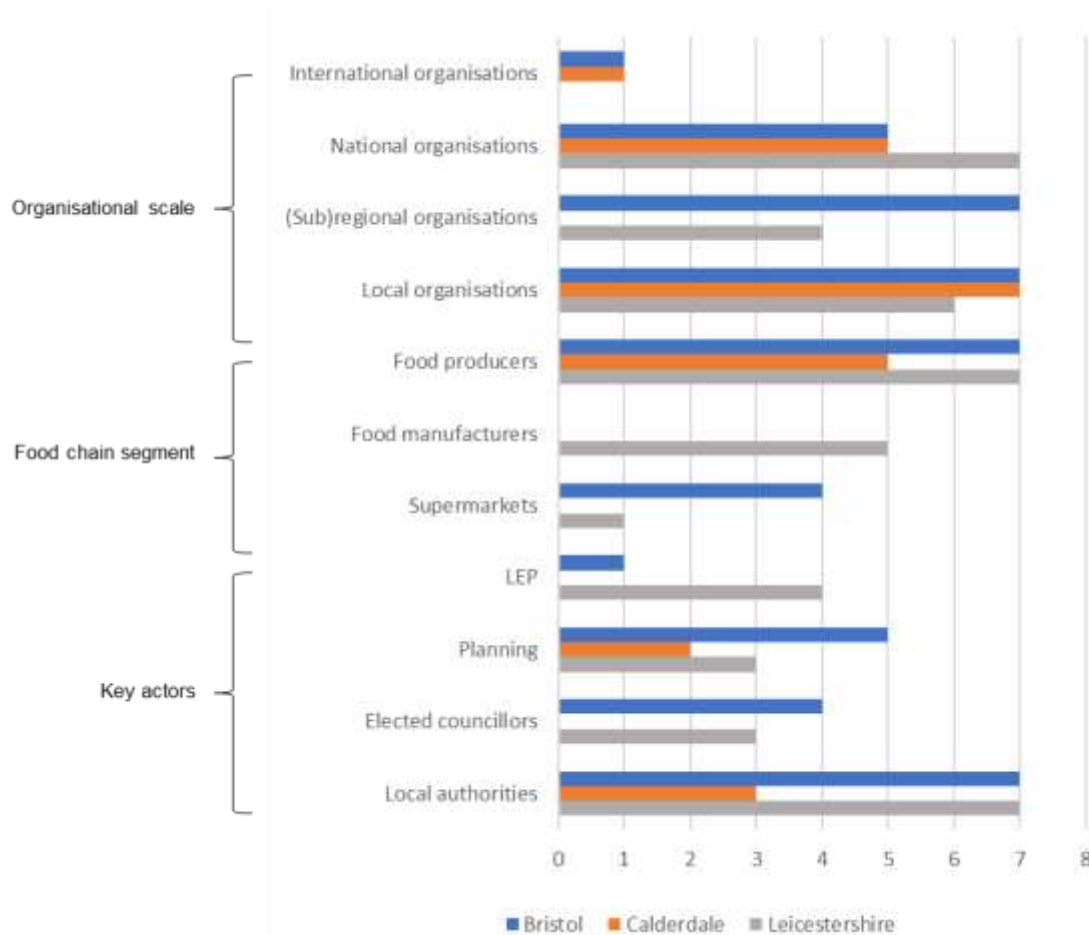


Figure 6.2 Interview identification of key actors (who needs to be involved)

Figures 6.1 and 6.2 present a more nuanced picture when viewed collectively. The combined data were used to select four key under-represented groups that are absent from steering groups and/or identified as key to the delivery of spatial visions. These are: food manufacturing; retail (notably supermarkets), land use planning and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Each is explored in turn below.

Food processing and manufacturing under-representation is considered first. Described as *“the widely disregarded space...between the farm gate and the retail outlet”* (Birmingham Food Council⁴⁸), only two of the 23 case study participants represented processing and manufacturing interests. Both of these were from the Leicestershire case study, a county known for its food

⁴⁸ <https://www.birminghamfoodcouncil.org/about/what-we-do/> (Last accessed 11/07/2023)

manufacturing heritage, see Chapter Four. One reason for the lack of representation may be that Bristol and Calderdale simply don't have the same level of manufacturing. As highlighted above, representation considerations necessarily reflect place-based nuances. On the other hand, it could reflect fundamental differences in the desired destinations of transition, a tension encapsulated in the following two Leicestershire quotes. The first quote describes a vision of increasing food manufacturing and associated imports and exports to drive economic development. The second quote highlights a desire to localise food inputs to manufacturers and also reflects a widely held vision – manifested in many food partnership charters and case study interviews – of more people cooking with local, fresh, unprocessed ingredients. In the wider discussion, the second participant queries how much manufacturing is 'wholesome', and how much is ultra-processed. This reflects judgements about what constitutes 'good food', a potentially unifying concept discussed in Chapter Seven. The two quotes speak to the heart of a tension between two opposing spatial visions: of reaching outwards and embracing the current economic and production models, versus a desire to challenge conventional market economics.

*“So I think whilst, yes, there's a need for people to buy local, grow local...But I think from an economic point of view, if we're going to improve our GVA [Gross Value Added] then we're going to have to continue manufacturing. And to do that we're going to need to continue to bring in products from overseas.” **Leicestershire participant***

*“First of all [it requires] the food manufacturers to look at their supply chain, to say how much we can localise things. And secondly, how much food manufacturing is good for us anyway?” **Leicestershire participant***

If manufacturing was largely ignored by two of the case studies, there was more discussion around the potential role and inclusion of supermarkets, as evidenced by the number of interview references to retail in Figure 6.1. There were no supermarket chain actors among the 'wholesale/distribution/retail' steering group members, and interviews revealed tensions relating to their engagement. Bristol interviews revealed a common narrative around the need to include

supermarkets, given they provide most of Bristol's food, and a level of frustration around their lack of willingness to engage. One Bristol participant highlighted how attempts to involve supermarkets in food partnership activity had not gone well:

*"The replies we got [were]...not unexpected. Silence from some, terribly patronising from others." **Bristol participant***

Another participant sought greater dialogue, but expressed similar frustration:

*"You can't get them [supermarkets] in a room together. We would like to see them come to the table with the local authority and the community and to address issues together. But it doesn't happen, it's so commercially driven...we don't see partnership working from them." **Bristol participant***

The Bristol narratives above provide insight into the difficulty of engaging supermarkets, indicating how supermarkets may be unwilling to challenge their own objectives and narratives by working more collaboratively. But would greater collaboration between food partnerships and supermarkets be welcomed by all? The narrative analysis also revealed two opposing positions within food partnerships themselves around the potential role of supermarkets. One narrative expressed frustration at a level of unwillingness in the food partnership movement to engage with the mainstream retailers:

*"The food movement generally coalesces around a certain type of person, who don't always want to look elsewhere...Unless we engage with supermarkets [90% of fresh fruit and veg is sold through supermarkets], it'd be difficult to consider ourselves a gold city [SFP accreditation scheme]...Because if you don't engage with them, you're actually playing to a niche. So, and that sits uncomfortably with me." **Bristol participant***

This Bristol quote highlights a desire for pragmatism: there is a need to work with commercial interests rather than writing them off as incompatible with sustainable food system transitions. This narrative is juxtaposed with another squarely positioning supermarkets as part of the problem; a barrier to transitioning to a

more sustainable, secure and just food future. This is reflected in a quote from a Leicestershire participant reflecting on two big hurdles to achieving their vision:

“One is vested interests and conservatism on the production side, and the other is the supermarkets. Because the supermarkets and the supermarket model has a stranglehold on the distribution side.” **Leicestershire participant**

Together the two narratives highlight a tension around the extent to which food partnerships should pragmatically work with a wide range of food system actors to improve the current system, despite a probable lack of shared objectives, or whether this approach co-opts and dilutes the imaginaries food partnerships seek to achieve.

Land use planners are under-represented and usually under-engaged in food partnerships. The evidence presented below supports this statement and examines why this matters in the context of food systems transitions. Chapter Two has already highlighted a rich history of spatial imaginaries in planning (Faludi, 2001; Davoudi, 2018), often providing links into food systems (Howard, 1902; Lloyd Wright 1932; Steel, 2008). It has been argued the growth of food partnerships offers an opportunity to re-establish food systems as a planning issue (Mendes et al, 2011) and involve planners in the creation of food system imaginaries. Since food systems are inherently spatial, and given a continued focus on towns and cities (the realm of the urban planner), this approach would seem to make sense. Certainly, SFP recognises the role of planning as not only desirable but essential in transforming the food system:

“As soon as you start interacting with land and land use and development and threats, you’re into the planning system. And if you don’t understand how the planning system works, how can you manage your ambitions, because you haven’t got the tools to achieve them”. **National representative**

SUSTAIN (a SFP parent organisation) is already working to forge greater connections between food partnerships and planners. It has published a slew of

advice on planning-related matters (Sustain, 2004; 2011; 2014) and encourages food partnerships to engage and collaborate with planners and the planning process. One especially relevant example was a visual exercise conducted at a pre-Covid Sustainable Food Cities (SFC) conference. Participants were asked to picture their 'good food city' 20 years in the future and draw or write a postcard to describe it. In this way, SUSTAIN sought to demonstrate the importance of the planning process and the need to engage with the planning system to encourage adoption of locally-relevant policies, be it increasing horticulture on the urban fringe, creating food hubs, or using community food growing to raise awareness of the value of food.

Table 6.1 indicates planning representation is absent in food partnership steering groups, despite clear links between food systems and land use planning. Yet the desktop review revealed some spaces of interaction: 35% of food partnership charters contain planning and/or land access narratives, and 12% specifically highlight the role of planners. For example, Leeds food charter "*encourage[s] landowners and developers to make space available for food growing and preparation, including through the planning process*", while Newcastle food charter highlights the need to "*work with planners to ensure sufficient access to growing spaces, redevelopment and new development*"⁴⁹. Meanwhile, any overlap between food and planning aims is patchy. Figure 6.3 shows variable levels of cross-over and interaction between food partnership strategies and local plans, indicating the extent to which the two document sets 'talk' to each other. At the time of the review, only two of the 50 active food partnerships demonstrated a mature level of integration between the food strategy and local plan. 47% of food strategies/documentation contained no planning-related references. On the other hand, only 20% of local plans had no relevant references to food. Local plan references deemed relevant include (but are not limited to) healthy food environments (e.g. hot food takeaway controls); design quality and access (e.g. kitchen and dining facilities); community growing spaces and land access. The more proactive food strategies recognise the need to develop

⁴⁹ http://www.foodnewcastle.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/FOOD_NEWCASTLE_CHARTER_POSTER.pdf.pdf (Last accessed 12/07/2023)

supportive planning policies, in some cases recommend the development of planning guidance, including Supplementary Planning Document (SPDs) and/or Planning Advice Notes (PANs). The key point here is that the level of awareness, coordination and cooperation between the ‘planning’ and ‘food’ camps is varied, and there is room to strengthen the relationship.

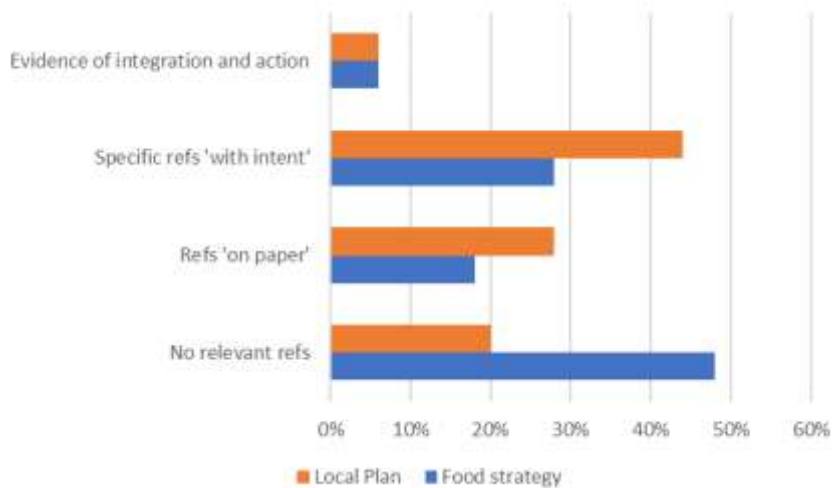


Figure 6.3 Cross-referencing between food strategies and local plans

Similarly, the interviews reflect a variable level of integration and cooperation between planners and food partnerships. Calderdale planners described how they became engaged through discussions with a co-founder of Incredible Edible Todmorden, who also led Calderdale Council for a period of time, and also by virtue of being co-located with the health department. This highlights the sometimes pivotal role of individuals, a point examined in more detail in Chapter Seven. On the other hand, one Leicestershire participant explained their two-tier authority made engagement harder, since the food partnership operates at county level while planning sits with the districts and boroughs. There is evidence of food thinking embedded in some of the Leicestershire district local plans, largely in relation to economics, food tourism and health. Several participants highlighted the need to build food systems thinking into the evaluation of land use tensions rather than treating it as peripheral concern:

“I don’t think [wider questions around sustainable food are] on the radar at all. I think obviously food is. But I think it’s still very much that sort of ‘oh,

well if we're building this number of houses we'll need an allotment'. It's not in terms of 'well actually should we be building those houses on prime agricultural land'.” **Leicestershire participant**

This concern is shared with a national-level participant, who raised several land-use related tensions. These included the attrition of agricultural land on urban fringes through horse grazing ('horsiculture'), and difficulties in obtaining planning permission to develop farming and education infrastructure on green belt agricultural land. Both of these highlight myopic weaknesses in the planning system which may negatively affect broader food growing and food education opportunities. This is reinforced by a point made by a planning representative that local plans are reflective of the national planning policy framework (which currently says little about food) and “*the broader issues the councillors are interested in driving forward*”. This highlights how elected leaders are often the conduits and gatekeepers through which other stakeholder issues are raised. The quote below offers a slightly different perspective, emphasising the need for food partnerships to be proactive in engaging directly with planners, particularly in the absence of champions within the council:

“...planning policy teams are so small now...they've got enough just to study the housing figures and do something on site identification. And they're really struggling to look at whole communities, and very reliant on consultees on doing that part for them...And it's only through consultation, and the food partnership participating, and maybe participating quite strongly and actually submitting—the wording of the policy or at least the wording of the justification for the planners...then really there's not going to be a lot in the local plan about food.” **National-level participant**

Even Bristol struggles to gain traction with planners, despite the 'institutional thickness' (Thrift and Amin, 1995; Stewart, 2003) of its food movement. Several participants expressed frustration that their comments are consistently ignored, despite providing regular input on planning applications and the local plan consultations. Another (national level) participant reflected that Bristol planners

“know what their policy is saying but they’ve got higher priorities to achieve. So the elements that relate to development and food fall off the list.”

The broader implication is land use planning is a key discipline into which food partnerships need to develop ‘roots’. Failure to engage planners has implications for both creating robust spatial visions and the ability to implement them effectively. Closer, more mutually supportive relationships need to be fostered in order to instil greater consideration of the ‘big’ tensions around land use planning, such as balancing housing, agricultural, environmental and amenity requirements. Yet planning departments are overstretched and understaffed, potentially failing to recognise their critical role in shaping local food systems. Food partnerships need to find creative ways of overcoming these barriers to engage more effectively with the planning system.

Alongside the need to develop mutually supportive relationships with planners, SFP has identified an opportunity for greater integration between food partnerships and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). LEPs were created in England following the abolition of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in 2010. Bringing together business, local government, education and the voluntary sector, its purpose is to drive local economic development⁵⁰. LEPs operate at a smaller scale (38 LEPs were created from nine RDAs) and were part of the coalition government’s localism focus. Yet a successful collaboration could still extend many food partnerships’ spheres of influence beyond their administrative boundaries (C5/F1a). Furthermore, SFP views collaboration as a means to influence the local food economy, thus facilitating the delivery of food partnership goals⁵¹. So there are potential benefits to be gained in relation to ‘scaling up’ food partnerships’ agendas to connect the urban and rural, and engaging a delivery partner. Yet realising such benefits are not straightforward; some key barriers to increasing collaboration between food partnerships and LEPs are examined below.

⁵⁰ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/article/explainer/local-enterprise-partnerships> (Last accessed 30/03/2023)

⁵¹ <https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/oct20-local-enterprise-partnerships-better-food-farming-economic-recovery/> (Last accessed 12/07/2023)

Interview and spatial mapping data indicate attempts to extend food partnership influence beyond immediate administrative boundaries by connecting with LEPs will need to overcome significant obstacles. LEP representatives are unlikely to have thought much about local food economies, still less developed a coherent view. Moreover, LEPs' agendas differ significantly from those of food partnerships. One participant deems the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) as having *“an obsession with economic growth and...smart, high tech transport links”* whilst another states the West of England Partnership is *“really only interested in airports”*. This indicates opportunities to link the urban and rural are likely to be limited: despite LLEP's rural coverage, interaction with the food supply chain is centred on manufacturing, with limited engagement with the agricultural sector. Fundamentally there is a lack of alignment of core goals. This is further illustrated by the LLEP representative's spatial vision prioritising international trade, compared to the shared (food partnership-centred) narrative around increasing the proportion of locally sourced raw materials in food manufacturing. In the words of one participant, *“[LLEP is] into globalisation...it's not a way of thinking that is going to move this kind of agenda [local production for local demand] forward very far”*. Furthermore, food partnerships would need to compete for LEPs' attention. One Leicestershire participant drew attention to how the LLEP is under pressure to absorb a wide range of policy aspects including health and climate change. Thus food partnerships are likely to have to vie with other organisations for their LEP's over-stretched attention. In summary, food partnerships and LEPs are likely to present fundamentally different spatial visions of future food systems, if indeed they have thought about it at all. There is value in explicitly examining these spatial visions, seeking to challenge assumptions (on both sides) and find common ground. Areas of mutual interest on which to build could include natural capital, low carbon and/or strategic growth agendas.

To conclude, Finding 4 reveals a level of disconnection between actors responsible for setting food partnerships' spatial visions and actors perceived to be critical to delivering transition, or part of the 'problem'. In other words, some groups appear to be under-engaged or excluded (on purpose, unintentionally or

self-excluded) from the vision-making process. For example, there are tensions between food partnerships and supermarkets: some interview participants expressed frustration at supermarkets' unwillingness to engage, while others attribute them to being part of the problem. Similarly, the lack of food manufacturing representation can be partially attributed to a view that food corporations and multinationals are part of the problem rather than part of the solution. This tension between grassroots/civil society movements and 'big business' is already recognised in some transition research (Hinrichs, 2014; El Bilali, 2019). But the finding also points towards under-engaged actors that are perceived by SFP as pivotal to delivering food system transition. Two such key groups are revealed to be planners and LEPs. In short, there appears to be a disconnection between where action or change is envisioned, and the actors involved with setting the vision. This has practical implications not only for how food partnerships organise themselves (whose voices are strongest), but how they identify, engage and involve actors deemed core to setting and/or delivering food partnerships' visions. It also raises a wider question of whether over- and under-representation on steering groups helps to create or reinforce "new urban elites" (Coulson and Sonnino, 2019). This is an area where the spatial mapping method could be adapted to provide a starting point to better understand overlaps, opportunities and tensions between key actors' desired food futures. This idea is further explored in Chapter Eight.

Finding 5. Food partnerships exhibit differing levels of ability (capacity) and willingness (enthusiasm) to collaborate and are more often 'vision takers' than 'vision makers'

In a slight extension of the second research question, this finding reflects how agency is conveyed through the structural organisation of food partnerships. The desktop review suggests food partnerships seek to enact transition (exercise agency) through the way they organise and position themselves. Figure 6.4 sets out how food partnerships have self-structured, recognising SFP's influence (Chapter Four). The evidence indicates a sliding scale, ranging from food

partnerships as ‘vision takers’ (coordinating the visions of others⁵²) to ‘vision makers’ (seeking to shape the vision). I argue the way in which food partnerships structure themselves influences their ability to develop shared spatial imaginaries of more desirable food systems.

While food partnerships largely operate within the SFC framework, they adopt a number of different roles. These roles – determined through the desktop review – are presented in Figure 6.4. Of the 50 active food partnerships, the adopted structure of 44 food partnerships (88%) could be determined. Of the 44, 36% position themselves as umbrella organisations, seeking to raise awareness of, connect and coordinate existing ‘niche-level’ projects within their area of interest. This may be expressed explicitly:

“We do not see ourselves as necessarily setting up projects ourselves – we seek to connect existing and arising initiatives...” **Sustainable Food City Lancaster**⁵³

“We are working to raise awareness of the huge amount of work already happening in the city in the provision of local food to all communities. We do this by building links between local producers, schools, colleges and universities and organisations...” **Food4Hull**⁵⁴

25% of food partnerships seek to move *beyond* a coordinator role to initiate new projects (e.g. Food Cardiff, Food Exeter, Good Food Greenwich, and Good Food Oxford⁵⁵). A further 16% of food partnerships seek to actively influence and/or lead the food agenda, for example by giving evidence to select committees and parliamentary enquiries (Brighton and Hove Food Partnership), commissioning

⁵² Noting caveats around use of the term ‘coordination’ (Moragues-Faus, 2021)

⁵³ <http://sfclancaster.org/http://sfclancaster.org/> (Last accessed 17/04/2019)

⁵⁴ <http://food4hull.co.uk/what-we-do/> (Last accessed 17/04/2019)

⁵⁵ “Good Food Oxford was launched...to help support the existing work of many organisations...to catalyse new initiatives and collaborations, and to encourage more joined-up thinking, research and policy around food issues” <http://goodfoodoxford.org/about-us/> accessed 17/04/2019

research (Bristol Food Policy Council) and engaging in regional and national food policy agendas (Food Plymouth). At the time of the desktop review, Birmingham Food Council (BFC) was taking an interesting approach in this respect, commissioning research and using innovative methods to increase focus on under-represented areas and gaps within the food system including food security/food crime, horizon scanning and demand change. It describes itself as *“independent, a critical friend to the socio-political set-up... [focusing] limited resources on important matters that don’t get much attention or airtime”*⁵⁶. 14% of food partnerships are embedded within broader organisations. For example, Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Local Food Partnership is part of B&NES Environmental Partnership; Food Carlisle is a subgroup of the Carlisle Partnership; Peterborough Food Partnership is part of the wider aspiration to become the UK’s ‘Environment Capital’ (driven by the Environment Capital Partnership) and Good Food York is part of One Planet York. A further 9% were classified as ‘shell’ organisations, largely due to their early stage of development at the time of the desktop review.

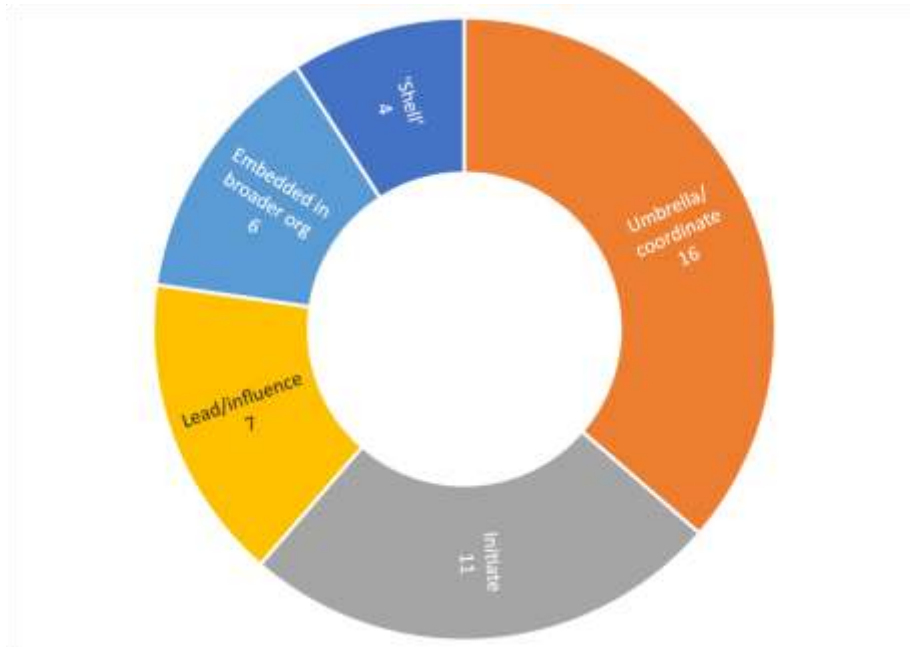


Figure 6.4 Food partnership structures

⁵⁶ <https://www.birminghamfoodcouncil.org/about/what-we-do/> accessed 17/04/2019

The level of adoption of the 'umbrella' role indicates the generic term 'food policy council' can be a misnomer (Gupta et al, 2018; Schiff et al, 2022). Many food partnerships are less concerned with shaping policy and mind-sets and more concerned with creating a framework for/bringing structure to a number of disparate organisations, providing a more coherent narrative to the range of practical responses to a range of food-related issues within their (spatial) area of interest. This reinforces the decision to refer to such organisations as 'food partnerships' within this research (Chapter Four).

The different approaches described above suggest agency may be sought and directed in various ways. This raises questions about how actors with agency work to create and secure shared spatial imaginaries. Is it the case that food partnerships adopting an umbrella role are '(spatial) vision amplifiers', whereas initiators and leaders are '(spatial) vision setters'? This position may be somewhat simplistic. Umbrella food partnerships influence agency/whose voice is heard by acting as a 'gatekeeper' to participation. So even if their collective spatial vision reflects an amalgam of individuals and organisations, the food partnership has agency over who participates. Complications may also arise when more than one food partnership emerges in a single area with intent to shape the vision and strategic direction, potentially creating a clash of agency. Certainly, there is on-paper evidence of potentially contested agency between Manchester and Greater Manchester food partnerships. This raises a wider question about whether food partnerships applying for SFP membership are sufficiently reflective of the areas they seek to represent, as per the quote below:

"At the moment regions aren't being invited to be members. That's the current view. But it is, like I say we've gone round in circles on different scales of membership and what...because we do get approached, and even that's happened within a city where we've had a member and then another association approaches us within the city to say they want to become a member, and we're saying, well there's already a member. And really it should be the city that's the member, rather than that particular organisation. But there is a challenge there, because it could be that the people who are

currently representing the partnership in that city are self-selected to a degree.” **National-level participant**

From the evidence presented above, it is reasonable to assume there is a relationship between the way in which a food partnership organises and structures itself; who has agency and who is excluded. In turn, both organisational structure and agency influence how spatial imaginaries are defined. To further explore the relationship between food partnership structures, how agency is exercised and the creation of spatial imaginaries, each case study is now considered in turn.

Finding 6: Case studies demonstrate three different expressions of agency: collaborative agency, individual agency and emerging agency

This finding differentiates between three different expressions of agency, classified as collaborative, individual and emerging. Each case study is reviewed in turn to build a place-based picture of how the approaches evolved, reflecting on political, geographical, historical and cultural influences. Ultimately, this matters because the ways in which food partnerships structure themselves (Finding 5) and how they exercise agency (Finding 6) influence their ability to develop shared spatial imaginaries of desirable food system transitions.

Chapter Four has already highlighted the long institutional roots of Bristol’s food movement. The interviews shed further light on the evolution of a ‘collaborative agency’ approach. A common story emerged through the participant interviews: that committed individuals, with some public health funding, created both a compelling, evidence-based narrative and an effective organisational structure as an agency-building mechanism. Classified as ‘leading’ in the desktop review (Figure 6.4), the Bristol Food Network (BFN) and Bristol Food Policy Council (BFPC) have developed a movement coalescing around the concept of ‘good food’. The good food narrative was intentionally developed to provide a shared foundation to unite multiple organisations and agencies. The benefit of its definition was described by one participant as “[bringing] everyone onto one platform instead of the circular firing squad”. A common narrative emerging from the Bristol case study indicates the partnership constantly evolves and is

strengthened through collaboration. For example, half the interview participants highlighted how cooperation between organisations improved during Covid, particularly in relation to fast-paced emergency food provision. Thus pre-existing organisational and political silos and boundaries were softened, often drawing in new individuals and groups seeking agency. Of course, this was not without tension. For example, several participants reflected on how the increased focus on emergency food provision shifted focus away from the climate change and procurement agendas. More widely, Bristol interviews reflected a shared narrative around the risks of becoming too closely associated with a particular elected member or political administrations (Halliday and Barling, 2018; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Parsons et al, 2021). Overall this indicates the success associated with Bristol’s food movement (Chapter Four) is underpinned by a collaborative and networked approach, with an awareness of the risks of narrow political patronage.

The food culture of Calderdale could be a fascinating PhD in its own right. The borough contains a large number of disparate individuals, networks and groups seeking to transition the food system. Calderdale Food Network (CFN), a SFC member, was classified in the desktop review as a ‘shell’ on the grounds that little information was available, save for a charter and minutes from a consultation meeting in 2017. On the other hand, the interviews revealed a myriad of food-related organisations and networks in the area. Table 6.2 lists some of the past and present examples cited in participant interviews, and the Calderdale Charter reference to *“amazing people and inspirational actions”*⁵⁷ recognises the exceptional level of grass roots activity.

Table 6.2 Examples of past and present Calderdale food groups

- Blackshaw Head Optimistic Gardening Group
- Burnley Food Links
- Calder Food Folk
- Calderdale Food Mixer
- Incredible Farm
- Northern Gardeners Group
- Pennine Crop Share
- The Real Junk Food Project Kindness Warehouse

⁵⁷ https://calderdale.gov.uk/v2/sites/default/files/calderdale-food-charter_0.pdf (Last accessed 31/03/2023)

- Calderdale Food Network
- Calder Valley Organic Gardeners
- Calder Veg Collective
- Cargodale (zero emission deliveries)
- Great Rock Co-op
- Incredible Aquagarden
- Incredible Edible Todmorden
- Rooting and Fruiting
- Todmorden Food Assembly
- Totally Locally
- Upper Calder Valley Food Group
- Valley Organics

As highlighted earlier, Bristol also has a large number of grassroots organisations. What differentiates Calderdale is that despite high levels of engagement, there is less coordination between groups, and an overall lack of desire for greater coordination. The following quotes allude to division between actors and some thinly veiled tensions that were sometimes expressed as suspicion or disapproval of other approaches. The following quotes are all attributed to Calderdale participants:

“I mean I wasn’t convinced the approach [they were] taking was the right thing to do.”

“The issue with [named group] is one of deep division and rancour and people not talking to each other. I’m sure I’m not the first person to have mentioned this.”

“So I really don’t want to be unkind about those things, but what you find is the articulate and able will always come together under some banner because...they’re doing their own thing.”

There are several narratives that offer insights into a general lack of coordination, and why there is seemingly little or no connection either between food-related organisations or to the Calderdale Food Network. Firstly, Calderdale is not a homogenous borough, and there are geographical, cultural and political differences between the upper and lower valleys. Many (although not all) of the food groups and networks listed in Table 6.2 are located in the upper valley.

“It’s a place where robust individualists have sought refuge from city life, and the state. Yeah, not being bothered too much by [inaudible] and planning permission and suchlike. And getting on and doing things more autonomously. I’m sure people in Halifax are appalled by a lot of things that happen in the upper valley!”

“And trying to mesh together the [named group] with people in Halifax was challenging as they’re always sceptical of what’s any value of going up to Halifax type of thing. This is not a community, in my view. Calderdale is not a community.”

Secondly, narratives suggest the presence of micro-cultures within Calderdale that are resistant to participating in more coordinated governance. The area has bred a “culture of distinctiveness”: an alternative, individualist outlook of pursuing one’s own agenda, tempered by strong communities, not least in the face of periodic flooding events.

Interviewer: “It’s fascinating because there are so many different groups and networks in Calderdale compared to other areas. And all quite independent”

Participant: “Well it’s the sort of non-conformist culture, people doing their own thing and falling out with each other.”

Taken collectively, the Calderdale evidence points towards a highly individualistic approach to food systems transition. If there is a cultural identity, it embraces independence of thought and deed combined with effective community networks. Examples include Incredible Edible Todmorden’s roots in guerrilla gardening (acting without permission); Incredible Farm’s issues with retrospective planning permission); and the sheer amount of small-scale organisations seeking food systems transition (Table 6.2). It should be noted that while SFP funds a part-time CFN coordinator, the ‘you should speak to’ list only included one CFN steering group member, who was unfortunately not available. This could be a limitation of the interview process, an indication that CFN operates in a different sphere, and/or a reflection of a wider desire amongst actors seeking food system transition to remain autonomous. Despite the somewhat disaggregate approach,

movements including Incredible Edible and Totally Locally have developed a global reach (Dobson, 2015; Morley et al, 2017). These examples demonstrate how place-based (transition) movements are capable of extending their influence by capturing the collective (spatial) imagination. The case of Incredible Edible is explored further in Chapter Seven.

The research finds Good Food Leicestershire (GFL) demonstrates 'emerging agency'. In other words, it seeks to extend an administratively-centred spatial vision through considered and gradually extended partnerships. GFL was classified as an 'umbrella' organisation in the desktop review, Figure 6.4. The classification reflects a Charter commitment to create good practice hubs across the county (like Calderdale, there was little publicly available information). The food partnership is County Council-driven, with the steering group comprising various County Council department representatives. Interview narratives reveal some tensions between the county (upper-tier) and district (lower-tier) level. For example, there is a question around the extent to which the county should continue to control the strategic direction versus enabling communities to take more ownership. Melton and Harborough have agreed to pilot District-level food partnerships linked into the County level, but there is also friction around funding and who should take the lead. This point is reinforced by first quote below. One participant argued that bringing in the districts later limited the opportunity to shape the direction of the county-wide food partnership. Another reflected how their pilot district partnership needed a greater steer from the County Council, but also that the district council needed to step up, see the second quote below. Both tiers are in agreement that there needs to be greater cohesion and collaboration between the county and districts, and that both need to be adequately resourced and aligned with wider functions and commitments including responding to the climate emergency. There is also a narrative around the County Council taking over district-led initiatives over the years, only for them to fail as they run out of resources or impetus, reflected in the third quote. The final quote below from a national participant wasn't directed at Leicestershire, but highlights issues around the county-district dynamic are not unique.

“So, with the lower tier stuff, we’ve struggled to get ownership and...I think sometimes, rightly so, the lower tier local authorities are a bit wary or...I suppose they don’t like the county council wading in and saying ‘you should be doing this, you should be doing that’. And, you know, that’s fair enough. But it does make sense for the two tiers to work together on stuff like food policy.” **Leicestershire participant**

“The Melton partnership as an organisation seems...to have sort of I think gone into abeyance. I think that’s partly because the district council...hasn’t put a lot of energy into it.” **Leicestershire participant**

“I’ve always wanted a Leicestershire food partnership based on the Melton model...we did have it for a while, and then the County Council said it would take it over, so we said that’s great. Which they did, and then promptly did nothing with it.” **Leicestershire participant**

“There are those areas where the county council proposes something then none of the districts will engage. And if the districts propose it, the county council won’t want to do it. It’s very sort of like ‘well that’s your thing, we’re not doing that. And there just seems to be quite a bit of that in places where it’s very, very sensitive as to how you actually gradually take this agenda forwards.” **National participant**

At the time of the desktop review, Leicestershire was one of the few SFC-affiliated food partnerships with a significant rural area, with food and drinks companies topping the list of small rural businesses in the County (Lea and Patel, 2018). Leicester is a separate unitary authority and has its own food partnership. Located in the centre of Leicestershire, it is a (potential) market for local producers, and there is a recognised need to work together across urban fringes of the city-county border to increase peri-urban growing. Of the three case study food partnerships, Leicestershire perhaps more reflective of its rural role. The interviews referenced the emergence of an interest group centred around food production (buying from and selling into local markets). This is covered in more detail in Chapter Seven. It is also the only case study engaged with the LEP,

although the fact that Leicestershire’s food partnership coordinator also holds a role in the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) has strengthened this connection. Latterly (after data collection) it is possible Good Food Leicestershire’s placement within the Leicestershire County Council has also facilitated the formation of wider partnerships. A notable example includes the launch of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) ‘BeanMeals’ project, whereby the County Council has brought together a variety of local partners including Leicester City Council, Food for Life and LLEP⁵⁸. To conclude, Leicestershire’s food partnership is controlled within the County Council but is cautiously seeking to build agency through limited channels. It is therefore classified as having ‘emerging agency’, in other words, is seeking to extend an administratively-centred spatial vision through considered and gradually extended partnerships.

Drawing the three case studies together, Table 6.3 summarises the supporting evidence behind the idea that each case study harnesses a different approach to agency in ways that are interwoven with organisational structures. In turn, these approaches reflect different relationships with SFP. Bristol is a ‘shining star’ within SFP’s portfolio, achieving Gold Sustainable Food City status in 2021⁵⁹. In turn, Bristol strengthens its agency through collaboration, recognising the value of its gold status in both providing a platform and mandate for its food systems agenda and gaining traction with wider organisations. At the time of writing, it was not clear whether gold status has unlocked further funding, a hope expressed by a number of participants. Leicestershire is clearly integrated into the SFP ‘family’, and appears to enjoy similarly close relationships with other charitable organisations including Food for Life (a Soil Association programme) and Feeding Britain. By contrast, SFP is a distant or unknown entity to most Calderdale participants, yet Calderdale Food Network achieved Bronze status in 2021. This indicates there are a number of distinct groups active within the district, working in parallel to effect food system transition.

⁵⁸ <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=BB%2FW017733%2F1> (Last accessed 26/01/23)

⁵⁹ <https://www.goingforgoldbristol.co.uk/bristol-named-gold-sustainable-food-city/> (Last accessed 31/03/2023)

Table 6.3 Case study expressions of agency

Bristol 'Collaborative agency'	Calderdale 'Individual agency'	Leicestershire 'Emerging agency'
Mature food partnership 'Grass roots' origins with public health funding Unity around 'good food' concept Organised and collaborative wider food movement Long institutional roots SFP as means to further Bristol's food agenda	Driven by individuals Deeply embedded food culture Nascent food partnership Autonomy prized Micro-cultures Dissonance between groups Community resilience Accept/learn from 'failures' Strong, individualistic visions SFP a peripheral concern	County Council driven Administrative roots County-district tensions Rural-urban bridge Little wider consultation Emerging partnerships Tentatively extending agency through restricted channels 'At home' within the SFP portfolio

To conclude the chapter findings, some actor groups are better represented than others in food partnerships; and there is often a misalignment between those in positions of greater influence (in terms of agenda setting and framing spatial visions) and actors identified as necessary to facilitate the process of transition. Turning to matters of agency and organisation, UK food partnerships more often position themselves as coordinators rather than leaders of transition. This puts them 'at risk' of becoming vision takers, absorbing and balancing the requirements of multiple actors and agendas. There are open questions about whether this leads to the development of bland and/or generic spatial visions, thus making them less persuasive and compelling. I return to these points in the next section. The case studies indicate there is potential for food partnerships to shape the dominant spatial imaginary by extending their influence over food system transition narratives. It is likely this requires them to move beyond the role of coordinator and enact a greater level of agency. Yet the case studies also demonstrate different levels of capacity and enthusiasm for engaging with a wide range of actors. Case study approaches are summarised as collaborative agency (Bristol), individual agency (Calderdale) and emerging agency (Leicestershire). Each approach reflects a delicate balance between agency, organisational structure and relationship with SFP. The next section reflects on why these findings matter.

6.3 Discussion and reflection

This section combines and extends Finding 4 (agency and representation), Finding 5 (agency and organisational structure) and Finding 6 (expressions of agency) to reflect more generally on **who creates the visions and spatial imaginaries of food system transitions, and who is excluded** (the second research question). To this end, it makes two observations that may be converted into recommendations. Firstly, food partnerships would benefit from making more intentional choices about what actors are engaged or excluded. Secondly, food partnerships could also gain from making more mindful decisions about the roles they adopt, and how agency is expressed.

Food partnerships would benefit from increasing intentionality around what actors are involved in – or excluded from – vision-making and vision implementation. Finding 4 highlights how certain voices predominate by virtue of their participation on food partnership steering groups. Conversely, other actors are under-represented or excluded from creating place-based food system visions and/or the process of implementation. Figure 6.5 represents case study participants' perceptions of actor engagement, based on actor groups identified in Finding 4. Each actor group is illustratively positioned in relation to their current level of engagement (high-low) and whether their participation is deemed a priority (part of the problem – part of the solution). Figure 6.5 indicates a relatively low level of current engagement with planning disciplines and LEPs, despite SFP's drive to encourage mutual collaboration. This suggests there is still a need to reinforce the benefits of developing LEP and planning-related connections, and support the requisite skill sets and resources to enable food partnerships to forge more robust working relationships.

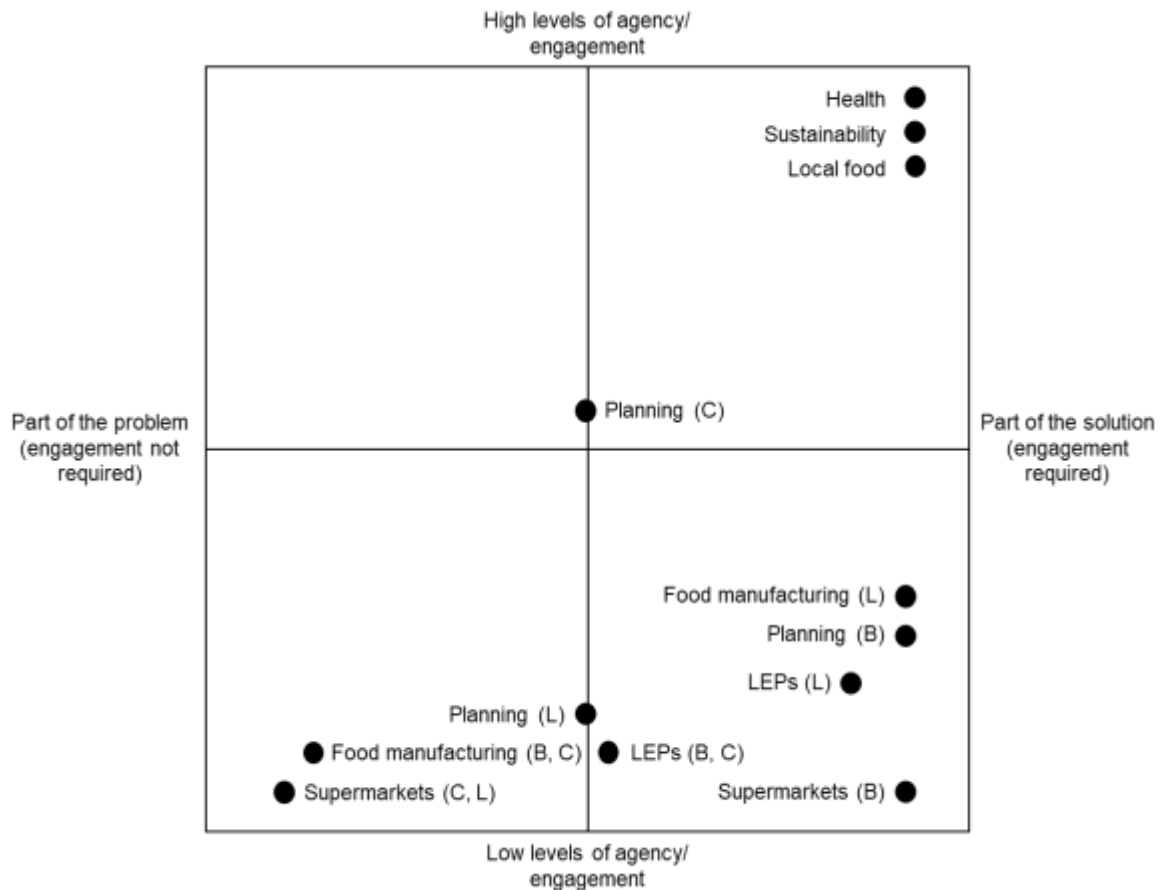


Figure 6.5 Participant agency perceptions

Furthermore, Figure 6.5 demonstrates certain food chain segments are prioritised by individual case studies (Bristol supermarkets and Leicestershire manufacturing), though engagement levels are currently not deemed optimum. Conversely, there is some reticence in engaging with actors or functions seen to be at odds with the desired food systems imaginaries of the majority of food partnership actors, notably large-scale manufacturers and supermarkets. Returning to sustainability transitions and the multi-level perspective (MLP) outlined in Chapter Two, the disparity in participation indicates possible tensions between the actors perceived to drive the current food system ('regime' level actors) and those seeking transition to a more desirable state ('niche' level actors) (Cifuentes and Gugerell, 2021). This assertion is supported by food charter evidence: every food charter that proposes specific actions on an individual basis (eighteen in total) recommends taking steps that effectively bypass 'big food'. Examples of specific actions include growing or using more local/seasonal produce and/or cooking from scratch using fresh ingredients. Furthermore, some

definitions of local food explicitly exclude the “*large-scale supermarket system*” (Waltz, 2011; Sustain and RSPB, 2023). Given steering groups are tasked with creating food partnership visions, it raises a question – to food partnerships and SFP – about how the steering group selection process is undertaken and legitimised. The data do not enable this question to be unpacked since an insufficient number of steering group members were included in the interview selection process. However, it would be interesting and useful to pursue this avenue in future. More broadly, there is value in encouraging current food partnership ‘gatekeepers’ (notably steering group members) to make more intentional decisions around the inclusion or exclusion of particular actor groups to strengthen both the development and implementation of high quality, place-based spatial visions.

Secondly, food partnerships could be more mindful of the organisational structures they adopt (Finding 5) and how agency is expressed (Finding 6). SFP classifies food partnerships based on their structure, i.e. housed by the public sector, housed by the third sector and fully independent (Davies, 2017). Yet food partnerships also make broad choices about whether their primary role is to coordinate or direct the food systems agenda, Finding 5. This raises important questions for each food partnership about what – and who – it represents. It is worth considering whether SFP exerts a greater influence on food partnerships positioning themselves as umbrella or coordinator organisations (Figure 6.4). One could theorise that such organisations are more likely to construct their visions by the wholesale application of SFP’s ‘six key issues’ (covered in more detail in Chapter Seven), rather than developing more nuanced, place-based responses. This could be a result of a lack of confidence and/or a desire to adopt a ‘templated’ (tried and tested) approach (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2018). It may also reflect the need to coordinate a variety of potentially disparate food-related organisations. Thus the vision content is potentially diluted to reflect the ‘lowest common denominator’ that all parties can agree on, resulting in a less persuasive, blander spatial vision. Certainly, there is some evidence to suggest food partnerships classified as ‘initiators’ or ‘leaders’ (Figure 6.4) are more likely to adopt place-based spatial imaginaries, providing more lucid evocations of what more desirable food systems will look and feel like. Examples include Cardiff and

London's local-national imaginaries, Birmingham's local-global imaginary⁶⁰ and Exeter's desire to "*rediscover and redevelop localised food systems*"⁶¹. However, this area requires more attention before definitive conclusions can be drawn. Thus, there is value in sharpening both the interview focus and analysis to tease out the relationship between how food partnerships structure themselves and the resulting impact on the quality and scope of their spatial visions.

The case studies reveal how different types of agency may be sought and deployed to shape and direct the dominant spatial narratives. Finding 6 differentiates between collective, individual and emerging agency. Specifically, it draws attention to the influences of politics, geography, history and culture on how place-based approaches to agency emerge. Findings 5 and 6 jointly demonstrate how the balance of agency may be variously distributed between food partnerships and SFP. SFP governance leans towards maximising influence in the absence of control, an approach that involves 'reaching up, reaching out and empowering'⁶². Nevertheless, alongside SFP's narrative of support, the organisation also extends a firm guiding hand through the tools it uses to regulate membership and steer the direction of food partnerships. As previously noted, SFP retains a high degree of influence over the normative spatial imaginary by controlling what spatial areas can become members, through grant-giving and by building a 'translocal' narrative around what a sustainable food place looks like (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2018; also see Chapter Two). Thus, depending on where the balance of agency falls, SFP has a greater or lesser influence over food partnerships' organisation and governance structures. In turn, the way in which agency is deployed influences the development of place-based spatial imaginaries of more desirable food systems. To this end, food partnerships – and food system transition actors generally – could benefit from being more mindful about the roles they seek to assume, and the ways in which agency is expressed.

⁶⁰ https://www.birminghamfoodcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/BirminghamFoodCharter_Summer2014.pdf (Last accessed 31/03/2023)

⁶¹ https://geography.exeter.ac.uk/documents/Food_Exeter_Strategy_2017-Cultivating_Food_leaflet.pdf (Last accessed 31/03/2023)

⁶² https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/about/our_story/ (Last accessed 04/02/2022)

6.4 Conclusion

While there is an identified need for more research aspects of agency in (food system) transitions, there is an established body of literature that engages with power, agency and/or governance aspects of food partnerships in the global north. This chapter complements and extends existing work in several key areas, and makes a unique contribution by drawing together thinking on spatial imaginaries and (the desire for) place-based food system transition. To conclude the chapter I summarise the findings and their key implications, identify several practitioner-based recommendations (expanded in Section 9.3) and provide more detail around the academic contributions highlighted in Section 6.1.

This chapter highlights the value of understanding whose voices are heard, and conversely, whose are excluded in creating food partnership spatial visions. Finding 4 indicates strong representation of health, sustainability and local food interests. Under-represented or unrepresented groups include supply chain actors (notably big retail and manufacturing) and several actors identified as important or fundamental to delivering spatial visions (land use planners and LEPs). Finding 4 also reflects a level of disconnection between actors responsible for setting food partnerships' spatial visions and actors perceived to be critical to delivering transition. This raises questions about the potential benefit of increasing the involvement of actors tasked with delivering transitions in spatial visioning. Under- and unrepresented groups are often 'regime' level actors, and could therefore be seen as potentially at odds with food partnerships' desired food systems imaginaries. There is ongoing debate about the extent to which such groups should be involved. Finding 5 illustrates the roles food partnerships seek to play are embedded in their organisational structures. This means they may be more or less willing to define, shape and lead the spatial vision-making process. Finding 6 identifies three different expressions of agency within the case studies: collaborative, individual and emerging agency. These expressions of agency reflect differing levels of engagement between food partnerships and SFP. More broadly, Finding 6 suggests there may be a 'myth of collaboration'. While imaginaries are seen to be broadly unifying, there is evidence to suggest strong visions, capable of creating change and shifting mindsets, are not

necessarily a result of widespread cooperation. The Calderdale case study in particular suggests spatial imaginaries can be driven through the sheer grit of determined individuals. I return to this idea in C7/F8.

Findings 4 – 6 lead to two specific recommendations. Firstly, food partnerships should make more intentional choices about what actors are engaged or excluded. Secondly, food partnerships should be more mindful about how their organisational structures are constructed and how they seek to enact agency. Part of a response to these recommendations is to ensure that agency is part of an up-front conversation when steering groups are formed. While a lack of planning engagement is identified as a risk to realising desirable food system transitions (Cabannes and Marocchino, 2018; see Section 2.4.1), my research recommendations are primarily targeted towards ways in which food partnership practitioners could increase purchase with urban planners (and other key actors). This approach reflects the low number of planners represented in the interview data. Furthermore, and while a level of participant frustration at the lack of planning engagement is palpable, the situation is also unlikely to change without a significant shift in resources and policy direction. So it is beyond the scope of this research to make planning-based recommendations. That said, involving planners (and representatives of LEPs and/or other organisations) in collaborative spatial mapping exercise to envision food system transition has the potential to challenge assumptions and help shift perspectives to find common ground and develop mutual areas of interest. A full set of recommendations is included in Section 9.3.

To complete the section, the key agency-related narratives are integrated into Figure 6.6 below, to create an updated version of Figure 5.11. The following text highlights three examples of where these narratives (‘who’s involved and who’s missing’) add to and/or intersect with current debates on governance and agency in the food partnership movement. In doing so, it draws attention to several opportunities to extend the research in future.

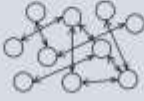


	Bristol	Calderdale	Leicestershire
Shared spatial imaginary	High degree of alignment around 'good food' concept	Competing visions have not coalesced around wider shared imaginary	Emerging imaginary around food supply chain thinking
'On paper' spatial imaginary	City region	Local	Local
Who's involved?	Wide range of interconnected stakeholders  → Collaborative agency	Independent actors Clusters of influence/collectives  → Individual agency	Local authority-driven; limited inputs  → Emerging agency
Who is identified as 'missing'?	Big retail Planners		Big manufacturing Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
What is 'local'?	West of England as common reference; 'less than the South West'	Geographically and/or culturally bounded	Administratively bounded
Where should our food come from?	City-region/bioregion Agro-ecological/lower intensity farming	Highly individualistic visions reflecting practical/lived experiences	Local definition and spatial vision closely linked Farming, manufacturing and distribution focus
Summary	Harmonious tensions High levels of participation	Dissonance Different agendas	Forming alignments County – district tensions

Figure 6.6 Case study common narratives (adapted/updated from Table 5.11)

Firstly, Figure 6.6 connects with literature on policy entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship (Giambartolomei et al, 2021; Emas and Jones, 2022). To expand, the notion of 'collaborative agency', displayed within the Bristol case study, particularly resonates with the tactics deployed by entrepreneurs to develop "sticky stories" to encourage alignment around shared agendas (Horlings et al, 2018; Giambartolomei et al, 2021). Conversely, the idea of collaborative agency is less evident in the Calderdale case study. This suggests a 'myth of collaboration' counterpoint, where individual autonomy is especially valued. Meanwhile the literature on policy intrapreneurship – focusing on the role of government actors in creating local food systems and their governance structures – resonates with the Leicestershire case study (Emas and Jones, 2022). Although agency is expressed in different ways – for example engaging to a greater or lesser extent with formal 'policy makers' – each case study tracks how unique connections between actors and organisations shape the development of alternative, place-based imaginaries (Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015; Parés et al, 2017; Moragues-Faus, 2020; Giambartolomei et al, 2021).

Secondly, there is both opportunity and need to expand data collection and analysis methods to provide greater insight into how place-based differences in individual and organisational dynamics and social networks occur. Section 3.2 has already highlighted how an interconnectivity between who is identified (via the snowballing method) and what they say (in interviews) tells us something about agency and power dynamics (Noy, 2008). While a number of other studies focus primarily on food partnership and/or network coordinators (Clayton et al, 2015; Bassarab et al, 2019; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019; Sieveking, 2019; Moragues-Faus, 2021), the case studies – Calderdale especially – indicate that powerful transition agents may be operating on the fringes or outside food partnerships. A future expansion of data collection and analysis methods could provide greater insight into how place-based differences in individual and organisational dynamics and social networks occur. Specific options could include mapping snowball ‘sampling trees’ (Noy, 2008) or applying Social Network Analysis to better understand social structures and cross-sectoral integration between individuals and groups (Levkoe et al, 2021). These methods could be both effective and transferrable where there are a greater number of participants per case study. Finally, broadening the range of participants offers greater potential to study interactions between niche and regime level actors (Cifuentes and Gugerell, 2021). This idea is developed further in Section 8.2.3.

7. Legitimacy and practice

This chapter examines how and why some spatial imaginaries are created, justified, elevated and institutionalised over others. Specifically, it addresses the third research question: **how are these visions and spatial imaginaries formed, shared, prioritised and validated ('justifying transitions') and implemented and practiced ('doing transitions')**? In this way, the chapter follows two lines of investigation. The first reflects on how spatial imaginaries are legitimised by examining the conditions and processes required for one imaginary to take hold (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). Building on the individual visions and shared spatial imaginaries identified in Chapter Five, it considers why certain spatial visions coalesce to form imaginaries, how they are justified, and conversely, which emerging visions fail to gain sufficient traction and why. The second aspect – practice (or 'doing transitions') – relates to the relationship or feedback loop between vision and action: what is the relationship between the legitimisation of certain spatial imaginaries and everyday practices of doing transitions? Are they mutually reinforcing? Or perhaps the relative practicality of taking certain actions over others makes some imaginaries more appealing? This chapter draws on three practical examples of how individuals coalesce around a shared vision, and the developing relationship between the emerging imaginary and how it informs decision-making and directs policy and funding. The findings associated with RQ3 are three-fold:

Finding 7. Rescaling is central to (re)conceiving, shaping and validating the everyday imaginaries of food system transitions

Finding 8. Spatial imaginaries gather power as they capture the collective imagination through a combination of clarity of purpose, commitment, actionability, scalability and luck

Finding 9. There is divergence between the problem-focused transition levers adopted in food partnership action plans and the mindset-focused transition levers of individual activists seeking food system change

7.1 Concepts and approach

This section defines the key concepts applied in this chapter, outlines the analytical approach and summarises how the chapter findings contribute to key academic literature. Several legitimacy-related discussions emerge from the literature review in Chapter Two. These relate to the legitimacy of transitions (Berkhout, Smith, and Stirling, 2004; Shove and Walker, 2007; Köhler et al 2019; de Geus et al, 2022), the legitimacy of spatial imaginaries (Boudreau, 2007; Metzger and Schmitt, 2012; Haughton and Allmendinger, 2015; Hincks et al, 2017; Davoudi, 2018; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021), and the use of spatial imaginaries to justify and legitimise particular transition pathways (Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019; Chateau et al, 2021). This chapter explores how differently-scaled visions gain legitimacy as alternative transition pathways seeking to disrupt the globalised food system (see Section 1.2). In its broadest sense, legitimacy relates to building consensus based on norms, values, practices and procedures (Zelditch, 2001; Bergman, 2017). It can also be a process where conflict runs deep, causing actors to “*negotiate and struggle for control*” to instil particular power configurations (Sareen and Haarstad, 2022). Furthermore, legitimacy may be undermined if actors are excluded or unheard, highlighting a close connection with ideas of agency and justice (Hendriks, 2009; Marsden, 2013; Hinrichs, 2014; Köhler et al, 2019; Sareen and Haarstad, 2020; de Geus et al, 2022). So perceptions of legitimacy are key to fostering a sense of fairness, inclusivity and good governance, as well as a prerequisite to accessing investment and policy support (Bergman, 2017).

This chapter also considers how spatial imaginaries are embedded in practice. As discussed in Section 2.3, this research interprets imaginaries to be performative – that is, embodied in material practices – as well as semiotic representations in images and texts (Jessop, 2010; Watkins, 2015; Chateau et al, 2021; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). This chapter also seeks to extend the findings to reflect on the feedback loop between action and vision. In this way, it connects with the assertion that planning tools (including maps) not only represent the future, but also have the potential to influence and shape the future by “*performing the future in the present*” (Davoudi, 2018).

I now turn to the analytical approach applied RQ3, which seeks to shed light on how visions and spatial imaginaries are justified and implemented. There are three analytical strands to RQ3. The first strand focuses on understanding why some visions and imaginaries gain purchase over others: specifically, how they are formed, shared, prioritised and justified, thus capturing the collective imagination. I first sought to identify the relative importance of scalar narratives (alongside other, non-scalar narratives) used in UK food partnerships' publicly available vision statements. I then analysed how food partnerships define the benefits of local food systems using their published food charters. Each identified benefit was assigned to one of the SFP's 'six key issues' categories. The results are presented in Figures 7.1 and 7.2. The second analytical strand takes a different approach. I developed a series of 'vignettes' – focused on a small number of interviews and spatial mapping outputs – to identify some of the common characteristics supporting the development of successful spatial imaginaries. Each vignette tells the story of the development of a particular spatial imaginary (largely from the perspective of the participant), before reflecting on why each has succeeded. While this analytical strand is neither a comprehensive nor complete narrative, the vignettes add richness to our understanding of how and why place-based imaginaries develop and evolve. The third analytical strand sought to examine how individual visions and shared imaginaries are implemented and practiced, drawing on both desktop review and interview material. To do this, I analysed food partnerships' action plans alongside the solutions identified by interview participants. These actions and solutions are collectively positioned as the controls sought to create change – or 'transition levers'. I mapped food partnerships' actions against the SFP's six key issues (which often form the structure of partnerships' action plans, see Figure 7.5). Common solution narratives are presented by case study in Figure 7.6. Table 7.2 drills into these common narratives, providing insight into more subtle, place-based differences. Note Appendix 4 contains more detail on the case study analytical approach.

This chapter intersects with and contributes to the literature presented in Chapter Two in several key ways. Chapter Five has already challenged an assumption

that written strategies are necessarily reflective of spatial imaginaries and/or desired transition pathways (Shove and Walker, 2007; Sonnino, 2016; Bergman, 2017; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). By adopting a broader analytical approach – for example through the use of vignettes – this Chapter provides a more nuanced view of *how* particular imaginaries garner power. When combined with Chapter Six’s findings, we see how studying the development of verbal, visual and written visions underpinning seemingly shared spatial imaginaries provides fresh insights into the role of agency and scale in legitimising particular transition pathways. This area of contribution is further developed in Section 8.2.1. The chapter findings are combined with Watkins’ (2015) spatial imaginary classifications to explore a ‘relational triangle’ between spatial imaginaries, transition and scale. This contribution is further expanded in Sections 8.2.2 and 8.2.3. Finally, this chapter responds to a call to better understand how spatial imaginaries are influenced by material practices (Watkins, 2015; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021), though recognises more research on the feedback loop between action and vision is needed.

7.2 Findings

This section presents and evidences Findings 7 – 9 which collectively speak to RQ3. The wider implications of the three findings are individually and collectively considered in the following Discussion and Reflection section.

Finding 7. Rescaling is central to (re)conceiving, shaping and validating food system transition imaginaries

Chapter Five has already drawn attention to a seemingly shared local food systems imaginary in food partnership written narratives, underpinned by individual convergent and divergent verbal and visual narratives. Building on this, Finding 7 reflects on i) the relative importance of relocalisation (compared to other aspects) in defining the imaginary and ii) how benefits associated with local food systems are framed and justified. This finding draws attention to the relative importance of *rescaling* as a central tenet of food system transition. It draws on written, verbal and visual evidence, arguing that the need to transition towards

local food systems is perceived as critical, but the justification varies between what is written and what is in the 'hearts and minds' of those seeking transition. From the evidence presented below, there is broad consensus about the need for food system transitions to improve health, sustainability and social justice outcomes. But there are subtle differences in how the benefits of rescaling are justified. Food partnerships' written narratives define the advantages of rescaling primarily in economic and community terms. Case study participants, by contrast, are less focused on the potential economic benefits of their imagined rescaled food systems. This points towards a potential dichotomy between underlying beliefs and instrumental justifications as related to rescaling. Supporting evidence is presented below; the implications are explored in more depth in the Discussion and Reflection section.

As part of the document review, food partnership vision statements were studied to understand written motivations for seeking food system transition. The most referenced themes are health and wellbeing, followed by sustainability and equitability (Figure 7.1). Interview participants' primary motivations were a desire to improve social justice (43%), environment/sustainability (43%) and health (30%). So there is broad alignment between written visions and participant interviews, albeit presented in reverse order. It makes sense that health is the most commonly expressed single theme in food partnership vision statements: it is the most represented category within food partnership steering groups (C6/F4) and furthermore, health-related organisations are a key source of funding (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019).

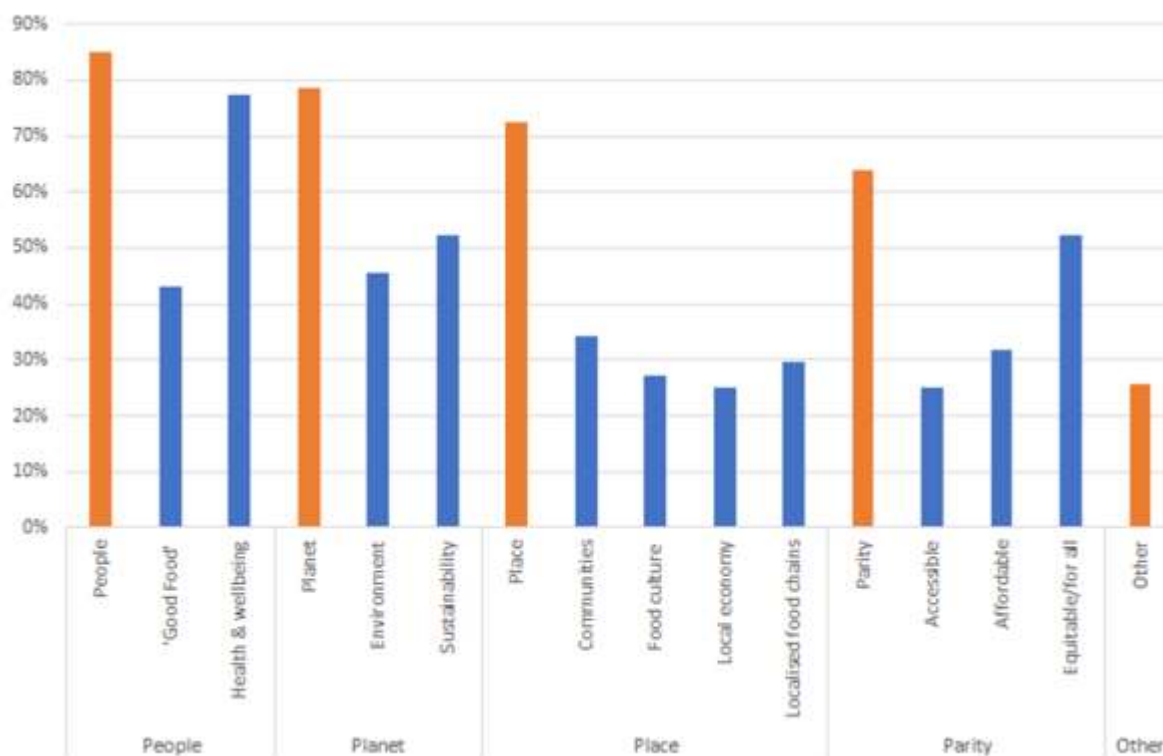


Figure 7.1 Food partnership vision statement key themes

We now turn to the relative importance of the 'local' (compared to other aspects) in defining the the desired destinations of food system transitions. At the highest level, food partnership narratives set an expectation that rescaling through relocalisation is a central tenet of reimagining food futures. Of the four thematic categories highlighted in Figure 7.1 (Health, Planet, Place, Parity), three contain sub-themes directly pertaining to local food systems. These sub-themes relate to local economy, localised food chains, food culture and communities (Place), the environment (Planet) and good food (Health). Given the centrality of localisation as a means of transforming the food system, food partnership charter documents were analysed to understand how the benefits of localisation are framed. Figure 7.2 shows the justification for local food systems is driven by economic arguments, centred on the ability to retain value within the local economy by investing in independent enterprises and generating local jobs. Community benefits – providing more growing opportunities, access to land, role of planning and linking growing with 'good food' – also feature highly. The economic benefits are further reinforced in many charters through multiple references. In contrast, the lack of links between perceived relocalisation benefits and the alleviation of

poverty exposes a possible tension between the relocalisation and affordability agendas. This is further explored in the following section. Although economic arguments lead food partnerships' written justification of local food systems, participant interviews place relatively little importance on economic arguments, with only 17% identifying improved local economy as a motivator for food system transition. This is doesn't mean participants fail to recognise economic benefits to communities, merely that economic factors are not their primary motivation. The wider implications of this are discussed in the next section (Section 7.2).

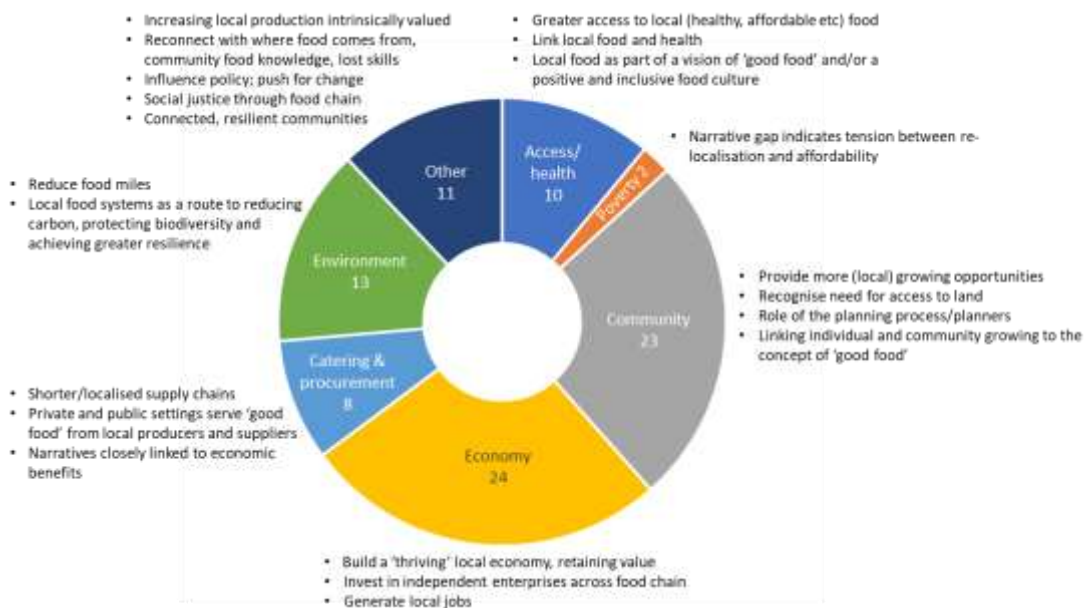


Figure 7.2 How food partnerships define benefits of local food systems within food charters⁶³

The next section reflects on the possible tensions between the food partnership (local economy) and interview participant (social justice/sustainability) focus. What we can take away from the evidence above is that rescaling is central to justifying desired food systems transitions. Given different imaginings open up tensions and potential conflicts reflecting the relative priority of rescaling and how rescaling should occur, there is benefit in better understanding how particular

⁶³ Categories aligned with SFP six key issues. It should be noted although economic and community justifications look to be comparable, the graphic reflects the number of food partnership charters conferring a direct relocalisation benefit to each SFP 'key issue', rather than the number of references.

scales become institutionalised, while others fail to gain traction (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). Again, this theme is further explored in the next section.

Finding 8. Spatial imaginaries gather power as they capture the collective imagination through a combination of clarity of purpose, commitment, actionability, scalability and luck

This finding reflects on the conditions required for imaginaries to coalesce and thrive through the examination of three vignettes derived primarily from case study interviews and participant mapping. The term ‘vignette’ has been applied to reflect the fact they have been constructed from a small number of interviews that are ‘snap-shots’ in time. Often presented from the viewpoint of a handful (or fewer) participants, they are neither comprehensive assessments nor complete narratives. Indeed, where possible I have included references to more detailed research. Rather, the vignettes are used as a device to draw out some of the factors making particular spatial imaginaries more appealing and enduring. Select papers have examined written strategies to better understand how spatial imaginaries gather power, see Chapter Two. However, the combined application of maps and interviews in this instance provides a unique counterpoint. The three vignettes showcased here were selected to demonstrate the evolution of place-based thinking in each of the case studies. For each vignette, a story overview is established before exploring why each imaginary has succeeded. Collectively, the spatial imaginaries explored in the vignettes reveal a number of common characteristics that have supported their development:

Compelling. Offer a convincing solution to a shared problem and/or a brighter vision of the future; capture the collective imagination; easily communicated

Shared. Garner wide (individual, political) support; high degree of alignment

Actionable. Tread a fine line between creativity and deliverability

Transferable/scalable. Often (but not always) offer the promise of transferability (within niche) or scalability (niche to regime)

Serendipitous. Tap into the prevailing zeitgeist; subject to an element of luck and circumstance/fortune

Vignette 1. Reimagining public sector food procurement through shorter supply chains, Bristol case study

Bristol interviews and documentation revealed a reimagined public sector food procurement favouring shorter supply chains. The spatial imaginary has roots in the Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) unitary authority pilot scheme to enable more, smaller suppliers to provide food related services by adopting a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). The pilot was picked up and promoted by the Food Procurement National Advisory Board⁶⁴ and attracted the attention of the Crown Commercial Service (CCS), the public procurement arm of the government. The CCS commissioned a pilot to open public sector procurement to local food producers and suppliers in the South West. The pilot roll-out subsequently experienced Covid-related delays. At the time of writing it had, however, enabled the set-up of the South West Food Hub Community Interest Company (CIC) to manage and support the process. To scale up, England and Wales is divided into regions based on NUTS (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) classifications, used for dividing up EU and UK territory⁶⁵. Each region becomes a food hub, and suppliers of all sizes use the DPS to register where they can deliver. Suppliers can register with up to two regions. This is particularly helpful to suppliers near a boundary. These centrally held contracts can be shared *between* local authorities (LAs), so high levels of food procurement experience are not required in each LA. Figure 7.3 reflects both an individual participant vision, but also alludes to a wider imaginary based on a nation-wide DPS rollout based on NUTS regional classifications. Thus a relational 'local' spatial imaginary (connecting local producers and consumers; linking the urban and rural) is implemented and administrated through applying territorial – in this case regional – boundaries.

⁶⁴ <https://www.dynamicfood.org/> (Last accessed 02/02/2023)

⁶⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background> (Last accessed 02/02/2023)

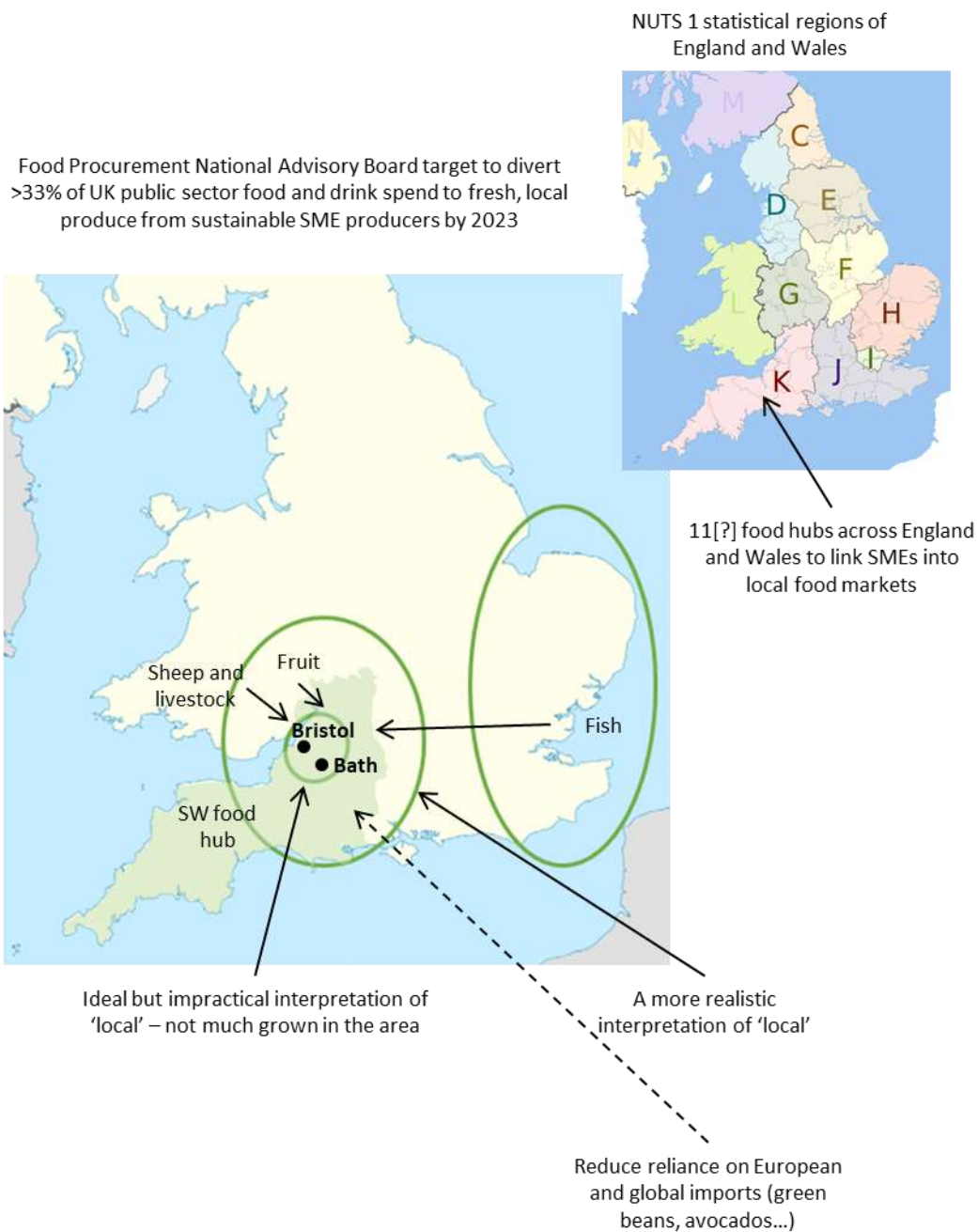


Figure 7.3 Bristol participant spatial vision

Attention is now turned to understanding why a compelling procurement-based (DPS) spatial imaginary has proliferated, how it is justified, and by whom. The imaginary has roots in the B&NES Food Strategy 2013-17⁶⁶, which committed to increasing the procurement and provision of 'good food' in the public sector.

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[https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/bath and north east somerset local food strategy_0.pdf](https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/bath%20and%20north%20east%20somerset%20local%20food%20strategy_0.pdf) (Last accessed 10/07/2023)

B&NES' decision to contract differently was the result of a new public health-driven food strategy, a newly appointed procurement manager and a committed Councillor motivated by a desire to support local businesses. The B&NES DPS pilot was also reflective of a wider drive to increase the ability of small and medium-sized food businesses to access public sector market. Public sector catering contracts (hospitals, schools, prisons etc.) are often targeted since the local authority has a higher degree of control. The DPS is an elegant solution to a number of barriers to transition identified by interview participants, including rigid and complex public procurement contract processes and practices, the scale of local production, the administrative burden of managing multiple, small contracts and lack of procurement expertise (also reflected in Wilkinson et al, 2022). The above response demonstrates a combination of committed individuals, political resolve, a shared desire to solve a recognised problem and scalability of the proposed solution.

More broadly, the DPS narrative has captured the collective imagination and demonstrates the capacity of some actors to access networks across multiple scales to influence the 'regime' (Coenen et al, 2012). It reveals a coming-together of visions and a level of alignment between B&NES unitary council, the South West region, Food Procurement National Advisory Board, Crown Commercial Service (CCS) and ultimately the (then) Secretary of State for Defra. This is illustrated in the quote below. Meanwhile, the National Food Strategy recommends an accelerated roll-out of the DPS (National Food Strategy, 2021).

“One of the reasons why Crown Commercial Service picked up [DPS] is that Michael Gove wanted to try and relocalise supply chains, try and get more farmers producing for ourselves, and doing this type of project was one way of doing that. So actually it was a response to the Conservative Secretary of State, what he wanted and that kind of vision.” **Bristol participant**

Ultimately the emergence of the DPS-related imaginary is reflective of a good idea at the right time, promoted by committed individuals and chiming with the prevailing thinking within the 'regime'. Thus the 'luck' factor is undoubtedly

powerful, although easily hampered by changes to individual roles and the prevailing political mood. Indeed, progress has been delayed as a result of changes in key CCS staff, and there is a recognised need to detach the ability to succeed with the presence (or absence) of specific individuals (Wilkinson et al, 2022). In time this may be achieved by institutionalising both the imaginary and supporting processes, thus shifting the transition potential from niche to regime. To summarise, there appear to be a number of pre-conditions supporting the emergence of the dynamic procurement spatial imaginary. These include the presence of committed individuals, political resolve and a high degree of alignment at local, regional and national levels, a shared desire to solve a recognised problem and the identification of a practical and scalable solution. Furthermore, the imaginary also reflects scalar flexibility/malleability. A shared desire to transition towards a greater proportion of local procurement is facilitated by a regional framework, thus blurring distinctions between the local and regional.

Vignette 2. ‘Rural capital of food’ spatial imaginary, Leicestershire case study

We return to the Melton ‘rural capital of food’ imaginary, as presented in Figure 5.8. The spatial imaginary was envisioned and championed by the Melton Mowbray Food Partnership. The Partnership itself was created in response to economic decline in the 1990s, defined by circumstances including ‘super pit’ and army depot closures and the impact of mad cow disease on rural communities. One participant disclosed how a range of options were considered to promote and differentiate the town. Potential points of distinction included antiques, horse racing and books. A decision was made to focus on Melton’s food reputation and infrastructure, something “*permanent and substantial*” reflecting the area’s food and manufacturing heart. As described in Chapter Five, a second imaginary focused on the territory of ‘Meltonshire’ was cemented through the EU Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) definition to protect and promote the production and manufacture of pork pies and Stilton cheese. Status was granted in 2008⁶⁷,

⁶⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/leicestershire/7652487.stm> (Last accessed 03/02/2023)

coming into effect in 2009⁶⁸. So two mutually supporting imaginaries were created: the 'rural capital of food' demarcated by boundary signs (visual cues) around the Borough of Melton; and the concept of 'Meltonshire' framed within a (different) EU PGI-defined border that cuts across existing administrative boundaries. The Food Partnership apparently expected the former to be challenged, see Chapter Five. However, the latter proved more controversial, with one food company taking its exclusion as far as the European Court of Appeal. The case was subsequently dropped⁶⁹. The local food focus reflects the development of spatial imaginaries sparked by economic opportunism, but also centring on local protectionism.

The vignette thus highlights a series of pragmatic responses to an identified problem, built around a compelling vision, driven by committed individuals, and capable of engaging politically and accessing levers of power. Despite a level of contention around the 'rural capital of food' and PGI boundaries, they provide a shared territorial understanding. The defined boundaries have economic meaning and are therefore a form of commercial gatekeeping, differentiating between what is local and what is not. The case of the Meltonshire spatial imaginary is especially interesting. This largely invisible but influential imaginary was designed to delineate a territorial boundary based on spatial-historical and spatial-economic aspects. While the concept of 'Meltonshire' itself doesn't appear to feature highly in the public conscious, it has quietly shaped the local economy and public image of the area. In this case, the imaginaries are unique and specific to the area and therefore neither directly repeatable nor scalable. They have been further amplified and cemented through media coverage, whether through luck or intention on the part of the food partnership (most likely a combination of the two). More widely, the emergence of these two complementary spatial visions demonstrate the power of imagination, enabling the construction of written, verbal and visual narratives around two iconic food products.

⁶⁸ Since Brexit, its EU PGI designation has been converted to a UK equivalent <https://www.countrylife.co.uk/food-drink/curious-questions-why-is-the-pork-pie-associated-with-melton-mowbray-247309> (Last accessed 06/02/2023)

⁶⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/leicestershire/6120164.stm> (Last accessed 03/02/2023)

Vignette 3. Kindness and the Incredible Edible imaginary, Calderdale case study

Shared meanings and definitions are pre-requisites to developing compelling spatial imaginaries. Chapter Six has already highlighted how defining ‘good food’ helped unite actors seeking food systems transition in Bristol, shifting the term from a broad platitude to an evocative ‘soundbite’. This vignette examines how shared meanings have been used both as a communications device and the ‘glue’ cementing a shared, value-centred focus. Specifically, it reflects on the development of the Incredible Edible movement in the town of Todmorden, built around the shared value of kindness. Creating a social justice movement around a universal value (few would argue for less kindness in the world) has reached a broad cross-section of the community, as well as striking a chord much further afield. The vignette positions Incredible Edible as a niche activity ‘gone global’, exploring how the movement has not only endured in the face of food system dissonance (Chapter Five) and internal dissonance (see below), but also why it resonates far beyond its place-based roots.

The Incredible Edible movement – united by a shared imaginary – is a broad church. While there is general agreement on the desired destination of transition (a kinder, fairer community), there is dissonance around how the imaginary should be achieved. Incredible Edible has certainly captured the collective imagination and garnered a lot of support. Around a third of Todmorden’s inhabitants have some involvement in the Incredible Edible movement (Hardman et al, 2019). Meanwhile, there are over 148 Incredible Edible groups within the UK and an estimated 1,000 groups worldwide⁷⁰. The imaginary itself encapsulates the shared principles of kindness, social change and justice, grassroots empowerment and local food, but there is disagreement around how the imaginary should be brought to life. It has been argued the Incredible Edible movement suggests “diversity and difference” both among community leaders and the relative emphasis of priorities (Campbell, 2019). This was also reflected in my interviews: while hard to argue with the common principles, there is

⁷⁰ <https://www.incredibleedible.org.uk/organisation-information/> (Last accessed 10/07/2023)

evidence of differences – even animosity – about how things should be done. The role of funding, the ‘commodification’ of Incredible Edible and factions within the movement were all topics of discussion. Despite internal factionalism, the movement has proliferated in the public and professional conscious. Most people have a view, from my Airbnb host to the Calderdale borough planners who cited it as an influence on the Draft Local Plan. So while there is divergence over the preferred path of implementation, the different approaches amongst Incredible Edible ‘leaders’ or proponents arguably make for a wider reach. This is reflected by different facets or representations of the movement including the Incredible Edible community movement in Todmorden⁷¹, Incredible Farm⁷², the Incredible Aquagarden (no longer operational) and the Incredible Edible Network⁷³. Returning to the multi-level perspective (MLP), the clarity and appeal of its imaginary has propelled Incredible Edible’s popularity as a niche-level movement. One might suggest diverse implementation methods and diffuse organisational structure limit any regime-level influence. This is intended as an observation rather than a criticism, since the ethos of the movement is to create stronger communities, inherently a niche-level activity.

One of the interesting facets of Incredible Edible is how it marries the potentially conflicting ideas of increasing local food production and delivering a fairer food system. While Incredible Edible’s roots are in guerrilla gardening, local food is positioned as a mechanism for delivering Incredible Edible’s broader social justice agenda. In the words of one participant, *“kindness will get us through political, economic, or whatever nature will throw at us...we’re using food and eating together as the most powerful tool we’ve got”*. The approach ascribes an instrumental value to food: activities like tending edible plants in public spaces or eating as a community help to build a kinder society. Thus, local food (whether grown, cooked or eaten locally) becomes a means to an end rather than valorised in its own right; a tool to develop and strengthen communities and create hope. Ultimately the Incredible Edible movement seeks to open up the community to a

⁷¹ <https://www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk/> (Last accessed 10/07/2023)

⁷² <https://incrediblefarm.co.uk/> (Last accessed 10/07/2023)

⁷³ <https://www.incredibleedible.org.uk/> (Last accessed 10/07/2023)

sense of what can be collectively achieved by “*showing what is possible in a cold, dark valley*”. Interviews highlighted how this expression of possibility resonates with a deep, place-based desire to challenge the perceived constraints of Calderdale’s marginal land, expressed by one participant as “*showing that these uplands, which are rejected as economic prospects for food economies, can nevertheless be very productive*”. The interviews reveal a common narrative around the need to understand what can be grown locally, re-discover local varieties and identify new crops compatible with local conditions. While the narrative rejects the idea of self-sufficiency as impractical, there is a deep sense that ‘more can (and should) be done’.

Despite some dissonance within the movement, the Incredible Edible imaginary brings an element of unity to a town that values autonomy (C6/F6), while differentiating Todmorden from other places. This research has established Calderdale is not perceived as a community. Rivalry across Calderdale’s upper valley is sometimes expressed through humour, for example the exchange between Cornholme and Hebden Bridge sparked by the contents of a library swap-box (note ‘kindness’ is stencilled on the bottom of the library box in the photo)⁷⁴, or the naming of Todmorden’s refill shop as ‘Tod Almighty’⁷⁵. While the neighbouring towns of Hebden Bridge and Todmorden have sought transition to address similar issues, their different responses reflect area-specific cultural dynamics. Hebden Bridge has positioned itself as a Transition Town, a movement deemed too middle class and abstract by Todmorden (Campbell, 2019). This desire for distinctiveness was described by one participant as “*the narcissism of small places*”. The connectedness of the Todmorden community is reinforced by visual cues, which play an important role in developing and reflecting a shared imaginary. It is impossible to miss the many ‘kindness’ signs; the word appears throughout the town including on shop fronts and café menus. Even more strikingly, ‘kindness’ is emblazoned on the hillside above the Morrisons supermarket in a nod to its more famous ‘Hollywood’ counterpart. One participant described how this is an act of making visible the invisible:

⁷⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-56948184> (Last accessed 10/07/2023)

⁷⁵ <https://www.todalmighty.co.uk/> (Last accessed 10/07/2023)

“Right from the beginning we thought kindness would be good...sometimes to have a value and an ethos is great, but it’s invisible. So we thought we’d use the power... So people have told me, people have broke down and cried getting out their car [on seeing the Kindness sign above Morrisons]. Or looking at it they, apparently when the brain recognises a positive word a tiny bit of serotonin...so it actually has a chemical effect to see something positive. And, so it just became a thing...people know Todmorden’s a vegetable town, but it’s also a kind town.” **Calderdale participant**

The Incredible Edible movement also invokes a “*dramatic visual imagery*” with the sudden appearance of “*vegetable beds bursting with leeks, cabbages, runner beans...*” (Campbell, 2019). Thus successful spatial imaginaries may be reinforced by visual reminders of their place-based, unique identities, signalling difference.

To conclude, a key strength of the Incredible Edible imaginary is its focus on values which have united communities around a desired destination of transition. The fact that every interview participant referenced Incredible Edible during the conversation underlines its embeddedness. While the imaginary evokes a sense of difference within the town of Todmorden itself, the imaginary is not dependent on or limited by specific spatial boundaries. This gives the movement the flexibility to spread between locations (as a ‘niche’ activity). Disagreement and factionalism over *how* the imaginary should be implemented reduces the potential for regime-level influence. Yet the vignette also highlights there is value in creative conflict: while there are tensions around how the desired destination of transition should be achieved, it is not a barrier to ‘getting things done’. Incredible Edible – and indeed many other Calderdale food initiatives and movements – pre-date the rise of the SFP-led food partnership movement. Quite apart from the cultural tendency towards autonomy and a prevailing view that Calderdale is not a community, the relatively late entry of the Calderdale Food Network may make it harder for the food partnership to gain traction in an already crowded field.

Finding 8 has reflected on the conditions required for spatial imaginaries to coalesce and thrive. The three vignettes suggest successful spatial imaginaries capture the collective imagination by offering a compelling vision that is relatable, shared and acted upon. While this is not intended as a comprehensive list of characteristics, it reveals something about the relationship between spatial imaginaries and transition. To conclude the finding, each of these conditions is visited in turn.

Successful spatial imaginaries present a convincing alternative to a recognised problem and/or offer a more compelling vision of the future. Returning again to Watkins' spatial imaginary classifications (Watkins, 2015), one might say the vision communicated by each vignette reflects an 'idealised space imaginary'. In other words, it conjures a persuasive image of what the desired destination of transition looks and feels like. This could be the idea of living in a town centred on kindness, or a place distinguished by its food culture, or normalising the procurement of fresh, locally grown produce. Such spatial imaginaries capture the collective imagination, becoming a short-hand expression of what is desirable ('good food', 'kindness town', 'rural capital of food', 'sustainable food place') and may be reinforced by visual cues. This semiotics connection is not explored in this thesis, but would make for interesting line of enquiry in future, see Section 9.3. While each vignette invokes relocalisation as a 'spatial transformation imaginary' to reflect how places could or should evolve (Watkins, 2015), the vignettes vary in their level of prescriptiveness about how such rescaling should be implemented. On one hand, the DPS 'short supply chain' vignette presents a clear course of action and defines how 'local' is scaled by invoking regional borders. By contrast, Incredible Edible factions have markedly different ideas on how its principles should be implemented in practice and rather less emphasis on rescaling. From these limited examples, one might tentatively say there could be a degree of harmony around the desired destination of transition (idealised space imaginary) but greater dissonance around how to get there/how to rescale (spatial transformation imaginary). Rescaling is often an inherent part of this spatial transformation. As the spatial mapping approach directly explores interpretations of rescaling, it is a valuable asset in better understanding both the process and framing of transition, see Chapter Eight.

The second feature is that compelling spatial imaginaries need to garner widespread (individual, political, community, organisational) support and a high degree of alignment around the desired destination of transition. On the surface, the vignettes indicate ‘anyone’ can create an imaginary; they are variously rooted in the imaginations of local government employees, grass roots activists, elected leaders and local businesses. However, what matters is not only the quality and resonance of the imaginary, but also an ability to engage with levers of power. For example, one of the Incredible Edible founders has also held a series of high profile roles including Calderdale Council Leader and serving on the Board of Natural England. This links into the third feature of actionability, where spatial imaginaries tread a fine balance between creativity and the potential for implementation. The idea of actionability – how spatial imaginaries are modified by material practices – is further explored in Finding 9 and the subsequent Discussion and Reflection section.

Fourthly, compelling spatial imaginaries are often applicable more widely, either through transfer between locations (niche to niche), or by scaling up (niche to regime). Incredible Edible is an example of niche-to-niche transfer, while the DPS is in the process of scaling up from niche to regime. The case of Meltonshire is unique and thus not directly transferrable or scalable, though of course there are lessons for other locations seeking to differentiate themselves. This highlights how imaginaries bounded at the local scale (Smith and Tidwell, 2016) should not necessarily be interpreted as a less powerful or ‘failed’ compared to transferable or scalable imaginaries. Scaling up and out is just one potential transition pathway (Pitt and Jones, 2016), and powerful spatial imaginaries may be uniquely place-based. Finally, there is still an element of luck and good fortune in accelerating particular spatial imaginaries. One participant described this as “*the stars aligning*”, highlighting a dependency on the presence (or absence) and support of key individuals. So the difference between imaginaries flourishing and failing can at times be marginal, conditional and unpredictable.

Collectively the three vignettes exhibit a shared narrative around the need to both increase availability of local food and link local producers and consumers.

Together they reveal ‘successful’ spatial imaginaries to be powerful shared visions that capture the collective imagination and are capable of shaping – and are in turn shaped by – everyday practices and behaviours. Spatial imaginaries gaining most traction are often place-specific (‘Kindness Town’; ‘Rural Food Capital’, ‘good food’ city). This resonates with academic literature positioning the need for food partnerships to apply their own place-based interpretations of SFP’s translocal imaginary (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018). This is not just about catchy slogans, but developing shared spatial identities by connecting the practical (what is feasible) with the imaginative (aspirational).

Finding 9. There is a divergence between the problem-focused transition levers adopted in food partnership action plans and the mindset-focused transition levers of individual activists seeking food system change

The research has positioned material practices as the everyday activities and behaviours seeking to transition the food system through rescaling (Finding 7). Furthermore, it has illustrated how the development of spatial imaginaries is limited by the actionability of the everyday activities required to deliver sought transition pathways (Finding 8). Finding 9 focuses on how individual visions and shared imaginaries are implemented and practiced. In order to do this, food partnerships’ action plans have been assessed alongside the solutions identified by participants through the interview and mapping process. These actions and solutions are collectively positioned as ‘transition levers’, in other words, the controls required to transform food systems. Thus it is assumed the written-down action plans reflect the transition levers required to deliver food partnership spatial imaginaries. Similarly, the solutions identified by participants reveal the transition levers that connect with their individual spatial visions. The evidence presented below indicates food partnerships’ transition levers focus on solving problems, whereas the transition levers identified by individuals relate to shifting mindsets. This questions whether problem-focused transition levers alone are sufficiently effective in driving transformative change. In future, more work is required to investigate the nature of the mutually reinforcing feedback loop between imagination and practice. This last point is developed in the next section.

Drawing on the document review, I sought to assess transition levers identified in UK food partnerships' action plans. The SFP framework implies that targeting actions towards the 'six key issues' will collectively enable food partnerships to drive transformative change. Indeed, food partnerships often draw on the six key issues to structure their action plans. This suggests that from a SFP perspective, the 'key issues' approach has been successfully internalised. For the purposes of the analysis, the six key issues are deemed to be 'transition levers'. To this end, Figure 7.5 maps food partnership action commitments against SFP's six key issues. Specifically, it highlights the number of actions aligned to each key issue, indicating the relative attention or priority given to each. Figure 7.5 demonstrates food partnerships do not engage equally with each of the 'key issues' (transition levers). Food partnerships are most willing or able to engage in activities to build community capacity and capability, improve food access and reduce the ecological footprint associated with food waste. Conversely, catering and food procurement receives least attention. Furthermore, designated actions do not necessarily mean the food partnership has triggered the activity, or is even involved. The third area (waste/ecological footprint) is perhaps particularly misleading since the actions listed most often relate to local authority food waste collection schemes. In other words, actions that would have been undertaken regardless of the presence of a food partnership. So what does this mean? Food partnerships are not generally in a position to pull policy levers (Parsons and Barling, 2021), so their primary mode of operation is to seek influence, see Chapter Four. Yet as we see in Figure 7.5, some issues receive more attention than others. Furthermore, not all food partnerships are equally set up to drive transformational change (C6/F5). Thus, the six key issues may be used as 'headlines' to consolidate and communicate ongoing activities undertaken by a range of organisations (i.e. what is already in place) rather than generating new or novel activity.

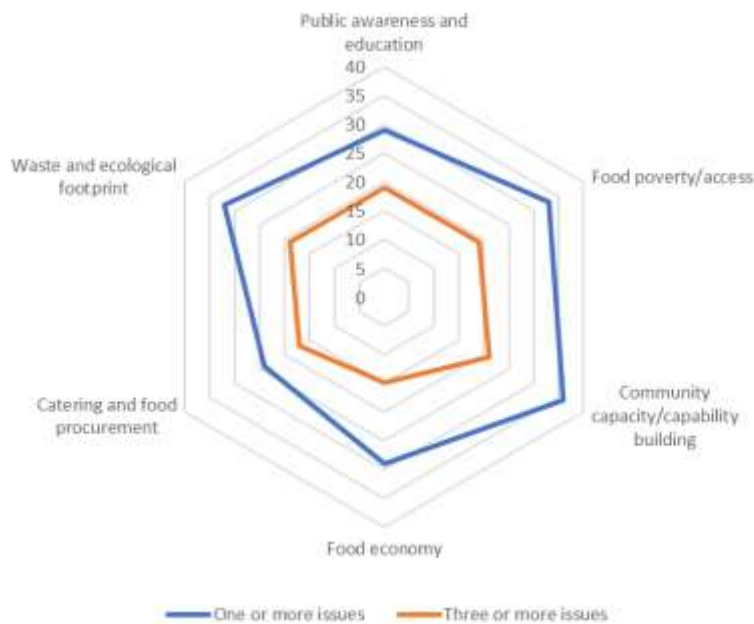


Figure 7.5 Food partnership 'current actions' mapped against SFP-defined 'key issues'

The next tranche of analysis examines the extent to which there is coherence between the levers of transition identified i) in food partnership written documentation and ii) by individual case study participants engaged in seeking food system transition. Several caveats need to be placed on how transition levers were derived from the interview and mapping process. The interview transition lever categories are based on common narratives regarding ongoing activities and the actions required to deliver more desirable food futures. The categories could have been assembled in a number of different ways, and the final selection is subject to the researcher's interpretation. It would also have been helpful to compare the common interview narratives against written action plans. However, action plans were not in place for Leicestershire and Calderdale at the time of the review. In retrospect, this was an oversight in the case study selection. Notwithstanding data limitations, positioning the transition levers side by side in Table 7.1 highlights immediate differences in approach. Written plans modelled around the SFP six key issues channel actions towards 'areas to be fixed'. The desire to focus on single issues is certainly not unique to food partnerships (Parsons and Barling, 2021). By contrast, interview participants recognise a need to shift 'how we do things' in order to transition our food systems.

Table 7.1 Identifying transition levers

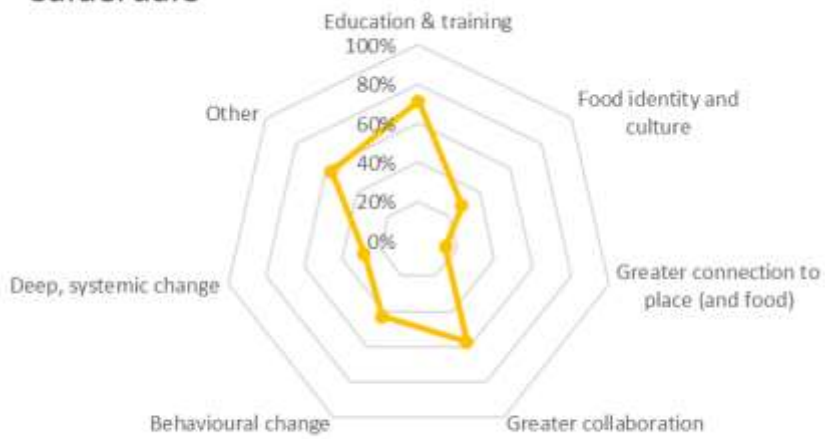
SFP six key issues	Interview six key narratives
Public awareness and education	Education and training
Food poverty/access	Food identity and culture
Community capacity and capability building	Greater collaboration
Food economy	Behavioural change
Catering and food procurement	Deep systemic change
Waste and ecological footprint	Connection to place

The transition levers identified through the interview narrative analysis are now examined in more detail. Once again they reveal more nuanced interpretations beneath seemingly shared action areas. Figure 7.6 demonstrates that while a set of common narratives emerged during the interviews, each case study has a unique footprint emphasising different action areas. Table 7.2 below takes this a step further by beginning to unpack how the top three transition levers are interpreted within each case study.

Bristol



Calderdale



Leicestershire

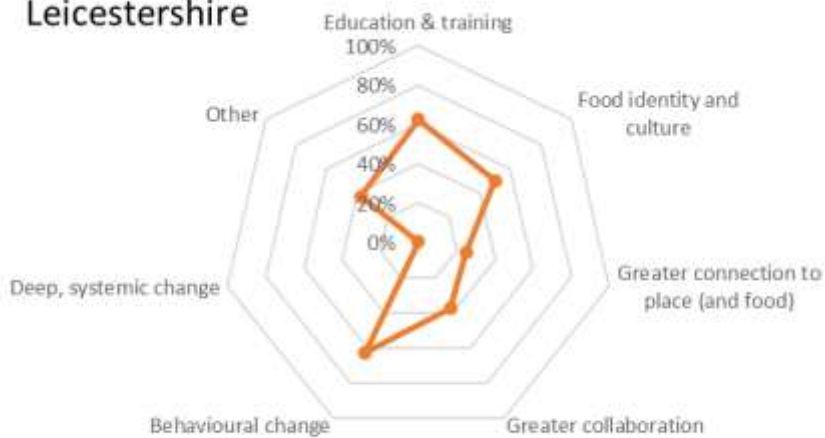


Figure 7.6 Transition levers by case study: common narratives

Dietary change is widely recognised as a transition lever within the case study interviews and food partnership action plans, Table 7.2. Action plans often promote dietary change as a subset of the public awareness and education category. Furthermore, eighteen food partnership charters contain dietary change-related recommendations for individuals, broadly relating to buying and eating more local and seasonal produce, cooking from scratch and growing food at home or in an allotment. Collectively this emphasises the role (and responsibility) of the individual in transitioning food systems through changes in dietary behaviours. Turning to the interviews and spatial mapping exercise, participants regularly referenced a need to increase plant-based content, improve cooking skills, limit processed food and develop more seasonal eating habits. Given Leicestershire's food manufacturing heritage, greater emphasis was placed on dietary change through switching to locally produced raw materials and reformulation to support healthier and more environmentally conscious diets. This Leicestershire example shifts the action away from the individual and towards the corporate, though still encompassing the importance of personal taste, preferences and cultural habits. Of course, the interviews picked up dissonance over dietary 'hot potatoes' including the role of meat, the shift towards highly processed plant-based proteins and the relative value of product reformulation. But there is a relatively high degree of consensus around the need to examine and transform our diets as part of any transition towards healthier and more sustainable food systems.

Yet Table 7.2 also indicates differences in case study interpretations of seemingly common transition lever narratives. For example, while both Bristol and Calderdale seek greater collaboration, they are positioned differently. Bristol participants identified a need to build connections with organisations outside the city limits, connecting the urban and rural. This is consistent with some challenging targets in the Bristol One City Plan, including that 20% of food consumed in the city should come from sustainable producers in the city region by 2034. Given Calderdale participants' highly individual spatial visions (Table 5.3; Figure 5.11) and an 'individual agency' classification (Table 6.3), the desire for greater cooperation could be seen as counterintuitive. Yet participants' comments suggest the idea of cooperatives and/or loose affiliations between

different communities are valued. The ‘greater collaboration’ example highlights differing interpretations: one focusing essentially on developing multi-scalar connections; the other on strengthening community networks.

Table 7.2 Transition levers by case study: unpacking the top three narratives⁷⁶

Transition levers	Bristol	Calderdale	Leicestershire
Behavioural change	Dietary change	Kindness; dietary change	Dietary change
Greater collaboration	City engages with (spatially) wider organisations; unity around common aim; diverse voices	Cooperatives and loose community connections; planning-public health collaboration	Between county, districts and LLEP; between producers, manufacturers, LAs and public
Education and training	More support of food business start-ups	Better skills through local investment; Todmorden Community College	Embedded in school curriculum; preserve historical skills; apprenticeships
Deep, systemic change	Uncouple local food systems from capitalism; indep. financing	Change economic business model and adopt self-sufficiency narrative	Not applicable (work within existing structures)
Food identity and culture	Develop culture of appreciating and celebrating food	Recognise, celebrate and/or reinvent diverse food cultures and practices	Celebrate local specialities and contribution of diverse communities

It is possible the document review and interview datasets require adjustment to increase comparability, see Section 7.3. Furthermore, it should be remembered interview participants only represent a small subset of a much broader community. Notwithstanding these caveats, the evidence presented above indicates a potential misalignment between the sought transition levers of food partnerships and the individuals working within or alongside them. The pervasiveness of the six key issues encourage food partnerships to associate transition levers (or “control knobs”) with fixing specific problems (Parsons and Barling, 2021). Conversely, individual participants are more likely to identify broader transition levers to change mindsets, see Table 7.2. This is not necessarily a problem, but deserves to be better understood in order to construct

⁷⁶ Note the greyed-out boxes relate to common narratives around key themes that didn’t fall into the ‘top three’ of the case study in question

stronger links between vision and action. It is also worth pausing to reflect on whether food partnership actions focus on what they believe to be the most critical transition levers, or the levers they are most able to influence (there may be a degree of overlap between the two).

7.3 Discussion and reflection

RQ3 responds to a call for greater understanding of *how* spatial imaginaries are influenced by material practices (Watkins, 2015). Specifically it seeks to shed light on how spatial imaginaries are shaped, modified, legitimised and enacted by the material practices associated with ‘doing transitions’. Findings 7 – 9 collectively contribute to understanding the ‘relational triangle’ between spatial imaginaries, transition and scale. This statement is explained by revisiting each finding in turn. Firstly, applying Watkins’ classifications (Watkins, 2015), rescaling is positioned as a spatial transformation imaginary (Finding 7), and the shared desired destination of transition as an idealised space imaginary (Finding 8). To expand, food partnerships generally seek relocalisation (spatial transformation imaginary) towards a collectively defined food future (idealised space imaginary). Finding 8 presents evidence to suggest dominant imaginaries are influenced by the relative ease of undertaking particular transition activities over others. In other words, certain imaginaries are promoted according to what is achievable in practice and/or limited by everyday realities. Thus there is a tension between what is imagined and what is actionable. Finding 9 draws attention to a potential misalignment between food partnership action plans and the transition levers identified by individuals seeking food system change. This opens wider questions about whether there may be a disconnection between spatial imaginaries and the everyday activities associated with ‘doing transitions’. That is to say, the everyday actions may not be aligned with the adopted imaginary. The relational triangle is further developed and examined in Chapter Eight. Each finding is extended through the reflections below, before drawing wider inferences at the end of the section.

While rescaling is central to re-imagining food system transitions (Finding 7), there is a potential mismatch between the instrumental arguments used for

justifying food system relocalisation in written documentation, and the deeply-held beliefs of individuals seeking transition. Food partnerships lean towards (relatively narrow) economic arguments in food partnership documents and generally steer clear of connecting relocalisation with reducing food poverty. Meanwhile, individual participants seeking food system transition generally reveal rescaled spatial visions motivated by the desire for greater sustainability and social justice. It could be that economic justifications have the greatest evidence base. An often-quoted figure is that for every £10 spent with an independent, local business, over a third (£3.80) is retained in the area⁷⁷. Interviews quite often revealed a level of tension between social justice and localism (C5/F3). Yet, the idea of social justice is somehow bound up with the idea of local food systems, a deep-seated belief that local food systems *should* be more just, even if it is not necessarily the case in practice. While the Incredible Edible vignette shows how local food can be harnessed as a tool for social justice (Finding 8), it is perhaps Bristol that most overtly seeks to combine the twin aims of re-localising food systems and improving social justice:

“I guess for me...I don’t see [local food and social justice] as incompatible because if we had a relocalised food system...say the town was able to source its food from its bioregion, that form of localised...then the levels of supply would totally shift the dynamics of the market.”

Bristol participant

This may connect with a greater desire for deeper, systemic change (Finding 9), reflecting the individuals involved, how the food system has been framed (Carey, 2011) and the level of maturity of Bristol’s food movement. To summarise, divergences between collectively documented and personally imagined visions reveal potential tensions between what is politically palatable and economically justifiable, and the deep-seated views and values of individual participants.

⁷⁷ Visa/Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) report (2020) <https://www.visa.co.uk/content/dam/VCOM/regional/ve/unitedkingdom/PDF/blog/visa-wysm-report-2020-031220.pdf> (Last accessed 11/07/2023)

Finding 8 highlights a mutually reinforcing relationship between imaginaries and material practices and provides several practical examples of how individuals coalesce around a shared spatial vision. Three vignettes explore the relationship between an emerging spatial imaginary and its potential to influence decision-making, including in relation to policy direction and funding. Collectively the vignettes reveal how the desired destinations of transition are, by turn, ideological, evolutionary, political, contentious, pragmatic and fluid. A series of pre-conditions emerge for spatial imaginaries to coalesce and flourish; and the particular condition of 'actionability' describes this mutually reinforcing relationship between imagining and doing, connecting with the notion that imaginaries are performative (Watkins, 2015, Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). It is clear the local food system imaginary has captured the collective imagination. Yet this raises two related questions. Firstly, what is the role of pragmatism or 'actionability' in favouring the local? Secondly, why have alternative imaginaries have been overlooked or discarded? Each question is now examined in turn.

Tackling the first question, UK food partnerships' preference for local imaginaries is rooted in pragmatism, not least because they are compatible with (or at least do not directly conflict with) existing political and administrative structures. As already highlighted in C5/F3, the 'local food' concept is sufficiently malleable and adaptable to a variety of place-specific circumstances. This is especially helpful when i) food partnerships generally do not have a formal mandate i.e. are in a position of influence rather than control and ii) there are weak regional structures. The ways in which SFP has responded to these challenges are covered later in this section. Localism is perhaps the least prescriptive of the food system imaginaries, see Table 2.1. This flex allows for multiple meanings and interpretations of 'local' to exist within and between food partnerships, as illustrated by the participant mapping exercise.

Turning to the second question, I return to the interview and mapping data to explore why alternative spatial imaginaries are have failed to capture the collective imagination in the same way. A subsection of participants frame their spatial visions in a way that combines city region and bioregional thinking. While the city-region movement has largely failed to take root, the Bristol food

movement is a notable exception. The greater propensity for city-region thinking can be partially explained by Bristol's geographical placement as a core city within the South West region (reliant on its hinterland) and the approach taken in the influential Who Feeds Bristol report (Carey, 2011). Through its actions, the Bristol food movement is expanding influence beyond city borders, for example by gaining commitment to targets that cannot be delivered by the city alone. Still the question arises – why does the city region, or re-regionalisation for that matter, have less transaction in the UK compared to some other European countries? Similarly, why has the notion of the foodshed, popular amongst US food partnerships (Sonnino, 2019), not captured the collective imagination in the UK? A subset of interviews pointed to the current model of land ownership and control in the UK (and especially England) is a barrier to re-imagining food systems on other ways.

“A lot of international models don't work because they...they rely on cities, communities owning the land. Yeah, you need to find models that work in this country that are based on private land, that would make it work for the landowner. [Prices are higher] because the food growers are having to rent land from private landowners to grow their good and then pay a living wage to themselves and to have housing themselves.”

National participant

Thus there is a group of participants, particularly within the Bristol and Calderdale case studies, that recognise the need for land reform. Proposed solutions included changes in land ownership (e.g. through the inheritance tax system), the use of cooperatives (despite what is described by one participant as their *“fraught and problematic nature”*; see also Nunes and Parker, 2021), or council land made available to community growing projects and small businesses. For some, land use reform is a route to fusing the localisation of food systems with social justice principles (see above). Merging the two questions, a pattern is revealed whereby a pragmatic local food imaginary flourishes, broadly set within, or certainly not contradictory to existing administrative, political, geographical boundaries. Negating the need to seek more fundamental structural change, this imaginary risks locking out alternative imaginaries and locking in institutional norms.

Responding to RQ3 begins to probe the 'edges' or limits of the research. Finding 9 reveals something of the relationship between the problem-focused transition levers adopted in food partnership action plans and the mindset-focused transition levers of active individuals seeking food system change. More widely, the research sheds light on why local food imaginaries flourish over other spatial alternatives. However, the available data falls short of unlocking the relationship between the everyday practices associated with 'doing transitions' and the justification of certain spatial imaginaries over others. In other words, it fails to fully illuminate the feedback loop between action and vision. To this end, the interview and spatial mapping method could be extended to examine participant views on the relationship between written actions and the extent of their contribution to food system transition. That is to say, the degree to which the practical actions identified in food partnership plans are set up to deliver (or are capable of delivering) transformative change.

7.4 Conclusion

Chapter Seven has examined the ways in which visions and spatial imaginaries are formed, shared, prioritised and validated. It also explores the mutually reinforcing, potentially transformative relationship between spatial imaginaries and material practices. Finally, and building on Chapter Five, it further evidences divergences between food partnership written documents and the values and aspirations of individuals seeking food system transition. This raises questions about the nature of visions themselves: whether shared imaginaries are represented by the negotiated goals of transition documented in strategies, or stem from value-laden, innate and often unspoken 'alternative' visualisations in the hearts and minds of transition actors. This question is addressed in the next chapter. More widely, Chapter Eight builds on the nine findings presented in Chapters Five to Seven to demonstrate both the value and limitations of the mapping exercise in the context of this research and the concept of the 'relational triangle' between spatial imaginaries, rescaling and transition.

8. Further discussion

This chapter draws together the nine research findings (Chapters Five to Seven) and three data collection methods (desktop review, interviews and spatial mapping exercise) to make some wider research-based observations and recommendations. The chapter details and evaluates the contribution of this research in two key areas: spatial mapping methods (Section 8.1) and spatial imaginaries and sustainability transitions thinking (Section 8.2). Section 8.1 takes a broader view of the spatial mapping exercise. It argues the value of the spatial mapping approach lies in providing unique insights into the spatial thought processes of individuals seeking to transition the food system. It reflects on the process, opportunities and limitations associated with the spatial mapping approach, thus responding to the question of what maps add that can't be gained from words alone (Gieseeking, 2013). Section 8.2 discusses the 'relational triangle' between spatial imaginaries, transitions and rescaling, and the benefits of their combination. It examines the complex and continually shifting relationship between individual visions, written visions and common spatial imaginaries. It highlights the risk of assuming alignment between the three elements, and assesses the implications of this in research and practice terms. It concludes by presenting a practical example of how Covid – a landscape shift – has impacted on both the process and the desired destinations of transition.

8.1 Contribution to spatial mapping methods

This section examines how maps are key to unlocking imagination and exploring spatial thinking around food systems. The first subsection builds on previous discussions of mental mapping methods (Chapters Three and Four). It reflects on the uniqueness of the selected approach that uses a spatial mapping exercise to augment semi-structured interviews. It discusses the impact of the changes required as a result of pandemic restrictions during the data collection period and evaluates the relative benefits of the original and adapted methods. Finally, it considers the method's original contribution to research. The second subsection highlights the limitations and challenges of the approach, and how they were overcome. Such challenges include limits to spatial thinking and how to ensure full participant engagement. The third subsection focuses on practical options to

extend the work to engage a greater diversity of actors and ultimately develop more informed and reflexive spatial visions and strategies. The final subsection concludes with some additional reflections on the spatial mapping method and reinforces the areas of original contribution.

8.1.1 A unique method

The spatial mapping approach is unique in extending beyond semi-structured interviews (Hincks et al, 2017), using mapping to explore both *current and future* spatial imaginaries of food system transitions (Feola et al, 2023). In this way, the research is differentiated from a handful of examples drawing on maps to shed light on *current* food-related socio-spatial imaginaries (Libman, 2012; Lamalice et al, 2020). As already highlighted in Chapter Three, the spatial mapping method underwent significant revisions in response to the first UK lockdown. The relative benefits and disadvantages of each are summarised in Table 8.1 below. For clarity, the term ‘mental mapping method’ refers to the original approach whereby participants created their own map, either from a blank sheet of paper or by selecting from a range of differently-scaled maps. The term ‘revised mapping method’ refers to a more collaborative process whereby the initial map was drafted by the researcher, drawing on carefully worded discussions with each of the participants. Both approaches are fully documented in Chapter Three (mental mapping) and Chapter Four (mapping challenges). The two variants are collectively referred to as the spatial mapping ‘approach’, ‘method’ or ‘exercise’. As already stated, there was roughly a 50/50 split between the two approaches. Revising the mapping method was a necessity, and as such the research does not favour one method over the other. The section is therefore dedicated to reflecting on the value added by the mapping method in general, and the relative benefits of the original and revised approach.

Table 8.1 Relative benefits and limitations of the spatial mapping methods

Original mental mapping method	Revised mapping method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extends beyond verbal narratives • Greater variation in quality • Greater freedom of expression • Less researcher input/influence • Limited by lack of confidence and/or willingness to engage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliant on words to express visual narratives • Greater standardisation • Increased comparability between maps • Greater level of researcher input/influence • Greater uptake (less intimidating task)

Participant mental maps (original method) are found to be incomplete, unique, and context and time-dependent. The mental mapping outputs reveal each spatial vision to be unique to the individual that created it (several examples are included in Appendix 5). Furthermore, each vision reflects a particular time and place, influenced by a distinct set of circumstances. Follow-up interviews demonstrated how individual conceptualisations of more desirable food futures evolve over time. For example, several participants updated their spatial maps to reflect new roles, a change to their organisation’s direction and/or their experience of the pandemic. The combination of shifting influences may create a level of discomfort for participants as they seek to find a balance. Several participants talked about the tension in balancing their personal vision against that of the organisation they represent, indicating that maps may convey a personal or organisational point of view, or a hybrid of the two:

*“...there’s always that crossover between the personal and the organisational. So I often express the vision I have and then think I need to row back a bit because it’s not all about me.” **Leicestershire participant***

This illustrates how individual visions of both the present and the (desired) future are malleable and context-dependent. Each mental map is unique to a time, place and individual, and is also, by its very nature, incomplete. As Reid (2018) observes, *“maps may pretend merely to record knowledge, but in fact help to shape it through choices about what to leave out, what to include and how to represent it”*. Thus, maps are a product of – and limited by – the knowledge and imagination of the creator, set in place and time.

Since each map is a window into the spatial imaginings of the participant, it provides clues about their values, motivations and assumptions. Firstly, the act of map generation has the potential to expose implicit assumptions about the ways in which we imagine and seek to enact relocalised food systems. This is covered in more detail in subsequent paragraphs about the benefits of visual thinking. Secondly, the participant-drawn maps collectively highlight a diversity of approaches. By way of example, the first quote below evokes images of a human-centred vision starting with a family; the second imagines a short, inter-connected supply chain tempered by the need to work pragmatically. In this respect, the act of mapping often draws attention to what matters most to participants.

*“I’d start with a little family...there’s a veg box...cooking from scratch...there’s a little chopping board...how it’s normal to sit down in brilliant company and share food together...how it’s normal for them to go to their local shops...and I can imagine that happening even in the most deprived areas.” **Bristol participant***

*“That would be absolutely fantastic if we could get everything from that bit there [draws a dotted concentric circle about the size of West of England]...because it make sense, you’ve got completely short supply chains, you’ve got your local employment going on in there, everything kind of feeds really well into that. That would be great. But...there’s not very much actually grown in that area...in terms of variety...quantity but not variety. So if you start to go further round...” **Bristol participant***

The act of creating a map encourages visual thinking. The original spatial mapping method in particular reveals the power of asking ‘*show me*’ rather than ‘*tell me*’ in order to capture spatial ideas and beliefs that would otherwise not be expressed in a traditional interview setting. This is also true – although to a lesser extent – of the revised mapping method: while the map is verbally negotiated, it is still likely that the process of spatial imagining triggers thoughts and ideas that otherwise would not have been raised in conversation. Figure 5.6 illustrates the power of the visual narrative where a participant positioned Wales outside their

'desired future food system' boundary, and indeed outside the rest of the UK. The physical division on the map indicates a perception of 'otherness', which could be interpreted as geographic, political, cultural and/or administrative separateness of Wales. While several other Bristol participants raised the 'Wales question', the mental map was an unprompted visual expression of boundary interpretation. In this way, it exposes implicit assumptions around the desired scaling and design of local food systems.

The spatial mapping method can also prompt verbal responses that otherwise would not have been revealed. In this way it extends understanding beyond the verbal, while recognising that the method still often relies on words to interpret the narrative (Powell, 2010). For example, the way in which participants pondered their map selections during the original mental mapping approach provided insight into their spatial thought processes:

*"I would probably be drawn to the ones that, these...so just looking on our borders, I would say each one that is, each county that neighbours, each county we have a border with." **Leicestershire participant***

*"Yeah, but where's the map of Tod[morden]? Really I don't care about..."
Calderdale participant*

In summary, both the original and revised mapping methods (Table 8.1) demonstrate the complexity and richness of individual visions underpinning or in the absence of wider spatial imaginaries. The original mental mapping method offered participants greater freedom to express themselves with less researcher input. On the other hand, there was a greater variation in quality, ranging from a few markings to detailed interpretations. The revised mapping method provided greater standardisation, and thus increased comparability. However, despite careful planning, it was impossible to reduce the researcher's 'fingerprint'. The maps themselves are incomplete representations of the experience, values, knowledge, conditions, gaps and biases of the authors. This highlights the importance of engaging a wide(r) diversity of actors across the food supply chain (Chapter Six). Put simply, not everyone wants the same thing. I will go on to

present the value to both theory and practice of the spatial mapping method before concluding the subsection.

To the best of my knowledge, mental maps have not previously been combined to explore the relationship between individual spatial visions and collective imaginaries of future (more desirable) food systems. There are a handful of examples where mental maps have been used to examine individual elements: exploring food imaginaries (Libman, 2012; Lamalice et al, 2020); investigating the relationship between individual visions and shared imaginaries (Reid, 2018); and examining imagined futures (Fenster, 2009). This approach therefore makes an original contribution by bringing the three elements together within an adapted, novel spatial mapping method. There is an established need to examine what lies beneath seemingly shared spatial imaginaries. Yet most relevant research has assumed the spatial imaginary to be embedded in written documentation (Sonnino, 2016; Bergman, 2017; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). Applying the spatial mapping method helps to tease out points of convergence and divergence between individual visions, written strategies and seemingly shared spatial imaginaries. By way of example, this can be illustrated by examining the Bristol participants' spatial maps in Appendix 5. The maps collectively reveal a common understanding of the West of England as 'local' (see also Table 5.3) and connect more widely with a shared (and documented) imaginary around 'good food'. However, the maps also invoke diverse spatial ideas including city-regionalism, bioregionalism, urban agroecology, the peri-urban, more-than-regional, national self-sufficiency, principles of subsidiarity and political-administrative constructs including the South West region and the Western Gateway. More specifically, the mapping also raises questions about the city's relationship with Wales, see Figure 5.6. Thus the spatial mapping approach assists in building a more nuanced picture of how spatial imaginaries are formed, legitimised and justified, and where they are most clearly expressed.

Furthermore, the spatial mapping method pushes the limits of participants' imagination, testing the notion that visions of the future are grounded in (and by inference, limited by) current realities (Smith and Tidwell, 2016). By exploring future as well as current visions, the spatial mapping method extends beyond the

realm of 'what is', to reflect on 'what if' (Hopkins, 2019). While this is freeing in theory, Chapter Five illustrates many of the same borders, barriers and institutional structures are still present in participants' imagined futures. Again, this caused an element of internal conflict as participants struggled with how rooted their visions of the future should be. This was resolved by one participant who differentiated between a 'utopian' and an 'optimistic realism' vision. So, what does all this tell us? Firstly, it indicates our ability to re-imagine the future is often seen through the lens of the present. This point resonates with the recent findings of Feola et al (2023). Secondly, it provides a counterpoint to the claim that administrative borders and boundaries are being broken down by 'new localism' (Sonnino 2016 and 2019). Instead, it suggests a limited appetite to challenge and remake existing structures. Thus, the dominant 'local' spatial imaginary often remains locked within administrative and political borders and boundaries. Underpinning this, what emerges is a far more complex picture of individual spatial visions converging and diverging beneath 'local food system' platitudes. These matters are examined in more detail in Section 8.2.

The spatial mapping method has the potential to facilitate collaboration, and thus makes an original contribution to practice. It is capable of fostering greater communication and understanding between individuals and groups, as well as engaging a wider group of actors. Participants experiencing the original mental mapping method often commented that they found the process interesting and thought-provoking. Some participants also expressed appreciation of how the visual and verbal narratives had been combined in the interview feedback. Furthermore, participants often expressed an interest in seeing the maps of others and/or meeting with other participants to use the research as a springboard for discussion. An assortment of examples are listed below:

"It was a clever way of presenting it really, interesting." **National participant**

"Well you've given me lots of food for thought." **Bristol participant**

"Did people come up with similar things?" **Bristol participant**

*“I’d be up for that [meeting with other participants], I think it would be very interesting.” **Bristol participant***

*“It’s quite interesting looking at it from the perspective of the spatial...it’s a different space to think about.” **Leicestershire participant***

Since exciting things can happen when maps are used as a means to understand different viewpoints and increase agency (Gieseck, 2013), there is an opportunity to use spatial mapping not only to reveal individual visions, but to open a conversation on how spatial visions could be achieved. Thus the spatial mapping method is an example of an experimental approach seeking to encourage critical thinking and potentially even *“inspire new imaginaries”* (Wilde et al, 2021). Practical opportunities to improve collaboration – within and beyond food partnerships – are outlined and discussed in subsection 9.1.3 (Future opportunities).

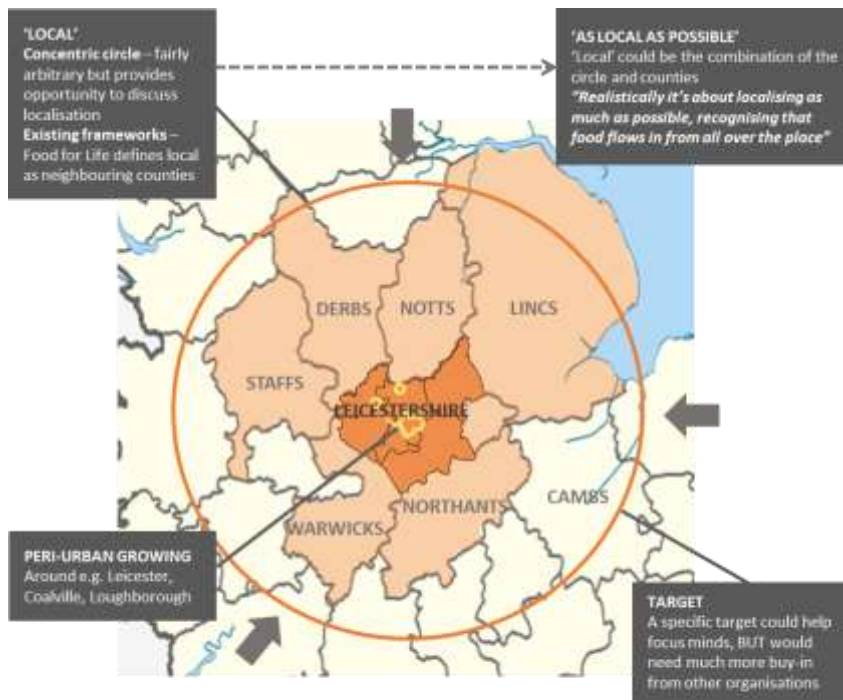
8.1.2 Limitations and challenges

Despite many benefits, some shortcomings of the spatial mapping method needed to be overcome. By its nature, the spatial mapping exercise encourages participants to consider land use to address the question *‘where should our food come from?’* This works for participants who are primarily concerned with connecting producers and consumers. However, a number of Leicestershire participants struggled to express their supply chain thinking spatially:

*“My vision isn’t necessarily just for landscape use, what your map’s really alluding to. Mine’s what happens to the supply chain underneath that. If you want to maximise that you have to have some functionality of how you get things to their destination.” **Leicestershire participant***

Responding to the challenge, I created supply chain graphics that were subsequently applied to four of eight of the Leicestershire participants’ spatial visions to express the dynamic between land use and supply chain thinking. Two contrasting individual spatial visions from Leicestershire are presented in Figure 8.1. While both Figure 8.1’s spatial visions share a desire for better supply chain

integration, the juxtaposition of the two images is striking. The first vision seeks to favour local supply chains, for example by increasing the proportion of local raw materials into food manufacturing processes. The second vision is constructed around the continuation and growth of international supply chains, with a particular focus on manufacturing and distribution. It indicates the power of spatial mapping in distilling and visually communicating participants' core ideas and sought solutions. This is helpful in deciphering the goals and solutions of – and potential tensions between – individuals and interest groups.



Ethics underpin everything (vision both spatial and ethical)
Key strategic agencies work across food chain (e.g. County Council, LEP)

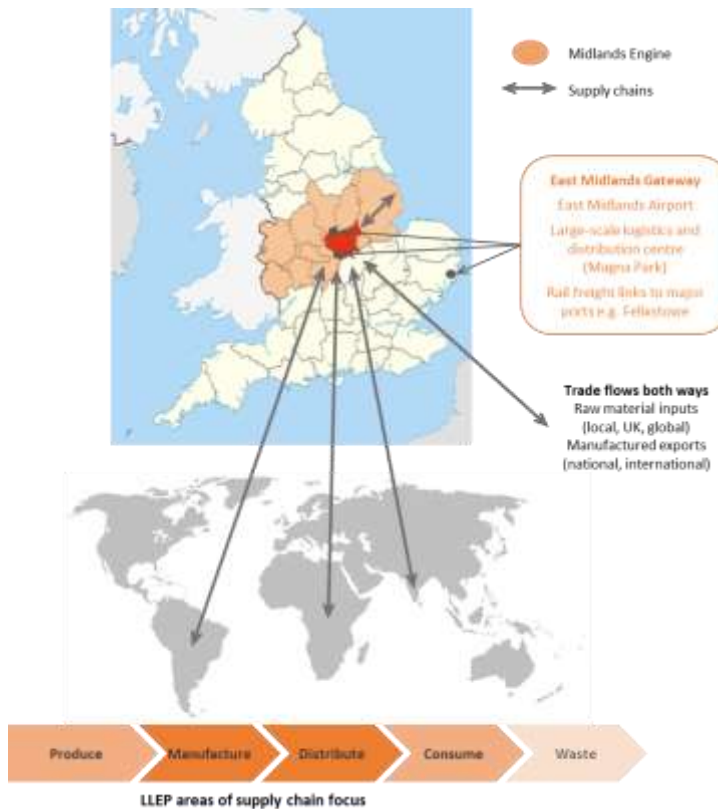


Figure 8.1 Leicestershire participant examples

A further potential limitation relates to the ability of participants to fully engage with the activity. Focusing first on the original mapping method, the successful generation of a mental map is partially dependent on a participant's ability to draw (Kitchin and Freundschuh, 2002; Giesecking, 2013), think spatially and the confidence and inclination to engage in an unfamiliar task. The request to draw a map met with a mixed response. Most were sufficiently relaxed about participating, and there were several very positive responses:

*"Yes, sounds like great fun." **Bristol participant***

*"I love maps!" **Bristol participant***

A contingent expressed at least a degree of hesitancy when asked, and needed some encouragement:

*"No. Oh go on then." **Calderdale participant***

*"Can I scribble on here?" **Leicestershire participant***

Finally, a small minority declined, though were happy for the researcher to create a map on their behalf as they talked, and offer corrections:

*"I'm not very good at spatial things. What would you...no, I'm not very good at any of this." **Calderdale participant***

*"Oh, gosh. I don't think, I don't feel competent. I'm sure there are people who would be much better placed to do it." **Leicestershire participant***

At least part of the discomfort was rooted in a concern to interpret the request 'correctly'. This was usually allayed by stressing that there was no 'correct' way of constructing a personal vision, and that all approaches were equally valid. Indeed, giving participants the opportunity to draw their spatial visions from scratch led to a range of approaches and differing levels of detail: some participants made a few rudimentary marks on the page while they spoke; others quietly sketched out detailed masterpieces. While each individual map was fascinating in its own right, I would have struggled with the variation in quality,

had the pandemic not necessitated a change in approach. Turning attention to the revised method, it is likely the approach placed less pressure on the participant. It may also have encouraged the use of existing political and administrative borders in creating and demarcating spatial visions since they represent shared reference points for both participant and researcher. In other words, participants may have drawn on common language to provide more concrete guidance when describing their spatial vision. This illustrates how the process became to a greater extent a collaboration between the researcher and participant.

8.1.3 Future opportunities

The natural ‘next step’ to extend the research is to reflect the mapping outputs back to participants. Indeed, before the outbreak of Covid I had originally intended to hold focus groups to collaboratively review the individual maps and assess the spatial mapping method. The benefits of focus groups more generally include enabling participants to explore and respond to different points of view, question each other and potentially moderate their own ideas (Cameron, 2016). Moreover, the discussion above has already highlighted how collectively studying individual spatial maps has the potential to generate new understanding around the shared goals and tensions within food partnerships, and between food partnerships and other interest groups. Focus groups could therefore be structured in a number of ways to tackle the recommendations in Table 8.2 below.

Table 8.2 Recommended focus group actions

Actions	Outcomes
Compare individual spatial maps within food partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas of spatial consensus and tension within food partnership • Develop a genuinely shared spatial vision while explicitly recognising outstanding areas of contention
Compare individual spatial maps from the same discipline across different food partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build understanding of common themes and challenges within disciplines • Participants could include (but are not limited to) food partnership coordinators; health professionals; food growers/producers; distribution hub representatives

Actions	Outcomes
Compare individual spatial maps of food partnership and other influential actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas of spatial consensus and tension • Identify opportunities to liaise with a wider set of actors to deliver a mutually supported spatial vision • Embed key vision elements in each relevant strategy • Participants could include (but are not limited to) land use planners; LEP representatives; climate change strategists

It is worth spending some time positioning and justifying the recommendations in Table 8.2. Since policy is within food partnerships' influence rather than control (Section 4.1), building constructive relationships with key actors, who themselves often lack time and resources (Chapter Six) is vital to push the food systems transitions agenda. In this respect, food partnerships benefit from practical tools and methods of engagement that promote dialogue, identify shared aspirations and tensions, and provide opportunities for food partnerships to develop roots into complementary agendas. SFP is already promoting the benefits of strengthening connections with both land use planners and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). This research has identified an additional need to increase integration with supermarkets and those pushing the climate change agenda (Chapter Six). So there is an argument to extend participation to more actors with direct connections to the issues food partnerships seek to tackle. Drawing these strands together, focus groups designed around spatial mapping inputs offer the possibility of building connections between food partnerships and a greater range of key actors. In doing so, we gain a better understanding of shared spatial aspirations and underlying tensions and conflicts. The approach also has the potential to form a bridge between the most pressing or 'immediate' issues around food access and availability and other critical but longer-term agendas such as climate change. Furthermore, the approach also builds awareness of what makes an area unique.

In addition, there could be an opportunity to blend the spatial mapping approach, and more widely spatial imaginaries, with the concept of everyday utopias (Cooper, 2014) and food utopias (Stock et al, 2015). This is a late stage development and thus was not incorporated into the research. Given *“the*

potential of everyday utopias to contribute to a transformative politics specifically through the concepts they actualize and imaginatively invoke” (Cooper, 2014), there is mileage in exploring whether enacted everyday utopias may be seen as the physical embodiment of spatial imaginaries. After identifying examples of everyday food utopias (Incredible Edible Todmorden could be one such example), one might draw on the ‘current’ and ‘future’ maps generated through a spatial mapping exercise to reveal an ongoing conversation between the past, present and future (Feola et al, 2023). In the way, the pairing could be used to explore the feedback loop between vision and action, thus bridging a research gap identified in Chapter Seven.

To conclude this section, the spatial mapping method offers an augmented insight into the ways in which individual visions combine (or not) to form more widely held spatial imaginaries. The method adaptations as a result of Covid have been explored and explained. It has been established that deploying either method confers several key benefits triggering participant ideas, values and beliefs that may otherwise be inaccessible. By generating both a visual and a verbal response, it has the potential to elicit more thoughtful replies, and ultimately provide greater insight into how desired food systems are imagined and scaled. In other words, the benefit is not just about the map itself, but the conversation the mapping exercise generates. Although there are limitations associated with the revised mapping method, the researcher-produced draft spatial map appeared to be enough to spark a valuable conversation around whether it was truly representative of the participant’s vision. So it could be argued it matters less about who generates the map, and more about the quality of the discussion. In this way, the mapping exercise enables participants to reveal spatial visions that they may not previously have consciously thought about or articulated, by drawing on deep-seated beliefs about what the future could and should look like. Furthermore, combining the verbal and visual narratives from multiple maps also illuminates some of the tensions present in imagining food system transitions. Tensions may relate to internal conflict within individual participants, as well as tensions between participants around the desired destinations of transitions or how transitions should be performed. As demonstrated above, the spatial mapping approach makes an original methodological contribution and informs

theoretical questions raised by the research. It also has potential to confer benefits to practitioners. Specifically there is opportunity to further develop the research through focus groups, positioning the spatial mapping method as a collaboration tool. In this way the individual spatial maps become the starting point for developing a better understanding of the level of consensus and any tensions underpinning seemingly shared spatial imaginaries, and identifying opportunities to develop more coherent and integrated approaches.

8.2 Contribution to spatial imaginaries and sustainability transitions thinking

The nine findings presented in Chapters Five to Seven collectively enable us to better understand connections between individual and shared imaginaries, and the relationship between spatial imaginaries, scale and transition. The previous section explored both the value and limitations of the spatial mapping method. This section draws together the mapping, interview and desktop review data to tell a more cohesive story about imaginaries (*what* imaginaries exist, and how they interact with individual visions), rescaling (*how* imaginaries are reinterpreted in a scalar sense) and transitions (*why* some scales and imaginaries are preferable to others in driving change). This section uses the multi-level perspective (MLP) approach to illustrate and explore how three points of the relational triangle combine. The MLP, introduced in Chapter Two, is one of several approaches seeking to describe how transitions unfold. It should be noted this is not a critique of the MLP. Rather, the MLP is applied as a tool to visually communicate the relationship between spatial imaginaries and sustainability transitions, and their interface with rescaling. To this end, Figure 8.2 is a simplified, graphical representation of the MLP, drawing together the research findings and areas for further discussion. At the broadest level, Figure 8.2 combines transition theory and the spatial imaginaries concept, drawing on Josh Watkins' spatial imaginaries classifications (Watkins, 2015). Watkins' '*idealised space imaginaries*' reflect the shared goals of transition. Meanwhile, his '*spatial transformation imaginaries*' relate to the process of transition or 'becoming', that is to say, the everyday practices associated with 'doing transitions'. This interpretation is reflected in Chapter Seven. More specifically, Figure 8.2 draws

attention to ways in which a spatial imaginaries lens brings greater understanding to transition destinations, agency, legitimacy and spatiality questions (research gaps identified in Chapter Two).

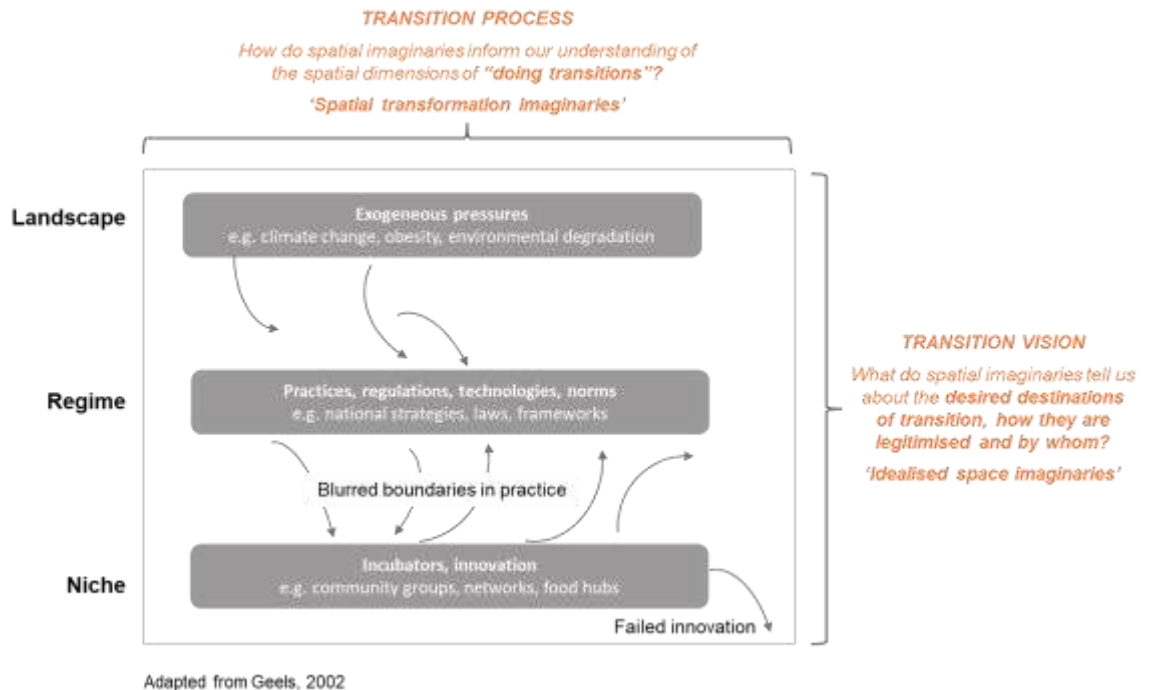


Figure 8.2 Combining sustainability transitions and spatial imaginaries thinking

Thus, the three 'points' of the triangle are combined to examine how the findings collectively advance understanding of how ideas about rescaling and spatial imagination are summoned to drive sustainability transitions. The following subsections are structured around i) the desired destinations of transition (how transitions are imagined); ii) the role of rescaling in the transition process; and iii) a practical example reflecting the impact of Covid on both the process and desired destinations of transitions in the context of the food partnership movement, at a particular point in time. Each subsection positions the discussion within the relevant literature, reflects on original contribution to knowledge and highlights opportunities for further research.

8.2.1 Imagining transitions

Spatial imaginaries matter. Evidence presented in Chapter Two suggests widely-held spatial imaginaries have the potential to bring about transformative change

(Smith and Tidwell, 2016; Sengers, 2017; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). So, there is value in better understanding the opportunities and limits of such transformational power. Yet there are open questions about the extent to which transition goals (Berkhout, Smith, and Stirling, 2004; Hodson and Marvin, 2009; Feola and Jaworska, 2019) and/or spatial visions (Zonneveld, 2005; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019) are truly normative. A seemingly shared 'local food system' imaginary is embedded in UK food partnerships' written documentation, C6/F1. However, C6/F2 exposes both convergent and divergent spatial narratives beneath the common transition goal. More specifically, seemingly coherent and shared spatial imaginaries are often underpinned by dissent, conflict and compromise. This subsection unpacks the assumption that written documentation reflects the prevailing imaginary.

The research demonstrates a complex relationship between individual visions, written visions and common spatial imaginaries. This subsection focuses on 'idealised space imaginaries', positioned as the desired destinations of transition in Figure 8.2. Sustainability transitions and transition management⁷⁸ studies often interpret organisations' documented goals to be the sought outcomes of transition (Shove and Walker, 2007; Lachman, 2013; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019), as do studies of vision and innovation (Bergman, 2017). But are these vision statements truly reflective of the 'hearts and minds' of transition actors? The subsection draws on findings from Chapters Five, Six and Seven to unpack the relationship between individual spatial visions, written strategies and common spatial imaginaries. In doing so, it challenges an assumption that spatial imaginaries (and individual visions) are necessarily reflected in written documentation, finding a more complex picture in practice. It argues that studying the convergent and divergent verbal, visual and written narratives underpinning seemingly shared spatial imaginaries is a prerequisite to better understanding the role of agency and scale in legitimising certain transition pathways over others. Furthermore, it challenges the role of written visions in uniting and inspiring a potentially disparate groups of transition actors. Table 8.3 seeks to summarise the characteristics of the dominant spatial imaginary, written vision (articulated in a

⁷⁸ A more goal-oriented sub-set of transition theory

documented strategy and/or food charter) and individual visions of case study participants. Each case study is discussed below, before wider implications are considered.

Table 8.3 Degree of vision alignment within case studies

Case study	Bristol	Calderdale	Leicestershire
Spatial imaginary	Harmonised	Dissonant	Inchoate/immature
Written vision	Unifying/place-specific	Place-adapted	Broad/generic
Individual visions	Collaborative/mutually supportive	Divergent	Areas of convergence

The case studies reveal how the role of written visions and their placement in relation to individual visions and shared imaginaries varies through time. Alignment between the three types of vision is unlikely to occur when the dominant spatial imaginary has been created independently of the food partnership movement. Table 8.3 alludes to how the role of the written vision plays out differently in each case study. Bristol has used a range of written documentation to support the development of a relatively harmonised imaginary. Spatial and systemic aspects are conveyed within the ‘Who Feeds Bristol?’ report (Carey, 2011), whilst a ‘good food’ imaginary has been defined, cultivated and documented to unite disparate groups (Chapters Five and Seven). This creates a line of sight between a widely appealing spatial imaginary and many individual participant visions, as reflected in the ‘collaborative agency’ classification (Chapter Six). At the other extreme, there is no evidence of a ‘golden thread’ in Calderdale. While the Calderdale Food Network charter pays tribute to “*amazing people and inspirational actions*” any imaginary envisaged by the food partnership fails to make significant headway in an already saturated market of competing imaginaries (C7/F8). Furthermore, individual spatial visions remain resolutely singular, reflecting Calderdale’s non-conformist culture (Chapter Six). Turning to the Leicestershire case study, the neutral wording of the food partnership’s charter does not reflect the fledgling imaginary centred on food supply chain thinking (Chapters Five and Six). The quote below encapsulates a wider struggle between place-specific, meaningful and challenging visions that demand change, compared with broad platitudes few could disagree with.

“[The Leicestershire Food Charter] is what I’d describe as a ‘motherhood and apple pie’ document. There’s nothing in there anyone would object to...but actually what kind of strategy for getting there lies behind it? It’s the big structural stuff rather than the nice community stuff, which is where the challenge is.” **Leicestershire participant**

Dipping more widely into other UK food partnerships’ visions, the document review revealed a city-scale approach in Exeter, focused on “*rediscover[ing] and redevelop[ing] localised food systems*”. Thus, the strategy reflected a unique, place-based imaginary to benefit people living or working in the Exeter City area, and for food producers, processors and providers operating within a 15 mile radius of the city centre (Sandover, 2017). It is interesting to note Food Exeter’s documented imaginary has since faded and strategic references on Food Exeter’s website are now pitched in more broad terms. Meanwhile, Good Food Leicestershire has more recently (since data collection) released a food plan⁷⁹. While the vision is unchanged, the new food plan focuses on the process of aligning county (‘regional’) and district (‘locality’) ways of working, and thus feels quite procedural in nature. Like the Food Charter, the food plan doesn’t reflect emerging thinking about Leicestershire’s role and position within the food supply chain that is reflected in a number of participant interviews (C6/F3 and C7/F4). Looking more broadly, while the quote above alludes to the anodyne nature of some food partnership documents, the combined findings indicate there is scope for change and adjustment through time. In short, both Leicestershire and Calderdale have spawned successful spatial imaginaries outside the food partnership movement, whereas the imaginary created by Good Food Bristol – and reflected in written documentation – more closely defines the city’s food movement. To summarise, the discussion above demonstrates documented visions are not necessarily a reflection of the dominant (or emerging) spatial imaginary.

⁷⁹ <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2022/2/22/leicestershire-food-plan.pdf> (Last accessed 05/05/2023)

The research finds powerful imaginaries connect individual narratives using shared/universal values. Building on C8/F7, we see stronger, more coherent, collaborative, truly shared spatial imaginaries can be created by connecting with the motivators and values of the people looking to promote and enact them. Incredible Edible's focus on kindness and the Bristol food movement's use of 'good food' are examples of how powerful narratives connect with universal values. This argument is encapsulated in the quote below:

"Yeah, but I think the power, the engines of change is in the narratives that bring those values forward, those shared values about health and equity and our children and respect for nature. All those things, I think they have a huge amount of power to drive change. If the narratives are right. And narratives work through universal values. They're not a way of disseminating technical information are they? They touch people, they move us, because they have values at their core." **Bristol participant**

The research reveals a more complex relationship between written visions and shared spatial imaginaries. Written visions have the potential to be transformational. In the case of Bristol, the written vision (expressed in the Bristol Food Network charter and strategy) reflects both the process of wider engagement and the journey taken by participants to unite around shared values. It is an example of a 'transformational' written vision, insofar as it has been used to unite individuals with differing place-based agendas around a vision of the future, based on a shared set of values. At their best, written visions can therefore be tools to communicate intent and garner both acceptance and support. However, research evidence suggests written visions are more often generic in nature. In other words, they are expressions of high-level, often vague (rather than place-based) intent that neither directly link to the place, nor the desired transitions sought by key actors. This means written visions should be used with caution as a proxy for imaginaries.

Reflecting on the discussion above, the research teases out a difference between 'instrumental visions' i.e. the explicitly-stated desired outcomes that have been developed, negotiated and documented, and the implicit, deeply-held, value-laden and place-based individual visions and shared imaginaries. In doing so, the

research counters a popular research assumption that written strategies are synonymous with either the prevailing ‘shared’ imaginary, or the visions of individuals seeking food system transition. We have seen how written visions *can* have power to unite and motivate: through the words themselves and/or through the process of creating them. Yet powerful spatial imaginaries can also occur independently of (or alongside) written strategies. Moreover, the research differences between documented and personally imagined visions, highlighting tensions between what is politically and economically desirable and defensible and the value-based motivations of individual participants seeking systemic change.

Bringing these observations together reveals a complex, fluid and constantly evolving relationship between individual visions, written visions and common spatial imaginaries. This has a number of implications for how research is conducted. Firstly, researchers should be mindful of the risks of conflating written visions with the prevailing imaginary and/or the spatial visions of individual actors. Practice-based recommendations also emerge. Explicitly recognising and exploring differences (e.g. through spatial mapping) will enable food partnerships to connect more directly with the (often under-articulated) motivations and values of their stakeholders. This will enable partnerships to develop more thoughtful, place-based written visions that resonate with – and motivate – a wider range of actors seeking food system transition.

Finally, both the spatial mapping methodology (Section 8.1) and the research reflections on the relationship between individual, written and shared spatial imaginaries (above) can inform a parallel discourse on ‘futuring’. This growing literature is a response to the need to unlock public imagination (Balug, 2019; Pereira et al, 2018; Hopkins, 2019; Moore and Milkoreit, 2020; Soria-Lara, 2021) and incorporates visioning, scenario planning and/or ‘futuring’ approaches. In doing so, it seeks to promote “*disruptive thinking*” (Soria-Lara et al, 2021) with a view to identifying and developing more creative and reflexive transition or transformation pathways (Hajer and Pelzer, 2018; Moore and Milkoreit, 2020; Oomen et al, 2021; Soria-Lara et al, 2021). Specific ‘futuring’ tools and techniques have included semi-structured interviews (Mangnus et al, 2019;

Soria-Lara et al, 2021); scenario narratives through storylines (Pereira et al, 2018); public art and play (Balug, 2019); dramaturgical approaches (Oomen et al, 2021); simulation games and/or backcasting (Soria-Lara and Banister, 2017; Mangnus et al, 2019) and immersive multimedia techniques (Hajer and Pelzer, 2018). Additionally, some researchers have sought to identify and assess a range of techniques (Pereira et al, 2021). Visual participatory methods and techniques are currently underexplored in relation to futuring exercises, and thus the research has potential to contribute in this area.

8.2.2 Doing transitions

The thesis sheds light on how spatial imaginaries inform our understanding of the spatial dimensions of 'doing transitions'. While noting other factors are also at play, it specifically considers the influence of rescaling on spatial transformation imaginaries. Successful imaginaries need to articulate a broadly appealing vision. But beyond that, shared spatial visions need to be translated into viable policies and actions (Levy and Spicer, 2013; see also C7/F8). In the UK, the relocalisation concept is compatible with existing administrative, cultural, political and spatial (e.g. land use) structures, in a way that other imaginaries (such as regionalisation, city regions and foodsheds) are not (C5/F2). Therefore transition actors convene around 'the local' as a pragmatic response to the food system lock-ins they seek to break. The definitional malleability of the 'local' (C5/F3) works in food partnerships' favour, since they lack decision-making authority and are reliant on influence and good will (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). Yet this position raises broader questions about the extent to which spatial imaginaries are limited by what is 'actionable' (C7/8 and C7/9). The thesis argues that focusing on fixing specific problems (Parsons and Barling, 2021), prioritising "low-hanging fruit" and failing to consider desired end-goals (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019) risks limiting our ability to develop creative, solution-based responses. Thus, the opportunity to transition the towards more sustainable, secure and just food futures is compromised.

The thesis offers some suggestions about what could be done differently to achieve a shift in focus. The use of spatial mapping encourages an experimental,

creative approach, “*prompting critical thinking and inspiring new imaginaries*” (Wilde et al, 2021; see also Mangnus et al, 2019 and Section 8.1). Combining the mapping and interview data highlights how individual spatial visions are both grounded in and tempered by everyday realities. The participant maps (Appendix 5) most often draw on established administrative borders and boundaries to express their individual visions (although there are a few exceptions). As discussed above, it reflects a recognised need to position imaginaries within the current spatial and governance frameworks. This limits creativity and reveals a tension between imagination and actionability. Individual participant visions fall somewhere along a sliding scale bookended by the ‘utopian’ and the ‘ultra-realist’. Yet adopting the spatial mapping approach provides an opportunity to challenge these engrained positions with the hope of developing more meaningful, place-based, nuanced spatial imaginaries. Explicitly recognising limitations, conflicts and tensions is the first step in seeking ways to overcome them. This connects with the idea of transformative imagination: “*the capacity to see beyond the engrained spatial and scalar imaginaries and imagine how cities and regions might be otherwise*” (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). As part of this process, it is critical to ensure the actors shaping food partnerships’ organisational structures, defining their roles and determining their goals reflect the wider communities and interests they represent, see Chapter Six. It is also key to develop mutually supportive relationships (and shared imaginaries) with target institutions and actors that are core to delivering change, such as urban planners.

The participant quote below reflects on the value of adopting mindset-focused transition levers (C7/F9) in order to increase preparedness for inevitable shocks.

“It’s about all of those things [changing mindsets/shifting the paradigm]...bringing those together in an articulated, clear vision that says ‘it doesn’t have to be that way. It could be this way’. And having that available for when crises happen. Because crises are going to come.”

Calderdale participant

This prescient quote segues neatly into the next subsection, which reflects on the impact of one crisis – the outbreak of a global pandemic – on the prevailing spatial transformation imaginaries and ideal space imaginaries, in the context of the UK food partnership movement.

8.2.3 Covid as a transition catalyst

While the research makes limited use of the Covid-related data collected, there is evidence the pandemic has shaped emerging spatial imaginaries. This subsection investigates the influence of Covid as a transition catalyst. Specifically, it applies the multi-level perspective (MLP), an approach that seeks to explain how sustainability transitions occur (see Chapter Two). Here, the MLP approach is used to explore the impact of Covid (an emerging landscape pressure) on the UK food system, and subsequent effects on niche- and regime-level activity. The MLP approach is visualised in Figure 8.3 and centres on the role of Sustainable Food Places (SFP) and the food partnership movement. It should be noted Figure 8.3 is illustrative and does not show the full complexity of relationships between each document, organisation or issue listed. The subsequent analysis of Figure 8.3 explores the evolving relationship between imaginaries and transitions by examining changes within and between the MLP layers in response to Covid. It finds the messy practice of imagining and doing sustainability transitions blur the neat theoretical layers of the MLP. Furthermore, evidence suggests the landscape shift has led to a greater role for food partnerships and increased interest in local food system imaginaries. It is, however, unclear whether the trajectory of food partnership influence and/or the desirability of the local scale will continue to rise. The subsection concludes by reflecting on why the impact of Covid doesn't feature more prominently in the research, given data collection methods were adapted to capture the effects of landscape shift on food system imaginaries.

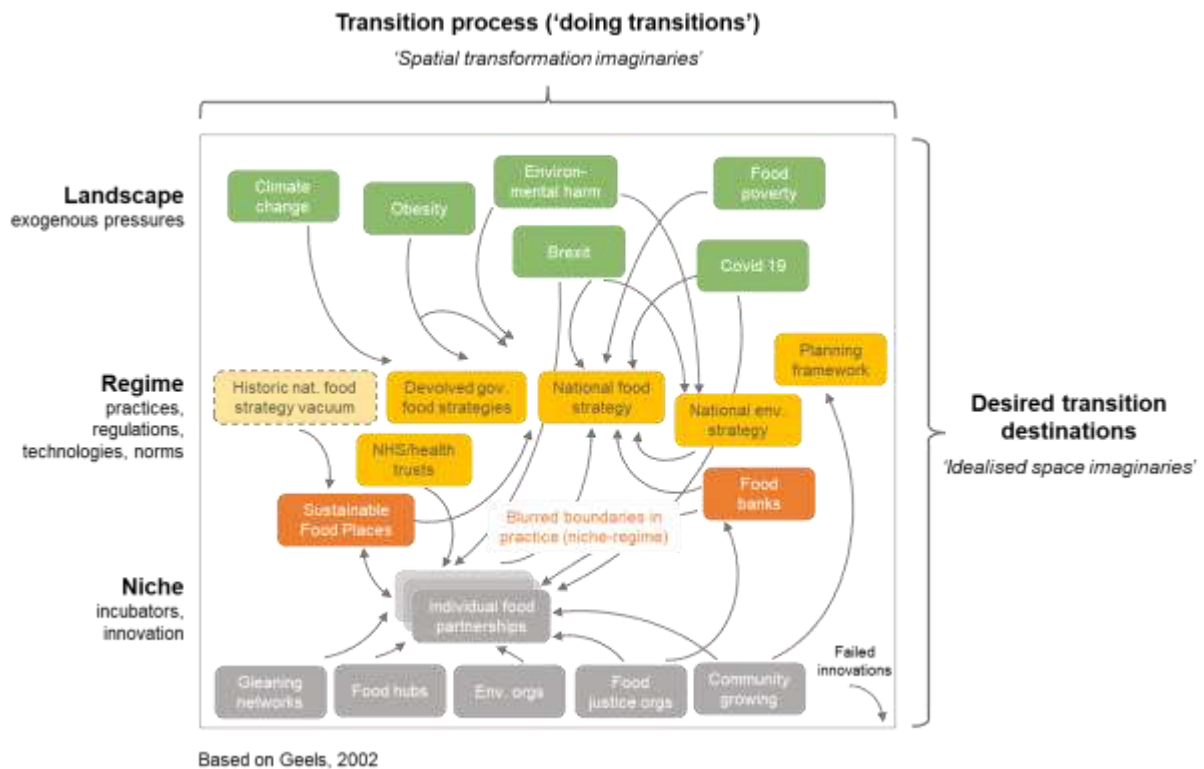


Figure 8.3 The role and influence of the UK food partnership movement on sustainability transitions, in Covid times

Periods of turbulence offer the greatest opportunity to make changes (Marsden, 2013), and the landscape shift as a result of Covid certainly challenged and changed the UK food partnership movement (as one part of the wider UK food system, see Parsons and Barling, 2022). As the UK entered lockdown in 2020, food partnerships and food banks collaborated with other 'niche level' organisations and individuals (not all listed in Figure 8.3), playing a vital role in the food crisis relief effort to deliver local and national priorities (Jones et al, 2022). As the pandemic exposed and increased disparities in food access, affordability and security and the fragility of the just-in-time approach to food supply (Jones et al, 2022), food partnerships became 'more than niche' (or at least occupied the fuzzy area between niche and regime), as they joined or led the local institutional response. In parallel we saw the early publication of (regime-level) Part One of the National Food Strategy – a response to Covid and Brexit-induced landscape pressures. Thus, Figure 8.3 captures a 'moment in time' where the collective influence of SFP and food partnerships swelled as a result of their ability to plug a gap in the national response capability. This shows the

relationship between the MLP layers to be dynamic and fluid, where constant shifts and adjustments in landscape, niche and regime activity blur the boundaries between the levels. Individual and organisational actors are in a constant state of flux, seeking to influence each other, drive change and adjust the transition trajectory towards their own future imaginaries. In future there is scope to return to this MLP analysis, for example to reflect on the idea of 'niche-regimes' as spaces of transformative power (Avelino, 2016; Köhler et al, 2019) and/or to connect with Gaitán-Cremaschi et al's diagnostic framework examining food systems through a MLP lens (Gaitán-Cremaschi et al, 2019).

The rapidly evolving Covid situation in the UK shone a light on the value of local food systems at least for a period of time. Certainly, participant interviews suggest the onset of Covid increased the desirability of local food systems. I suggest this is evidence of a 'quick-cycle' imaginary, whereby a particular spatial vision becomes more widely attractive in the face of unexpected landscape shifts. As voluntary organisations sought to compensate for national supply chain interruptions and concerns about security of supply, the idea of accessing locally produced food became more attractive. Thus, the local food system imaginary enjoyed a boost as local producers and suppliers strove to meet increased demand. The extent to which interest in local food system imaginaries has been sustained was not tested as part of the research, although there is scope to do so in future. This is discussed in more detail at the end of the subsection. The rise in interest does, however, reflect the two-way conversation between the process of transition ('doing transitions') and the desired destinations of transitions.

There is a call to research how translocal configurations (such as the food partnership movement) can develop forms of power that break down lock-ins preventing the development of more sustainable foodscapes (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018). Speaking to this question, Figure 8.3 indicates how responses to landscape changes have the potential to challenge or break dependency on a particular transition pathway (sometimes referred to as 'lock-ins'). Certainly, the food partnership movement has leveraged power by supporting local authorities in tackling various food crises, as described above.

Inevitably though, there are winners and losers as the power balance shifts. For example, some participants expressed concern about dwindling focus on climate change due to a greater prioritisation of food access and availability (C7/F6). One participant described food partnerships as shifting into firefighting rather than lobbying mode. The example reinforces the message that legitimacy can be lost as well as gained (Marsden, 2013). The UK food partnership movement undoubtedly gained greater prominence and legitimacy, at least for a while. Yet within food partnerships themselves, there is evidence the increased focus on food access and availability may result in a de-prioritisation of the climate change emergency. This suggests shifts in power and agency can be opportunistic and transient, rather than carefully planned.

To conclude, it is worth reflecting on why relatively little Covid-related data was analysed in the research. While the impact of Covid on data collection methods has been discussed in Section 8.1 and Chapter Three, there is little reference to how the pandemic has shaped emergent spatial imaginaries. Most participants were interviewed twice, and the second interview sought their perspectives on likely Covid legacies and potential impacts on the food system. The global pandemic was playing out as these interviews were conducted, so there was a time-dependency and immediacy to many of the participants' Covid-related comments. Thus, it was somewhat difficult to 'pin down' key narratives due to fast-changing events. For example, a tranche of participants noted changes in shopping habits and greater demand for locally-grown food to counteract the lack of supermarket supply and the desire to avoid crowds. However, comments in later interviews included observations that interest was waning and consumers were returning to old habits. It is likely some 'distance' is required to more accurately assess the impact of Covid on the spatial visions of actors seeking to transition food systems. At the time of writing, the 'Covid legacy' data strand remains largely unanalysed, although it could make for an interesting project in future. For example, one might differentiate between short-cycle reactions (such as increased demand for local veg boxes and other supermarket alternatives) and longer term trends such as the rise of 'dark kitchens' (separate premises used for food take-away preparation with no restaurant or shop front). More broadly, Covid gave us a glimpse of alternative food futures, both good and bad.

It could be argued there is value in building on existing data to discern why (and how) some hopes and ideas triggered by the Covid experience have become embedded in personal visions and shared spatial imaginaries, whilst others are transitory and ephemeral. This could be achieved through further participant interviews and/or focus group sessions designed around a food futures mapping exercise.

9. Conclusions

“So we don’t think about...‘yeah but how’s the whole entire system going to work in 20 years’, because there are too many unknown variables. We just...imagine that humans decided to start making life wonderful. What’s the thing I need to do now to make that likelihood...as strong as possible.”

Bristol participant

At the time of writing, the future of the UK food system is at an important juncture. How we respond to a combination of landscape shifts (Brexit, Covid, Ukraine, food and fuel shortages and austerity), regime-level policy developments (food, environment, agriculture) and grassroots actions (tackling environmental concerns, rising food prices and food poverty) has the potential to create the conditions for transition. This is a time to think creatively, begging the questions ‘where do we want to go?’ and ‘who gets to decide?’ At its heart, this thesis is a call to embrace the power of imagination and the (spatial) imaginary to drive food system transition towards more sustainable, secure and fair outcomes. The quote above captures part of the value of future-focused spatial imaginaries. At their best, such imaginaries are capable of creating a compelling images of what the future could look and feel like, connecting aspirations with the everyday. In doing so, they flip the narrative from focusing on the barriers to be overcome to the ‘what ifs’ (Hopkins, 2019). Regardless of whether they are driven by landscape shifts (e.g. Covid) or niche-level change (e.g. the Incredible Edible movement), spatial imaginaries have the potential to shift views on our capacity for transition, demonstrating a collective leap of imagination. To this end, the closing chapter returns to the title of the thesis, reflecting on how unlocking imagination through maps sheds new light on the spatial imaginaries of food system transitions. Specifically, the chapter summarises and reflects on the research findings (section 9.1), the study’s original contribution to knowledge (section 9.2), and limitations and opportunities for further development (section 9.3). During the course of discussions, the chapter more broadly seeks to explain why the research was required; its relevance to the present day; and its potential impact and consequences, both in academic terms and for wider society.

9.1 Research summary

At its core, the research seeks to better understand the relationship between spatial imaginaries, transition and scale. For reasons touched upon above and examined in Chapter Two, studying the UK food partnership movement provides an opportunity to investigate this three-way relationship (or 'relational triangle'). The UK food partnership movement actively seeks food system transition, and rescaling is often a key element. The research recognises a need to better understand the goals of such transition, how they are imagined and legitimised, and by whom. In particular, it raises questions about why certain scalar and/or spatial interpretations capture the collective imagination over others. It also draws attention to the extent to which there is harmony or dissonance between collectively-held spatial imaginaries, written strategies and the spatial visions of individual actors seeking food system transition. It argues that placing the spatial mapping approach at the centre of the research enables a more thorough examination of the relational triangle between spatial imaginaries, rescaling and transition. The method is also a means to identify and reflect on disparate viewpoints, an important first step in developing more thoughtful, reflexive and effective spatial imaginaries. The research is therefore, in the widest sense, a response to a call to re-awaken our collective imagination of what the future could be (Hopkins, 2019). In the thesis, Research Questions (RQs) 1 – 3 are tackled consecutively in Chapters Five to Seven. This section reviews each chapter/RQ in turn, summarising key findings and reflecting more widely on broader questions and potential consequences.

Chapter Five identifies and examines relationships between individual visions, documented visions and more widely-held spatial imaginaries amongst active UK food partnerships. It aligns to RQ1 and is concerned with identifying the individual spatial visions and common spatial imaginaries of food system transitions expressed within the UK food partnership movement. The chapter provides three findings that shed light on the vision-strategy-imaginary relationship within UK food partnerships, and the extent to which there is congruence between each 'layer'. Specifically, it highlights that seemingly coherent and shared spatial imaginaries may be underpinned by dissent, conflict and/or compromise. In doing

so, the chapter makes several interventions that contribute to knowledge. Firstly, it challenges the assertion that the alternative spatial imaginaries promoted by the UK food partnership movement overwrite established borders and boundaries (Sonnino, 2016; Hincks et al, 2017; Sonnino, 2019). Secondly, it contests the supposition that we can rely on written narratives as accurate reflections of common spatial imaginaries (Sonnino, 2016; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019). The first three findings are summarised below.

Food partnerships' written documentation collectively points towards a seemingly shared spatial imaginary reflecting a desire to transition towards local food systems (Finding 1). The research identified five key spatial imaginaries within food partnerships texts – local, regional, city-regional, national and (local-)global. Most UK food partnerships adopt a 'local' spatial imaginary that seeks to benefit those living (and occasionally visiting or working) within an administratively bounded area, centred on shortening supply chains, increasing local community benefits and reconnecting producers and consumers. The finding confirms the baseline from which to examine the individual visions underpinning the broad 'local food' spatial imaginary sought by UK food partnerships.

Convergent and divergent spatial narratives are interwoven beneath case study food partnerships' seemingly shared local food imaginaries, exposing tensions and conflicts underpinning common transition goals (Finding 2). Case study data analysis found evidence of some common narratives between individual visions, food partnership written narratives and more widely held spatial imaginaries (Figure 5.4). However, on closer inspection, subtle differences emerged beneath a “*seemingly consensual image*” (Zonneveld, 2005) of the local food system imaginary. Examining the individual participant maps made it possible to tease out the differences and potential tensions associated with the use of borders and boundaries in reconfiguring (rescaling) food systems to deliver desired destinations of transitions (Yap, 2022). The individual participant maps (Appendix 5) are revealed to be rich in detail and reflective of the values, experience and perceptions of the individual at a specific point in time and as a result of an 'on the day' conversation between participant and interviewer. Collectively the spatial maps and interviews highlight the richness, diversity and complexity of individual

spatial visions underpinning a seemingly uncomplicated, shared desire for local food systems. Narratives of convergence and divergence are interwoven, demonstrating the ways in which spatial visions are framed within existing borders and boundaries, and/or how those borders may be re-imagined or rejected.

Food partnerships' common desire to relocalise masks more nuanced interpretations of how local food systems should be rescaled (Finding 3). This finding explores how 'local' is defined and how the 'local' scale is fixed or framed within spatial visions and imaginaries (Prové et al, 2019; Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). It finds the language around the local to be malleable and nebulous. This enables desired outcomes to be expressed (e.g. reconnecting producers and consumers) without being hampered by potentially difficult questions around overcoming borders and boundaries, or where the 'local' ends. This contrasts with regional or city-regional imaginaries, which more overtly invite questions about how such alternatives are scaled. Despite this, participants are often drawn towards using territorial (administrative and political) borders in exploring and defining their spatial visions. This suggests, in the words of one Bristol participant, *"[the structures in place] tend to determine our story, or maybe the limits of our imaginations"*. The dominance of the local could be interpreted as a broad expression of intent where food partnerships lack decision-making authority and are reliant on influence and good-will (Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). This is further explored in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six is concerned with transition agents in the UK food partnership movement. It responds to RQ2, focusing on who creates the visions and spatial imaginaries of food system transitions, and who is excluded. The chapter highlights a level of disconnection between actors responsible for setting food partnerships' spatial visions and actors perceived to be critical to delivering transition. In this way, it shows how some actors and interests play a key role in defining food partnerships' visions, while other actors are under-engaged, intentionally or unintentionally excluded or self-excluded. Food partnerships more often self-identify as coordinators rather than direction setters. Furthermore, the roles food partnerships adopt influence their ability to develop shared high-quality

spatial imaginaries of desirable food system transitions. Findings 4 to 6 collectively reveal that the ways in which food partnerships organise and structure themselves, engage key actors and express agency need to be part of an up-front conversation. The chapter concludes that food partnerships would benefit from greater intentionality in their decision-making in each of these areas. In this way, food partnerships have a greater chance of overcoming 'lowest common denominator' thinking to create engaging spatial visions with the potential to drive transformative change.

Actors representing health, sustainability and local food interests are most active in developing and shaping food partnership spatial visions, whereas other actors identified as critical to delivering transition are under- or un-represented (Finding 4). Using Steering Group membership as a proxy for influence in setting food partnership agendas, the most powerful voices represent health, sustainability and local food interests. This is at least partially reflective of the relative level of funding provided by the health sector and Sustainable Food Places (SFP). By contrast, food manufacturing, retail (notably supermarkets), land use planners and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are absent from steering groups and/or identified as key to delivering spatial visions. Finding 4 reveals broader questions about who should have agency, and whether agency should be extended to actors deemed 'part of the problem'. Conversely, SFP identifies land use planners and LEPs as potential delivery mechanisms, i.e. 'part of the solution'. So there is benefit in seeking engagement with a wider range of actors. This approach could present a challenge where there is a lack of vision alignment. It suggests there is value in developing some kind of group visioning exercise that challenges participants to think through and negotiate spatial interactions. Ultimately this kind of approach has the potential to engage with pressing issues such as conflicting land use pressures, rather than treat them as peripheral concerns. Furthermore, working directly with LEPs and/or land use planners could reduce the need for elected member patronage and bridge the relative lack of emphasis on food in current national planning policy.

Food partnerships exhibit differing levels of ability (capacity) and willingness (enthusiasm) to collaborate and are more often 'vision takers' than 'vision makers'

(Finding 5). The finding reflects on how agency is conveyed through food partnerships' structural organisation. Overall, UK food partnerships are more likely to seek to coordinate the visions and activities of others (vision takers) than shape the vision themselves (vision makers). Thus not all food partnerships seek to engage with policy, making the often-used term Food Policy Council a misnomer. Yet 'vision takers' are still gatekeepers, with agency over who participates. There is value for individual food partnerships, and more widely SFP, to have an open discussion about the role(s) they seek to play.

Case studies demonstrate three different expressions of agency: collaborative agency, individual agency and emerging agency (Finding 6). The finding charts how each case study has developed a unique, place-based response to political, historical, geographical, cultural and individual influences. It reveals several expressions of agency: collaborative (Bristol); individual (Calderdale) and emerging (Leicestershire). These expressions of agency are a combined reflection of food partnership structure, how agency is exercised and the case study's relationship with SFP.

The final 'findings and discussion' chapter, Chapter Seven, responds to RQ3. It is concerned with how visions and spatial imaginaries are formed, shared, prioritised and validated ('legitimising transitions') and implemented and practiced ('doing transitions'). The final three findings (7 – 9) collectively indicate UK food partnerships' preference for local imaginaries is influenced by pragmatism. Chapter Six has already indicated that food partnerships' agendas are furthered through influence rather conferred agency (usually associated with a formal mandate) and/or dedicated funding. Thus, food partnerships are particularly reliant on building connections within existing political and administrative structures. The local food imaginary is shown to be malleable, adaptable and non-prescriptive, which is useful in this context. Since 'local' has the potential to mean 'all things to all people', it leaves space for multiple meanings and interpretations. Chapter Seven also provides some insight into why alternative imaginaries have failed to gain traction, identifying barriers including the model of land ownership and control in the UK. Thus, land reform could be a route to diversifying spatial imaginaries and fusing relocalisation and social justice

principles. More widely, Chapter Seven argues that since shared spatial visions are used to legitimise certain transition pathways (and therefore are powerful precursors to transition), there is a need to improve the quality of our imaginaries.

Rescaling is central to (re)conceiving, shaping and validating food system transition imaginaries (Finding 7). Finding 7 highlights the relative importance of rescaling in food system transitions. Written justifications (identified through the document review) found food partnerships most commonly attribute economic and community benefits to food system rescaling. By contrast, case study participants were less motivated by economic concerns and more focused on environmental, sustainability and social justice drivers. This suggests a potential dichotomy between instrumental justifications (expressed through food partnership documentation) and underlying beliefs in relation to food system rescaling.

Spatial imaginaries gather power as they capture the collective imagination through a combination of clarity of purpose, commitment, actionability, scalability and luck (Finding 8). The finding is drawn from three case study 'vignettes' used to examine why certain spatial visions capture the popular imagination. Five common characteristics or factors were identified as preconditions for 'successful' spatial imaginaries. In summary, such imaginaries need to be compelling; shared; actionable; transferable/scalable and serendipitous. The combined case study vignettes indicate how imaginaries can gather momentum, as well as recede and fade, or even fail to germinate in the first place. More broadly, findings 7 and 8 demonstrate how studying collectively documented and personally imagined visions reveal tensions between what is politically and economically justifiable, and the deeply-held values of individuals seeking food system transition. This points to the need to challenge ideas around feasibility and actionability as part of creating more meaningful (and potentially more aspirational) spatial imaginaries. This segues into the final finding, below.

There is a divergence between the problem-focused transition levers adopted in food partnership action plans and the mindset-focused transition levers of individual activists seeking food system change (Finding 9). This finding relates

to the everyday activities and behaviours that support the goals of food system transition. It compares food partnership written action plans with solutions identified by case study participants. Collectively these actions/solutions are termed ‘transition levers’. The evidence suggests a potential misalignment: food partnerships’ transition levers are concerned with solving problems, whereas the transition levers identified by individuals relate to changing mindsets. Thus, food partnerships are focused on fixing specific problems (Parsons and Barling, 2021), while individuals prioritise and value shifting mindsets. This needs to be better understood in order to develop a mutually-reinforcing feedback loop between vision and action. It also identifies a potential disconnection between spatial imaginaries and the everyday actions and activities associated with ‘doing transitions’. The limits of the research are brought into relief when responding to RQ3. The implications (including opportunities to further extend the research) are considered in more detail in section 9.3.

9.2 Original contribution to knowledge

The research is both an academic and personal response to the role of spatial visions – and in a broader sense, of imagination – in shaping the ways in which we seek to transition towards more sustainable, secure and just food futures. The research makes several original contributions to knowledge, in the areas of theory, methodology and practice. These are synthesised in Table 9.1, noting connections to relevant chapters and sections, and expanded upon below.

Table 9.1 Original contribution to knowledge

Area of contribution	Explanation	Document cross-refs.
Theory	Establishes and addresses a theoretical gap by combining spatial imaginaries, sustainability transitions and food system rescaling (relational triangle)	C2 8.2
	Speaks to recognised (food system) transition research gaps: transition destinations, agency, legitimacy and spatiality	2.1 3.2 C5 – 7
	Contributes to an emerging body of academic research on the food partnership movement	2.3 2.5
Method	Adopted methods extend food partnership research knowledge base: desktop review of all UK food	3.5 4.1

Area of contribution	Explanation	Document cross-refs.
	partnerships; interviews extended beyond SFP representatives	4.2
	Spatial mapping method uniquely combines thinking on food systems and spatial imaginaries of the future	2.4 3.5 8.1
	Facilitates examining the relationship between individual visions, written strategies and common spatial imaginaries	C5
Practice	Identifies recommendations to help food partnerships develop more imaginative, inclusive and truly shared spatial imaginaries	8.1 9.3

The research makes an original contribution to knowledge in three key areas. Firstly, there is an original contribution to theory. The research develops thinking around the relationship ('relational triangle') between spatial imaginaries, rescaling and transition, shedding light on how the power of imagination and the politics of rescaling combine to reconceive, shape and validate food system change. The RQs are designed to shed light on transition destinations, agency, legitimacy and spatiality. In this way, the work contributes to identified gaps in food transition research and (more widely) sustainability transitions literature (El Bilali, 2019; Köhler et al, 2019). Furthermore, the approach uses UK food partnerships as a point of access to explore the relational triangle. By introducing a spatial imaginaries lens, it contributes to an emerging body of academic work that has thus far focused on the transformative potential of the food partnership movement through rescaling food systems (Sonnino, 2016; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Coulson and Sonnino, 2019; Prové et al, 2019; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019; Sonnino, 2019; Moragues-Faus, 2021).

The research also makes an original methods contribution. The document review of all active food partnerships is the first of its kind in the UK, expanding document reviews targeted at individual case studies/cities (Sonnino, 2016; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018; Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019). As a result of its wider remit, it considers both government-led and third-sector-led food partnerships (the latter are less-studied). Furthermore, the case study interviews were conducted not only with SFP representatives, but also with a wider range of actors within or on the fringes of the food partnership movement. These points of

distinction are detailed in Tables 3.3 and 3.4. The research makes a second method-based contribution by combining an innovative spatial mapping method with semi-structured interviews to develop a richer picture of individual spatial visions. Visual images are often downplayed in qualitative research in favour of the written and spoken word (Silverman, 2014). Yet food systems are inherently spatial, so it makes sense to use a spatial mapping method to extend thinking beyond the written and verbal, see Chapter Eight. The research makes a methodological contribution through the application of this novel method. While mental maps have been applied in various contexts, to the best of my knowledge they have not been used to combine thinking on individual spatial visions, common spatial imaginaries and imagined food futures. Pursuing this line of enquiry facilitates examining the relationship between individual visions, written strategies and common spatial imaginaries. It teases out points of convergence and divergence, and thus constructs a more nuanced understanding of how certain spatial imaginaries are formed, promoted and legitimised. In doing so, it challenges an assumption that written strategic documents are proxies for common spatial imaginaries (Sonnino 2016; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019; Prové et al, 2019), see Chapter Five.

Finally, the spatial mapping approach also has utility for policy makers and practitioners. Thus it has potential (if implemented) to make an original contribution to practice. The spatial mapping approach elicits unique insights into the visions of key actors seeking food system transition. There is value in sharing these individual visions, ensuring they represent a diversity of perspectives. In this way, the approach can be applied both to tease out individual differences and encourage greater collaboration. This has the potential to help avoid the 'local trap' (Born and Purcell, 2006) and identify and overcome (rather than eliminate) bounded thinking, so that choices are thoughtfully made. In this way, there is greater potential to develop more inclusive, imaginative, nuanced and culturally appropriate shared spatial imaginaries, see Chapters Five and Seven. The development of recommendations to both policy makers and practitioners is covered in more detail in the next section.

9.3 Limitations, challenges and future opportunities

It is recognised this thesis is a summation of an imperfect research project that has sought to overcome challenges and limitations. Such challenges are a reflection of limitations in the researcher's skills and decision-making. They indicate the difficulties encountered as a result of the place and time 'window' during which the research was conducted. The most significant difficulty was managing the impact of the global pandemic on the research. While this threw up challenges, it also raised unexpected opportunities through the need to adapt to changing circumstances. These are documented across Chapters Three, Four and Eight and are summarised below. In retrospect, there are aspects of the research that could have been improved. Yet there are also a range of possibilities for further developing and extending the research. These opportunities are also outlined in this section.

Covid impacted most significantly on the data collection and analysis aspects of the research. The first national lockdown during the pandemic occurred midway through data collection, and necessitated a significant rethink. The need to adapt data collection methods raised questions about comparability (between pre-Covid and Covid data sets), approach (number of case studies and interviews; ability to conduct focus groups), the role of the researcher (increasing researcher influence through the spatial mapping component) and shifts in research direction (capturing the Covid legacy). These issues – and the justification for my chosen approach – are detailed in Sections 3.3, 4.3.3 and 8.2.3. Developing an analytical approach also proved challenging. The data analysis phase coincided with the second Covid lockdown. For reasons described in Section 4.4, I needed to take an iterative and intuitive approach to analysing the interview and spatial mapping data. Under different circumstances it might have been beneficial to develop a more structured approach to analysing both data sets. Conversely, the pause also brought a period of reflection. This proved to be an opportunity as well as a challenge. The original mental mapping approach was experimental, and there do not appear to be academic data analysis precedents to draw upon, see Section 3.5.3. Thus, the interruption allowed me to reassess how to treat and analyse the visual data. While perhaps 'less than ideal', the approaches

described above were a direct result of the need to adapt to the challenges created by the prevailing Covid landscape.

There are certain aspects of the research I would have tackled differently with the benefit of hindsight. I originally intended to hold focus groups to test and discuss the research outputs with participants. While the lack of focus groups is undeniably a gap, there are opportunities to develop this line of investigation. These are explored in the following paragraphs. Furthermore, through the course of the interviews I found examples of visual cues complementing the imaginaries coalescing around particular words and phrases, including 'rural capital of food' (Melton) and 'kindness town' (Todmorden). In retrospect, I would have looked more closely at these, and other more subtle visual cues, incorporating questions into participant interviews and potentially drawing on semiotics literature. It would be interesting to study whether/how such cues are used to amplify the imaginary, considering representational aspects alongside the performativity of spatial imaginaries (Watkins, 2015, Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). Had time allowed, there would have been value in updating the desktop review (conducted during 2018 and 2019) to reflect the increase in SFP membership. This is highlighted in Figure 5.1 and also the more recent uptake in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland⁸⁰. Finally, there is potential to expand analysis to consider how visions of the 'local' coexist and interact with other spatial imaginaries including the fair trade imaginary (Goodman, 2004).

A number of 'next steps' and future opportunities were identified during the course of conducting and writing up the research. These range from short-term, practical suggestions such as providing participant feedback, to longer-term suggestions to extend the research. Such suggestions (working from short- to long-term) include providing written participant feedback, holding participant focus groups and developing a practitioner guide. These are discussed in the following paragraphs. It is observed that many opportunities draw on the spatial mapping element of the research. Maps are already regularly used by food partnerships. While maps may cover a range of aspects including food deprivation, food assets,

⁸⁰ <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/members/> (Last accessed 20/07/2023)

land use, food environments and urban agriculture (Cabannes and Marocchino, 2018), they more often focus on the current rather than the future. By contrast, the mapping exercise asks participants to articulate the ‘what if’ (Hopkins, 2019), setting their sights on the horizon. This creates an opportunity to deploy the spatial mapping approach in several ways. For example, it could be used to explore individual perspectives and negotiate more challenging and inspirational spatial visions as part of the food partnership’s vision setting agenda. Participation could also be extended to strengthen multi-disciplinary relations between food partnerships and key delivery actors. This includes urban and regional planners, who have an important role in connecting the food system and related actors and sectors, and linking different spatial scales (Cabannes and Marocchino, 2018). Strengthening the vision-making process and extending participation has the potential to enable participants to reach beyond the established political-administrative borders and create clearer links between vision and action.

The most immediate next step is to provide case study-based feedback to the 27 participants. At the end of the interviews, participants were often keen to see the wider outputs, including other participant maps. Many expressed an interest in attending a focus group. Indeed, several specific requests for feedback have been made since the interviews. Feedback is likely to be in the form of a concise presentation document centred around the spatial mapping exercise, although focus groups could be held for each case study if budget and time allowed. If focus groups become a possibility, there is opportunity to extend the research. Specifically, individual participant maps could be used as inputs into a session designed to understand common goals and tensions (within and between food partnerships and other actors, with the potential to develop a shared spatial vision of a more desirable food future. Specific examples of how focus groups or participatory workshops could be constructed, and for what purpose, are given in Section 8.1.3 (see Table 8.2). This approach has parallels with a recent participatory action research (PAR) study using mental maps to explore desired Inuit food system transitions (Lamalice et al, 2020).

There is also potential to develop a food partnership practitioners' guide. Such a guide could draw on the research findings, offering targeted suggestions and advice. Thus, it would complement SFP's existing toolkit⁸¹. Although this requires more thought, Table 9.2 contains examples of potential recommendations that are linked to specific research findings. Note the recommendations are most relevant to – and therefore targeted towards – food partnerships (be they local government or third sector-led) and (inter)national food networks. By extension, the guide suggested above could be relevant not only to food partnership practitioners, but more widely to other individuals or organisations seeking (food system) transition. There is also potential utility to policy makers, who could apply the spatial mapping method to better understand the imaginaries sought by different interest groups. More broadly, the research findings challenge us to give greater consideration to how elements of agency, legitimacy and spatiality interact to shape the desired destinations of transitions, and the ways in which we try to achieve them.

⁸¹ https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/sfp_toolkit/ (Last accessed 03/04/2023)

Area of contribution	Food partnership (FP) coordinators	(Inter)national food network coordinators	Cross-references and benefits
Spatial framings	Incorporate a spatial mapping exercise into FP direction-setting agenda to identify individual visions	Develop or update guidance to include spatial mapping exercise as a desirable input into vision setting	C5 (F2 and F3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges assumptions and finds common ground between actors • Generates more explicit discussions about the use of (re)scaling and border/boundary delineation • Increases likelihood of developing truly shared imaginaries • Greater likelihood of producing thoughtful, place-based food strategies with congruence between words and values
Agency – representation	Use outputs from the spatial mapping exercise to check actor groups identified as key to defining and/or delivering vision are appropriately engaged	Develop or update guidance to support more intentional decision-making about whose interests are included (and excluded)	C6 (F4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food partnerships make more intentional and timely choices about what actors are engaged or excluded • Builds on spatial mapping exercise to identify additional actors/interactions needed to deliver shared vision. This could include planning, LEP and/or other key organisations' representatives
Agency – role, structure and expression	Adopt a more reflexive approach to defining the food partnership's role, structure and working practices	Develop or update guidance to explicitly recognise choices about how agency is expressed and enacted through structures and practices	C6 (F5 and F6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food partnerships are more mindful about the organisational structures they adopt and how they seek to enact agency (as 'vision takers' or 'vision makers'; collaboratively or individually)
Legitimacy	Explicitly prioritise shared values alongside practicality of implementation while developing action plans (vision-action alignment)	Develop or update guidance to enhance and strengthen the relationship between 'imagining' with 'doing'	C7 (F7 – F9) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves beyond narrow economic justifications to connect with place-based values and objectives • Engages directly with more challenging (e.g. sustainability and social justice) issues • Better alignment between action plans and transition levers • Increases ability to influence policy and funding decisions

Table 9.2 Recommendations

The thesis identifies several areas where findings identify the limits of the data, revealing additional opportunities to extend the research. The findings broadly suggest pragmatic food-related spatial imaginaries risk locking out alternative imaginaries and locking in institutional norms, for example through the failure to challenge existing structures and boundaries. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with adopting flexible 'relocalisation' imaginaries, there is value in explicitly recognising and testing place-based administrative, political, geographical, cultural and historical framings, since they shape our everyday decision-making and who we engage with. There are several research directions that could potentially challenge and stretch our ability to carve out place-based imaginaries that push the limits of our collective imagination. Firstly, there is an opportunity to further investigate the relationship between problem-focused transition levers evident in food partnership action plans, and mindset focused transition levers more prevalent in actors seeking food system change (C7/F8). This will help to identify potential shortcomings in the feedback loop between vision and action, and the role of pragmatism in directing everyday activities and the desired destinations of transition. There is scope to look into tipping points – the moment at which a vision becomes a common spatial imaginary – in more detail. Extending this train of thought, there is also value in better understanding the relevance of short- and long-cycle spatial imaginaries, see Section 8.2.3. This is important in order to capitalise on emerging opportunities during key moments of change, such as the surge in local food interest during Covid. Finally, the thesis suggests drawing on the concept of everyday utopias a means to explore the tension between actionability and idealism in food systems transition, and practice-based ways in which it may be overcome (Cooper, 2014), see Section 8.1.3.

To conclude, spatial imaginaries matter, both academically, and more broadly to society. Realising food system transitions is dependent on our collective ability to imagine and work towards more sustainable, secure and just outcomes. The research demonstrates a need to be more attentive to the concept of the 'spatial imaginary'. The process of forming shared imaginaries brings actors together to negotiate and seek solutions to complex and contested issues and can ultimately determine policy and/or direct investment (Wetzstein, 2013; Hincks et al, 2017;

Davoudi and Brooks, 2021). Yet the term is applied loosely within food partnership research (see Section 2.5.1), and generally goes under- or undefined. This thesis sought to correct this oversight. It differentiates between spatial visions and spatial imaginaries, arguing the latter are formed when there is sufficient support to promote one vision over others. It also challenges the idea that spatial imaginaries are necessarily embedded in vision documents, highlighting a more complicated relationship between written goals and the collective imagination. In doing so, it questions the nature of true visions, and whether they live in written documentation, and/or in the hearts, minds and actions of those seeking transition.

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11. Appendices

Appendix 1. Active UK food partnerships included in the desktop review

No.	Food Partnership	Steering group membership disclosed?
1	Sustainable Food City Partnership Aberdeen	Y
2	Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Local Food Partnership	
3	Belfast Food Network	
4	Birmingham Food Council	Y
5	Bournemouth & Poole Sustainable Food City Partnership	
6	Bradford District Food Strategy/Feeding Bradford	
7	Brighton & Hove Food Partnership	Y
8	Bristol Good Food/Bristol Food Policy Council	Y
9	Calderdale Food Network	
10	Cambridge Sustainable Food	Y
11	Food Cardiff	Y
12	Food Carlisle	
13	Food Durham	Y
14	Feeding Coventry	
15	Good Food Doncaster	
16	Good Food East Midlands	
17	Edible Edinburgh	Y
18	Food Exeter	Y
19	Glasgow Food Policy Partnership	Y
20	Feeding (Greater) Manchester	
21	Good Food Greenwich	
22	Hackney Food Partnership	
23	Herefordshire Sustainable Food and Tourism Partnership	Y
24	Hull Food Partnership	
25	Lambeth Food Partnership	Y
26	Sustainable Food Lancashire	
27	Sustainable Food City Lancaster/Feeding Lancaster	
28	Leeds Food Partnership/Feeding Leeds	Y
29	Leicester Food Plan	
30	Good Food Leicestershire	
31	Lewisham Food Partnership/Good Food Lewisham	Y

No.	Food Partnership	Steering group membership disclosed?
32	Lincoln Food Partnership	
33	London Food Board/Programme	Y
34	Luton Food Plan	
35	Middlesbrough Food Partnership/ Growing Middlesbrough	Y
36	Food Futures/Manchester Food Board	
37	Food Newcastle	Y
38	North Lincolnshire Partnership	
39	Nottingham Good Food Partnership	
40	Oldham Food Network/Growing Oldham	
41	Good Food Oxford	Y
42	Peterborough Food Partnership	
43	Food Plymouth	Y
44	Portsmouth Food Partnership	Y
45	Feeding Stockport	Y
46	Good Food Stoke-on-Trent	
47	Tower Hamlets Food Partnership	
48	Wells Food Network	Y
49	Winchester food Partnership	
50	Good Food York	Y

NB In some instances, two groups from one location were included in the review. This tended to reflect a split between strategic and delivery responsibilities. In addition, several locations had food plans which were included in the review, even though a food partnership was not established at that point.

Appendix 2. Semi-structured interview template

Key question	Interviewer checklist	Rationale/notes/timings
Scene setting	What motivates you?	< 10 mins
<i>I've reviewed publicly available information about your FP, but it would be helpful to understand a bit about you, your background and your role</i>		<i>What motivates this person?</i>
What got you into this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement in FP/org? • What is your particular interest in improving the food system? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant's background; work/academic discipline; personal interest • Role within FP/organisation
Vision mapping exercise	What would a better food system look like?	30 mins
<i>I'd like us to use these maps to explore your vision of a better food system. You're welcome to sketch out your thoughts. Equally, you could use post-it notes or direct me to annotate the maps</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a 10 year view (if asked) – consistent with ongoing National Food Strategy for England review • How is scale understood and framed?
Please can you highlight your area of interest/concern?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of scalar terms? • Consistent with dominant imaginaries from the desktop analysis? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial factors; influences related to participant's area of expertise • Geographical, political, institutional, cultural or historical boundaries?
What is your vision of a better food system?	<p>Where should food come from? How would it work e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are the raw materials sourced from? • Where are they processed? • How are they distributed to consumers? • Impacts on other (excluded) areas/actors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dig into concepts of scale, space and relationships e.g. local, global', urban-rural, global-local • Place as community. How defining 1) community and 2) community they are engaging with? • Meaning behind 'eat local' message? • Implications for policy, practice, consumption?
Where does the vision come from?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the vision come about? • Who/what influenced thinking (and exclusions)? • How is it negotiated and justified? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical, political, institutional, cultural, historical framings • Pragmatism? Ability to influence? • Networks, 'space of places' (Castells)? • Key orgs, individuals and agendas? • Influence of SDGs, CRFS, SFC, MUFPP?
What are the main challenges to achieving this vision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations and tensions? • Impacts on people and processes in the food system? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political, administrative, cultural, institutional etc. barriers • Link to MLP (landscape, regime, niche)

Delivery	Material effects of vision?	20 mins
<i>The final series of questions looks at how the vision is translated into action</i>		<i>Material effects on policy, practice and consumption patterns</i>
How is this vision translated into strategies and plans?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who/what are the key influences in <u>developing</u> strategy? Other orgs? • Who is excluded? • How is it negotiated? • What gaps/assumptions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the vision shared, resourced and embedded in strategies and plans • Explore relationship between visions and strategies and plans of <u>FPs and other organisations</u> • Links between FPs, LEPs, Local Plans, Transport Plans, Climate Change Plans
How are strategies and plans translated into action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who/what is key to <u>delivering</u> the strategy? • What is prioritised? • How are priorities selected? • What are the gaps? • Reliance on/links to other organisations' delivery plans? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery mechanisms and prioritisation • Links to other organisations/agendas e.g. FPs, planning/Local Plans, LEPs, climate change, health, sustainability, business • To what extent are they currently engaged? Are they aware of each other?
What are the main challenges to translating vision into action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers to delivery? • Limits to influence? • Access to funding? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory, institutional, administrative, cultural, behavioural challenges? • Link to MLP
Wrap-up		
<i>Thank you for your time. Is there anything else you'd like to add? Any questions about the process going forward?</i>		<i>Double check name, role, contact details, any follow up etc. Check whether OK to follow up to clarify any points etc.</i>

Appendix 3. SFC/SFP six key issues: a comparative table

SFC original 6 key areas		SFP revised 6 key areas			
1	PROMOTING HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD TO THE PUBLIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Run healthy eating campaigns Run sustainable food campaigns Develop a food charter Develop and promote the initiative identity Use a variety of communications tools Create public participation opportunities Map and promote community food projects Create opportunities to buy healthy and sustainable food 	FOOD GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY	Establish a broad, representative and dynamic local food partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a local cross-sector food partnership Broad representation and clear terms of reference Recognised and supported by key institutions Establish working groups
				Develop, deliver and monitor a food strategy/action plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food strategy and/or action plan FP helps coordinate and measure progress Develop food charter Develop identity and use to connect and promote inspiring work
2	TACKLING FOOD POVERTY, DIET-RELATED ILL HEALTH AND ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HEALTHY FOOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish multi-agency partnership Promote living wage Provide food advice, referral and support on food access Increase understanding of food poverty Provide healthy weight services Reduce hunger and malnutrition 	HEALTHY FOOD FOR ALL	Tackling food poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish multi-agency partnership Ensure high quality provision for most vulnerable Promote fair wages Improve signposting to direct those experiencing food poverty
				Promoting healthy eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy eating and drinking campaigns Healthy eating/weight support services Healthy food culture transformation programmes Map access to healthy food

SFC original 6 key areas		SFP revised 6 key areas			
		Increase healthy option availability Curb food desert/swamp development			
3	BUILDING COMMUNITY FOOD KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, RESOURCES AND PROJECTS	Establish community food activist network Identify and make assets available Incorporate food growing in local development Increase community food growing Improve food education in schools Buying and cooking training opportunities Change local authority policy and practice Help communities protect and take control of assets	GOOD FOOD MOVEMENT	Inspire and engage the public about good food	Raise public awareness Provide opportunities to learn about, share and enjoy healthy and sustainable food Encourage participation for all in community food initiatives Umbrella-campaign to encourage individuals and organisations to take direct action
				Foster food citizenship movement and a local good food movement	Establish community food activist network Improve community access/control of green, brownfield and unused building spaces Support local community food initiatives Increase participation in food growing
4	PROMOTING A VIBRANT AND DIVERSE SUSTAINABLE FOOD ECONOMY	Develop strategies, policies and services Support new sustainable food businesses Promote healthy and sustainable businesses Increase independent food business spending	SUSTAINABLE FOOD ECONOMY	Put good food enterprise at the heart of local economic development	Broader strategies, policies and services to support healthy, sustainable food businesses and circular food economy Improve infrastructure to support shorter supply chains Support sustainable food entrepreneurs and enterprises Improve diversity of (independent) retail offer

SFC original 6 key areas		SFP revised 6 key areas		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support sustainable food start-ups Protect/improve food infrastructure Help connect producers and consumers Help restaurants become more sustainable 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote healthy, sustainable and independent businesses to consumers Online directory of local good food businesses Promote local good food businesses to the public Greater consumer spending in local independent and sustainable food businesses Increase opportunities for local producers to sell direct to consumers
5	TRANSFORMING CATERING AND FOOD PROCUREMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish food procurement working group Adopt sustainable food procurement policy Persuade public sector organisations to adopt food policies Encourage caterer accreditation Track healthy and sustainable catering accreditation Help procurement officers source more local food Help small businesses access procurement Encourage restaurants/caterers to source more healthy, sustainable, ethical and local food 	CATERING AND PROCUREMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change policy and practice to put good food on people's plates Council adopts sustainable food procurement policy and strategy Individual public sector bodies adopt sustainable food policies Public sector organisations and large private caterers achieve recognised healthy, sustainable and ethical food accreditation Restaurants and other outlets improve their food offering
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving connections and collaboration across the local supply chain Cross-sector sustainable procurement group Enable increased ingredient sourcing from local and sustainable producers and processors Enable small scale local producers and sustainable food businesses to access large scale procurement markets Enable a more strategic approach over a larger geographic region

SFC original 6 key areas		SFP revised 6 key areas			
6	REDUCING WASTE AND THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT OF THE FOOD SYSTEM	Run campaigns Help producers reduce impact Incorporate food waste hierarchy Establish food waste collection scheme Waste and resource efficiency training Home and community composting Collect harvest surplus/unwanted produce Redistribute surplus food	FOOD FOR THE PLANET	Promote sustainable food production and resource efficiency	Declare climate and nature emergency and contribute to joint strategy Land use management strategy for community and commercial agriculture Agroecology and resource efficiency training and advice Promote mainstream shift to sustainable food
				Reduce, redirect and recycle food, packaging and related waste	Incorporate food waste hierarchy Establish food waste collection scheme Raise awareness of food waste Ensure effective collection and redistribution of waste food and raise nutritional standards

Sources: SFC website <http://sustainablefoodcities.org/keyissues> (Last accessed 14/08/2018); SFC Award Criteria and Process (downloaded 19/09/18); SFP website <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/> (Last accessed 02/02/2022)

Appendix 4. Case study key themes and narratives

Key themes	Analysis question(s)	Narratives identified	Application
RQ1 Spatial framings CHAPTER FIVE Defining 'local' Borders and boundaries Spatial vision	How is the local defined and scaled (borders and boundaries)?	Administrative (e.g. county, region) City-regional/bioregional Radial Social networks Geographical/watershed	Table 5.3 Common narratives – local scale
	How are individual spatial visions expressed?	Re-localised food system Bioregion/city-region food system Location-specific vision Global food system	Figure 5.4 Spatial visions – areas of complementarity Table 5.3 Common narratives – spatial visions Figure 5.11 Common narratives and connections (combining desktop review and case study data sources)
	What common spatial narratives underpin visions?	Transform farming practices Increase land access Increase local food production Diversify local production Jobs on the land Shorter/localised supply chains Other	Figure 5.5 Spatial vision narrative 'footprints' Table 5.2 Spatial vision narratives – top three themes
RQ2 Agency CHAPTER SIX Who (stakeholders) Roots (stakeholder background)	Who needs to be involved (actor representation)?	Local authorities Food partnerships Planning system Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) Business/industry Supermarkets Farmers Community/the public	Figure 6.1 Interview references to food supply chain segments Figure 6.2 Interview identification of key actors

Key themes	Analysis question(s)	Narratives identified	Application
	How are food partnerships structured?	Vision-takers Vision-makers	
	How is agency expressed in vision-setting?	Collaborative agency Individual agency Emerging agency	Table 6.3 Case study expressions of agency Table 6.6 Common narratives and connections (updated from Table 5.11)
RQ3 Legitimacy and practice	What are participants' primary motivations?	Social justice Health Economy Environment/sustainability	Section 7.2 Finding 7
Drivers and influences Barriers and tensions Food futures (achieving visions)	What are the shared characteristics of imaginaries that are legitimised over others?	Compelling Shared Actionable Transferable/scalable (but not always) Serendipitous (right time and place)	Section 7.2 Finding 8 (vignettes)
	What's holding us back?	Resources Access to land Supermarkets Affordability and supply Stakeholder tensions Other	Section 7.2 Finding 8 (vignettes) General discussion points distributed across Chapter 5-7 findings
	What are the levers for change?	Education and training Food identity and culture Greater connection to place (and food) Greater collaboration Behavioural change (cooking from scratch; choosing seasonal etc) Deep, systemic change Other	Figure 7.6 Transition levers – common narratives Table 7.2 Transition levers – unpacking the top three narratives

Appendix 5. Case study participants' spatial imaginaries

A. Defining 'local'



Everybody is walking distance from a shop that sells affordable, basic, cook-from-scratch ingredients



Network of growers, buyers and sellers with a clear flow of food produced, processed or traded by network participants; 50 mile radius



West of England and Devon; 1.5 hours' drive (extends into Wales)



Defined in various inconsistent ways, from 30 miles to Europe-wide; can become short-hand for 'good'

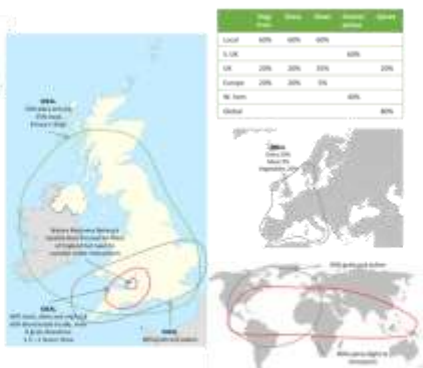
B. Where should our food come from?



Shops are walking distance; infrastructure on the city outskirts; thriving rural economy/small scale agriculture further out



Produce what you can locally; city region scale is key; UK self-sufficient where possible; trade still vital



More localised, lower intensity food systems; Majority of fruit, veg, dairy and meat sourced from within UK



Re-localise where possible, growing a greater quantity and diversity in the UK

Bristol participants' spatial imaginaries

A. Defining 'local'



West of England. Scale needs to be manageable, relatable and bioregional



Controversial term, often conflated with 'British'. Spatially, surrounding counties (not Wales)



30 mile radius local food growing



25 miles? South West as regional

B. Where should our food come from?



Bioregional/city region food systems; co-creating conditions for commercial urban agroecology to thrive



Source as near to home as possible. Realistically still a significant role for the rest of the UK, Ireland and Europe



'More-than-regional approach – look beyond West of England to link into SW peninsula



Increase city and peri-urban growing; regional partnerships and supply chains; national networks

Bristol participants' spatial imaginaries

A. Defining 'local'



Local not defined. Focus on Todmorden



Within Calderdale or within 10 miles of a place in Calderdale

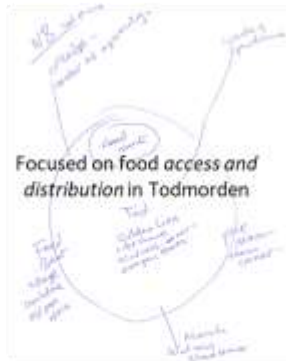


'Local' as a series of networks and communities



Within 30 miles of Hebden Bridge

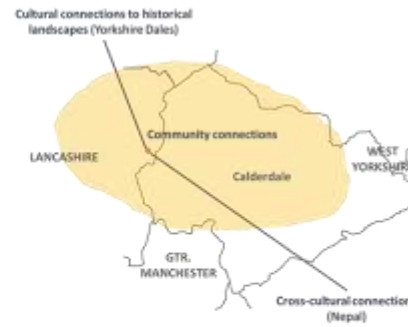
B. Where should our food come from?



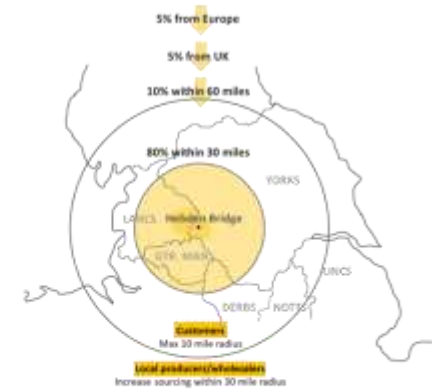
Focused on food access and distribution in Todmorden
 "Should I care about where food comes from? Probably because I care about [the environment, slave labour etc]. Can I do much about it? Not really"



Optimistic realism (10% Calderdale; 20% Yorkshire; 30% UK and Ireland; 40% global)
 Utopian (60% Calderdale; 30% Yorkshire; 10% UK)



Increase local production; cultivate connections/sense of place



80% within 30 miles; 10% within 60 miles; 5% UK; 5% Europe

Calderdale participants' spatial imaginaries

A. Defining 'local'



Calderdale, Bradford and Kirkstoft (food purchase); Yorkshire (food production)



Super-local 6 miles; local 30 miles; regional as Yorkshire, Humber, Lancashire, Greater Manchester



Local depends on product and season. Could be the Calderdale (W Yorks.), Rochdale (Greater Manchester), the North, the UK

B. Where should our food come from?

Limited opportunity in Calderdale. Could look more to West/North Yorkshire, but ultimately it's a national and international issue



Increased land access with increased local and regional growing



A more localised food system, based on the principle of subsidiarity and fairly traded

Calderdale participants' spatial imaginaries

A. Defining 'local'



25 miles from Melton Mowbray



Leicestershire



Leicester and Leicestershire (Local Enterprise Partnership boundary)



'Meltonshire'

B. Where should our food come from?



50% of food comes from within 25 miles of Melton



Shorten supply chains and increase proportion of food growing within city and county



Global food system with increased two-way trade



Food ideally supplied by the borough of Melton or 'Meltonshire'

Leicestershire participants' spatial imaginaries

A. Defining 'local'



Leicestershire and portion of the surrounding counties (30 miles radius)



East Midlands and NW Cambridgeshire



Leicestershire and surrounding counties (FFL boundary)



Surrounding counties (FFL) and concentric circle

B. Where should our food come from?



Local-global vision. Between a quarter and a third is grown within 30 miles



Increase supply of local food, focusing on what grows well within the area (whole food chain thinking)



Aim to supply as much as practicable from the local area; 70-80% produced within the UK



'As local as possible', recognising physical environment limitations, and drawing from an area including Leicestershire and surrounding counties

Leicestershire participants' spatial imaginaries

Appendix 6. Steering Group membership

Category	Representing	Examples
Business	For-profit organisations, largely operating within a food chain sector	Wholesale markets, caterers, organic producers, food manufacturers
Consulting	Mix of business and third sector organisations representing consultants, research groups, think tanks and policy institutes	Consulting firms, not-for profit foundations, Chatham House, healthcare consultants
Educational establishments	Universities, colleges, schools	Academics, teachers and professional staff
Government	Local government, devolved government, Public Health, civil service, elected representatives	Local and County Councils, Welsh Assembly, councillors
Healthcare providers	NHS and health trusts/partnerships	Health Boards, health charities, social care partnerships, GP practices group, NHS catering
Third sector ⁸²	Organisations that are neither public nor private sector, including voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives ⁸³	Local and national charities, SFC coordinators, Transition Towns, community allotments, community kitchens, food redistribution groups
Trade/industry/business associations	Organisations working directly in or representing the food chain; tourism agencies	National Farmers Union; Chamber of Commerce; National Caterers Association
Other	Groups not represented elsewhere	Private estates (Duchy of Cornwall); the Church

⁸² Also sometimes referred to as the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector

⁸³ <https://www.nao.org.uk/successful-commissioning/introduction/what-are-civil-society-organisations-and-their-benefits-for-commissioners/>

Appendix 7. Categorising stakeholders' areas of interest

Category	Representing	Examples
Communities	Groups seeking to transform lives and/or improve community cohesion	Groundwork; church groups; transition movement
Community growing	Allotments, community gardens and growing schemes. Emphasises local production but also often seeks to enable and transform communities	Incredible Edibles movement; Social Farms and Gardens
Economic development	Trade associations, tourism and national/local government seeing to plan for and improve economic conditions	British Retail Consortium; Make it York; City Council Development Dept
Health	Healthcare providers; local government; charitable trusts; health consultancies; research groups	Public Health; NHS Trusts; Guy's and St Thomas' Charity; Food Nation
Housing	Community landlords and housing developers seeking to support those in housing need; local government	Housing and social care social enterprises; Local Council Housing Depts
Local food	Businesses and third sector groups working directly within the food chain	Allotment market stalls; organic veg boxes; cheese-makers
Poverty	Charities and NGOs focusing on issues including social justice, food access, homelessness, holiday hunger	Fareshare; Nourish Scotland (social justice focus); community food initiatives
Sustainability	Range of government, third sector and consultancy/research interests	Soil Association; Zero Waste Scotland; carbon management consultancy; local council reps
Other	Predominantly Local/County Council departments	Natural infrastructure, strategy, tourism representatives