The Hybrid Governance of Urban Food Commons. Evidence from the Brussels-Capital Region.

Alessandra Manganelli

Abstract

Over the last three decades a revival of food commoning initiatives has occurred. Reacting against shortcomings of conventional food chains, food commons pursue socio-political transformation in established food and socio-political systems, towards more empowering modes of local food systems' governance.

Drawing from the conceptual apparatus and empirical findings of my PhD research, this article aims to examine the **critical governance tensions** faced by food commoning initiatives as they diversely develop. In particular, three types of governance tensions are identified: **organizational** - i.e. tensions in governing the food network organizations as they diversely develop, build alliances and networks; **resource** - i.e. tensions in accessing and securing key resources (e.g. land, funding, material infrastructures, other key human and natural resources); and **institutional** - i.e. tensions related to institutionalization processes, and to the constraining or enabling role of key institutions with respect to the agency of local food networks.

In the empirical part of this paper, these types of governance tensions and their interrelations are briefly analysed in three case studies of urban food networks in the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR): a Community Supported Agriculture Network called GASAP (*Groupes d'Achat Solidaires de l'Agriculture Paysanne*) active in the BCR; the multi-agent governance of the access to land for urban agriculture and its scaling out in the BCR; the contested dynamics of institutionalizing alternative food systems through the development and implementation of local food policies in the BCR.

This article argues that the Hybrid Governance analysis provides a more nuanced and grounded characterization of the agency and socio-political dynamics of (food) commoning initiatives as they diversely develop and pursue socio-political change. In particular, the last part of this article discusses potential contributions of the Hybrid Governance analysis to studies on collective action initiatives in general. These contributions relate to *a)* a more complex characterization of the *agency* of collective action initiatives; *b)* a more sound analysis of the connections between value systems and cooperative practices; *c)* a better understanding of challenges and tensions experienced by self-organizing initiatives in exercising greater socio-political transformation.

1. Introduction. The revival of (urban) food commons.

Food commoning initiatives can be defined as bottom-led movements pursuing alternative ways of organizing and managing the food chain and its processes (Manganelli 2019). Community gardens, Community Supported Agricultures (CSAs), food cooperatives, producers-consumers networks, as well as urban-driven food policy councils and food strategies (Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015, Morgan 2009), can be considered as key examples of food commoning initiatives.

Moved by alternative value systems and ideologies of food sovereignty (Sage 2014) and food democracy (Hassanein 2003), food commoning initiatives react against the perceived injustice and unsustainability of mainstream food chains (Marsden 2013; Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe 2010). In fact, food commons aspire to (re)establish community ownership and control over the food chain, opposing privatization and corporate sovereignty over land, other key resources as well as food systems' processes (Figueroa 2015). As such, food commons hold subversive and transformative aspirations, aiming to build alternative or counter-hegemonic modes of local food systems' governance and, hopefully, to change key mechanisms and logics through which food systems are organized and managed (Vivero-Pol *et al.* 2018).

Over the last three decades a new wave of practices as well as scholarly research on food commons has flourished (Karner 2010; Morgan 2014). Core contributions concentrate on cities as drivers of place-based (urban) food commons through citizens' led food initiatives such as urban agriculture(s) (Angotti 2015), consumers-producers networks (Roep and Wiskerke 2012), or urban food policies and strategies (Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015). Part of the debate has begun to address the governance of (urban) food commons, stressing for instance scalar dynamics of food commoning initiatives as these initiatives attempt to scale out and exercise a transformative impact on the socio-institutional system in which they are embedded (Campbell and MacRae 2013; Johnston and Baker 2005; Levkoe 2011; Levkoe and Wakefield 2014). Not enough attention, however, has been provided to key **governance tensions** food commoning initiatives face as they diversely develop and attempt to scale out or up in their socio-institutional context.

This article summarises content and results of my Doctoral research on the *hybrid governance* of alternative food networks (Manganelli 2019), in order to conceptualise and analyse these tensions. In particular, the objective of this article is twofold. First, this article

aims to outline an integrative conceptual framework - called the **Hybrid Governance Approach (HGA)** (see Manganelli, Van den Broeck and Moulaert 2019) - that pinpoints to interrelated *organizational, resource* and *institutional* governance tensions. The HGA intends to provide a dynamic socio-political view of key struggles and tensions food commoning initiatives face in their life-course and development. Second, this article intends to show how this framework provides useful analytical tools to unlock critical governance challenges of collective action initiatives in general.

In order to pursue these objectives, this article is organized as follows. The following *Section 2* presents the HGA as the analytical-methodological framework used to identify the three types of governance tensions in food commoning initiatives. In particular, social innovation and relational approaches to governance are used to pinpoint to the *agency* and self-organizing dynamics of food commoning initiatives as driven by their will to secure key resources, organise alternative food chains and build alternative institutions for the local food governance. *Section 3* provides empirical examples of how the three interrelated types of governance tensions are experienced by food commoning initiatives in the context of the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR). Then, *section 4* briefly discusses potential contributions of the Hybrid Governance analysis on food commons to debates on collective action initiatives in general. *Section 5* concludes by recasting the value of the Hybrid Governance analysis on (food) commoning initiative, and underlying its potential impact and further exploitation.

2. **Framing governance tensions in food commoning initiatives through a Hybrid Governance Approach (HGA).**

The agro-food literature has progressed in identifying key challenges in the governance of food commoning initiatives, addressing governance from diverse angles. On the one hand, key contributions shed light on challenges in governing food commoning organisations. As they develop and scale out, diverse types of local food networks or bottom-led food initiatives need greater resources and management capacities to run and sustain their own organization (Mount 2012). Furthermore, challenges in securing key material resources - i.e. land, logistics, funding, operational infrastructures, human capital, etc. - are highlighted as integral part of the growth dynamics of local food organisations (Fridman and Lenters 2013). Urban food governance and planning literatures (Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015)

also showcase the multi-scalarity of institutional systems, such as planning, state or market institutions, conditioning but also challenging the transformative potential of (urban) food commons as these initiatives enter urban governance arenas. In short, the agro-food debate has identified major *organizational, resource* and *institutional* dynamics of the governance of food commoning initiatives. Yet, these contributions fall short in making these dynamics and their interrelations explicit (see Manganelli, Van den Broeck, Moulaert 2019).

Capitalising from socio-political and relational approaches to governance, the HGA - introduced by Manganelli, van den Broeck and Moulert (2019) - helps to re-conceptualise key interrelated tensions in the governance of food commoning initiatives. Indeed, Hybrid Governance pinpoints to the tensions created by the interactivity among different governance forms (i.e. *solidarity, networked-horizontal, state, market-driven*) and the ways these tensions are experienced by food commoning initiatives, conditioning their diverse modes of scaling out or up. In particular, three types of tensions are identified in the HGA: **organizational** (governance) tensions, i.e. tensions in governing the food network organizations as they diversely develop, build alliances, networks, interact with the socio-institutional system in which they are embedded; **resource** (governance) tensions, i.e. tensions in accessing and securing key resources (e.g. land, funding, material infrastructures, other key human and natural resources); **institutional** (governance) tensions, i.e. tensions related to institutionalization processes, and to the constraining or enabling role of key institutions with respect to the agency of local food networks. Governance tensions are related to one another. For instance, the need to access land and other resources (resource governance tensions) can trigger the mobilization of self-organizing food initiatives (organizational governance tensions) which may enter into conflict or may build alliances with diverse agents of the institutional system (such as state, market agents, or planning regulations, etc.), which control and regulate the allocation of resources (institutional governance tensions). To identify key tensions and highlight their interconnections the HGA capitalises from diverse governance literatures. Based on a socio constructivist perspective (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Healey 1999, 2004), **sociological, institutionalist, multi-scalar approaches to governance** allow to distinguish between organizations and institutions and to define institutions as "frameworks of norms, rules and

practices which structure action in social contexts" (Healey 2006, p.302; see also Manganelli, Van den Broeck and Moulaert 2019). Thus, according to this perspective, institutions are both formal modes of operating of state or market structures, as well as informal, customary socially embedded norms and codes of behaviour of community-based initiatives. This distinction and definition help to characterize organizational and institutional types of governance tensions and articulate their interrelations. *Political economy and socio-ecological approaches to governance* (Swyngedouw 2000, 2010; Swyngedouw and Jessop 2006) support this distinction and articulation. Indeed this strand of literature helped to theorize the ways by which multi-scalar institutional logics - such as modes of working of the state or market institutions - impact on the reproduction of alternative food organizations, and their socio-ecological metabolism (including access to land, logistics, human capital and other material resources feeding alternative food systems), involving different types of governance tensions. Contributions on *social innovation and collective action* (García *et al.* 2012; Moulaert *et al.* 2005, 2007, 2010, 2013) are instrumental to theorize the (collective) agency and self-organizing dynamics of local food initiatives. In particular these contributions help to cast light on how value systems, socio-political transformative ambitions, but also short term needs for resource and organizational sustainability, shape the ways local food actors self-organize, build alliances, and diversely scale out or up. Figure 1, taken from Manganelli, Van den Broeck and Moulaert 2019, provides a schematic illustration of the conceptual framework, highlighting the three interrelated types of governance tensions (re)produced by dynamics interactions among governance forms.
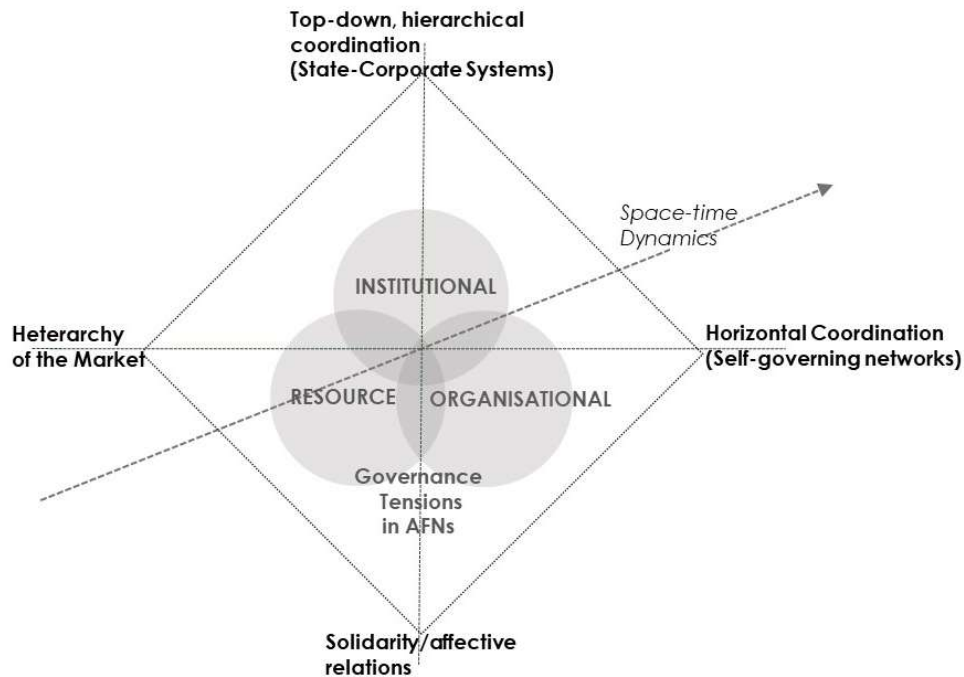
Figure 1. Conceptual scheme of Hybrid Governance and its tensions. *Source*: Manganelli, Van den Broeck, and Moulaert 2019.

3. Investigating hybrid governance tensions in food commoning initiatives: examples from the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR)

Summarizing key empirical findings from my Doctoral dissertation (see Manganelli 2019), this section aims to show how hybrid governance tensions manifest in real-life examples of food commoning initiatives in the BCR. In particular, three case-studies are presented. First, '*organizational governance tensions*' constitute the entry point to the analysis of the Brussels-based Community Supported Agriculture network GASAP (Solidarity Purchasing Groups for Peasant Agriculture), summarised in sub-section 3.1. The empirical investigation focuses on the ways in which governance tensions become explicit all along the life course of this food commoning organization and how the GASAP network has responded to these tensions. Second, '*resource governance tensions*' stir the analysis of the ways access to land for urban agriculture is governed by diverse actors in the BCR. In fact, section 3.2 summarises how key actors self-organized and associated in order to address land-resource constraints and how this has triggered certain types of institutional

responses to the land-resource governance. Finally, in sub-section 3.3 '*Institutional governance tensions'* constitutes entryways to a more zoomed-out analysis of the development and implementation of the BCR's local food policies. In particular, actors' struggles to scale out or up food system principles across organizational and institutional spheres are emphasised.

3.1 Uncovering organizational governance tensions in food commoning initiatives through the Brussels' GASAP case

A brief description of the GASAP organization

The GASAP initiative was established in the BCR in 2006, at the origins of a nascent local food movement in Brussels (Manganelli and Moulaert 2018). As a citizens' driven bottom-up initiative, with originally no formal links with state or market institutions, the GASAP fosters a solidarity alliance between consumers and small-scale peasant producers/farmers, formalised by signing a contract between producers and consumers' groups (see GASAP's charter). The GASAP holds strong ideologies and values of food sovereignty and defence of peasant agriculture. The members' self-perception as being part of a movement, driven by citizens that aspire for more agro-ecological and solidarity based food network, constitutes an essential driver of the initiative. Nowadays the GASAP counts over 90 consumer–producer groups, scattered in the BCR and the surrounding area (see figure 2.1). Each group generally encompasses 15 to 20 households, sometimes more, linked to one or more producers (see Manganelli and Moulaert 2018). The number of small scale farmers belonging to the network went from a single producer in 2006 to over 30 producers nowadays (see figure 2.2). As figure 2.2 shows, farmers are mostly located outside the BCR's administrative area, i.e. in the Walloon and Flemish Regions. This has an impact on the logistics of food distribution, as food deliveries need to be organised in short supply chains covering a considerable spatial distance. Practically, producers distribute food produce on a regular basis at delivery points divided over the Brussels' regional territory, whereas citizens-consumers compose and collect food baskets at each pick up point. Thus, the organisation is self-managed by consumers and producers in a direct solidarity alliance, with the objective to foster transparent and horizontal networks between producers and consumers.

Governance tensions in the GASAP's early stage (2006 to 2012)

Set up by active citizens and farmers, the early stage of the GASAP shows a nascent bottom-up food network dealing with the spontaneous self-organization of its local food chains. Indeed, as GASAP started to grow and scale out in the BCR, management challenges came to the fore provoking organisational (governance) tensions. As a consequence, tensions were experienced between the spontaneous / informal governance and the need for a more structured organisation, also requiring greater professionalization, and therefore, greater access to human and material resources (see Manganelli and Moulaert 2018, p. 837). Pushed by these organizational and material-resource tensions, key GASAP leaders were ushered to connect with state agencies at the regional level as to access funding and political support. Initial support was found through the Environmental Agency of the BCR (IBGE - *Institut Bruxellois pour la Gestion de l'Environnement*) - under the jurisdiction of the Environmental Ministry. Led by a political leader who was sensitive to food and environmentally-oriented initiatives, the Cabinet of the Environment started to support to the GASAP organization through yearly-based subsides.

In general, securing stable access to financial resources has been a constant factor of organisational and resource governance tensions for GASAP all along its life-course. Moreover, difficulties to guarantee sustained collaborative relationships between an organisation like the GASAP and a state agency, stem from differences in socio-political and socio-professional cultures. Indeed, the need to mediate between food sovereignty values and priorities of the GASAP and professional/bureaucratic practices of state agencies can be considered as a key factor of institutional governance tensions (see Manganelli and Moulaert 2018, pp. 837-38).

Governance tensions in intermediate and late stages (2012 to nowadays)

The GASAP organisation continued growing in numbers of participants and members reaching over 60 consumers–producer groups in 2012 (GASAP Activity Report 2012). Alongside, new demands by citizens-consumers for more variety in products beyond fruits and vegetables started to pop up in the intermediate stage (see Manganelli and Moulaert 2018, section 3.2). These growth factors and requests for diversification in food supply ushered responses by the GASAP's organization, who faced greater pressures to better

organise the distribution logistics. These interrelated resource and organizational governance tensions stirred new institutional governance interaction. In short, some leading members of GASAP began to search and negotiate for new supportive policy spaces in the Brussel's sustainable food policy arena. Opportunities were found through a new inter-governmental programme to stimulate employment in the BCR. From 2013 an axis on sustainable food was included in this program. This axis provided new funding opportunities for food actors and organisations such as the GASAP. Responding to a call for projects, in 2013-2014 the GASAP was able to acquire project-based funding for improving its logistics. Yet, other institutional governance tensions manifested as following the elections, a change in the BCR Regional Ministry of the Environment – also responsible for food policies – occurred in 2014. The new BCR political coalition imposed stricter rules for allocating financial resources to food and ecologically oriented bottom-up initiatives. As a result, the project proposed by the GASAP was stopped after one year, due to new orientations in the allocation of funding and in the delivery of programmes and policies. These sharpened governance modes affected the resource base of the GASAP network, generating tensions in the relationships between the organization and public institutions.

The years 2014–2015 represented a threshold in the GASAPs history, as a greater diversity of actors, organisations and state agencies became part of the GASAPs' governance (see Manganelli and Moulaert 2018 section 3.3). The highlighted factors of tension – in particular the growth in the organisation, the search for additional resources and the conflicts in value systems with state agencies – have played a part in pushing the GASAP towards the establishment of new governance networks.

Indeed, responding to new policy opportunities in the Brussels' food arena, in the latest stage of its trajectory, the GASAP organization becomes embedded in a more complex network of involving different types of actors: research agents, alternative food organisations, some being social enterprises, but also corporate agents, such as Delhaize, one of the main supermarket chains in Belgium, and Sodexo, a big enterprise responsible for institutional food procurement. These new governance networks seem to play an ambivalent role in the GASAP's organisation. On the one hand, they fostered more stable and longer-term funding, greater expertise and human capital. On the other hand, tensions

occur in the cooperation with actors coming from different organisational practices and cultures, with different objectives and behavioural modes:

> *Needs, goals and timeframes of the associative world are very different from the ones of the corporate. By working in these partnerships you realize how challenging it is to implement a fruitful collaboration and to put into action the aspired objectives of everyone in the given timeframe.* (Cit. from a "Co-create" project's responsible within the GASAP; quoted in Manganelli and Moulaert 2018, p.840)

Other organisational governance tensions relate to the increased degree of professionalization required by the projects. Conflicts have emerged between volunteer participation, an essential driver of the GASAP organisation, and professional agency, as well as between participatory–horizontal versus hierarchical-efficient decision-making practices (see Manganelli and Moulaert 2018, section 3.3).

Figure 2.1. Conceptual map of the BCR with GASAP's food baskets delivery points in the latest stage.
Source: Manganelli and Moulaert 2018

Figure 2.2. Conceptual map of Belgium with location of GASAP's producers latest stage.
Source: Manganelli and Moulaert 2018

3.2 Coping with land-resource governance tensions in the BCR: the agency of the *Terre en Vue – Boeren Bruxsel Paysans* initiative

Contextual characters of land for (urban) agriculture in Brussels

The officially designated agricultural land in the BCR covers around 3,5% of the Regional territory, i.e. approximately 572 ha (Statistics Brussels – IBSA 2017), reaching around 786 ha with pastures and prairies. These agricultural lands are mostly situated in the outskirts of Brussels, towards the borders with the neighbouring Province of the Flemish Brabant and prevalently in the South-West part, within the Municipality of Anderlecht. Most of the professional farmers located within the BCR practice a conventional type of agriculture, based on grains and cereals, and thus not directed to feed Brussels through short chains (Lecocq 2012). Despite land scarcity and fragmentation, local movements recently emerged in the BCR with the intention to re-politicise and re-activate land for small scale local food production within the existing agricultural areas as well as in other potentially suitable areas of the Region. In particular the *Boeren Bruxsel Paysans* is a coalition of diverse actors - including grass-root organizations, bottom-up advocacy organizations as well as state actors at the Regional and Municipal levels - which has formalized into a project-based partnership pursuing the enhancement of small-scale urban agriculture and local food networks in the BCR.

More precisely, in this sub-section land-resource governance tensions around the scaling out of urban agriculture in Brussels are analysed through the agency of the bottom-up organization *Terre and Vue*, part of the BBP coalition. Holding aspiration of (re)create landed commons through the scaling out of small-scale agro-ecological agriculture, *Terre en Vue* and the wider BBP cope with *challenges and tensions* related to the implementation as well as institutional promotion - or at least protection - of urban-peri-urban agriculture.

Agents' struggles over the access and scaling out of land for urban agriculture

Around 2014 the BBP coalition started to form as a network of diverse actors promoting urban agriculture and more localized food networks in the BCR. Within the wider coalition, the organization *Terre en Vue* has the specific role of searching for available land for small-scale (agro ecological) farmers in Brussels (communication with *Terre en Vue*). Proactively engaged in the search for available and useable land, *Terre en Vue* came across and began

to address several land-resource constraints. In particular, actors from the *Terre en Vue* organization came across the fragmented land ownership structure affecting the potentially available land for urban agriculture within the BCR. Thus, generations of land subdivision processes have reduce the size of land parcels. Ownership and land use rights have also gone through fragmentation. Other constraints derive from unsupportive land owners - including Municipalities and other state actors - as well as tenants, that show scarce appreciation towards alternative/commoning forms of urban food production. As underlined by *Terre en Vue*, these factors make it difficult to find space for urban agriculture and to scale food production out across the BCR. *Terre en Vue* and other partners point at the '*patrimonial*' and speculative attitude over land by a large part of land owners or tenants in the BCR.

> *"There is a multiplicity of owners, both private and public, and thus land parcels potentially suitable for urban agriculture are very fragmented. This hyper fragmentation of land is absolutely a constraint […]. In addition, most of the owners - private as well as public – advance instrumental and speculative practices on land. Thus there is no vision as well as no coordination among different owners of the land towards the fostering of alternative land use practices (…)"* (Excerpt from the interview with Terre en Vue, quoted in Manganelli and Moulaert 2019 p.396).

In the frame of the BBP's partnership, actors such as *Terre en Vue* have begun to tackle some of the constraints on the access to land (see Manganelli and Moulaert 2019, section 3.3). Practical actions included communication and negotiation with some land owners, local authorities (also in their quality as land owners) and municipal planning actors of the BCR to identify potentially available and usable land, and to negotiate its access and use by small scale farmers. Alongside that, the *Terre en Vue* organization started to develop a GIS database in which potentially suitable land plots for small scale farmers within the BRC are identified and mapped. In the view of the organization, this cartographic database could constitute a basis for a conversation and negotiation with relevant actors (e.g. potentially interested small scale farmers, land owners, local or regional authorities, and so on) on the opportunity to scale out access to and use of land for small scale growers in the identified plots across the Region. Along with that, *Terre en Vue* engaged in mediating among land owners and potential small scale growers in the attempt to elaborate adapted and mutually beneficial land use contract agreements.

Results of these actions are uneven. If some land owners, such as the Municipality of Anderlecht, showed some openness and support in providing land for urban agriculture, other Municipalities of the BCR, land owners or tenants, among which institutional land owners, were rather reluctant. Thus, this analysis suggests that the subversive/counterhegemonic agency over land stirred by actors such as *Terre en Vue,* need to confront with pragmatic conditions of as well as conflicts over the actual availability and accessibility. These conditions inevitably impact on the concrete possibilities to realize transformative action.

Figure 3.1 and 3.2. Images of implementation sites of urban agriculture in the BCR by *Boeren Bruxsel Paysans* actors. *Source*: author

Institutional responses and uncertainties over the (hinter)land question

On the side of Brussels' state institutions, new incentives to the development of urban agriculture have, at least discursively, been identified in the recently approved Food Strategy (see Manganelli and Moulaert 2019, section 3.3). Launched in 2015 by the newly elected Cabinet of the Environment, the 'Good Food Strategy' seems to recognize the importance of enhancing urban agriculture and access to land. Thus, the Regional Agency responsible for implementing urban agriculture has recently issued a study aiming to investigate the legal and planning barriers to the development of urban agriculture within the BCR.

Also, at the light of this study, actors of the Regional Agency have re-casted the importance of sensitizing other sections of the Regional and local governments of the BCR - among which planning and land-use decision makers (communication with the Regional Agency).

However, uncertainties remain concerning the institutional mechanisms and instruments (for instance, reforms to the dominant land use agreements, or *ad hoc* land use contracts, etc.) to deal with the scaling out of the access to land for urban agriculture in the Region. Moreover, some actors point to the lack of a proactive and sustained dialogue among the Regional Agency responsible for implementing urban agriculture and key BBP's actors about the enablement of institutional mechanisms that can favor access to land (see also Manganelli and Moulaert 2019, section 3.3).

Alongside, the BCR food strategy actors also recognize the importance of building relations with Flemish agents to sustain local agriculture in the BCR's hinterland (personal communication with the manager of the BCR's food strategy). Thus, developing urban agriculture from a wider spatial perspective seems to be considered a fundamental step in enhancing food security and provide more healthy local food for the BCR. However, questions remain concerning the building of leadership and socio-political capacity to fuel cooperation across organisations as well as institutions. The compartmentalized and autonomous more of operating of state agencies and institutions do not help to achieve these objectives.

3.3 Building institutional support to food commoning initiatives. Highlights on institutional governance tensions in Brussels' food policies.

As mentioned earlier in section 2, institutional types of governance tensions refer to the enabling or constraining role of existing institutions (e.g. more or less established/codified modes of behaviours affecting local food networks, norms, rules, policy guidelines as enforced by governmental coalitions and so on) with respect to the agency of food commoning initiatives. Moreover, institutional types of governance tensions also refer to the establishment of new/empowering institutions for the local food governance. Examples are new cooperative frameworks among food commoning initiatives and state agents, policy guidelines or directives fostering the enhancement of local food networks and similar.

Taking on board key empirical findings of my Doctoral research, this sub-section shows institutional governance tensions related to the formation and development of institutional support to food commoning initiatives by Brussels' (sustainable food) institutions. The analysis retraces genesis and development trajectories of the BCR's food

policies identifying two key stages. It highlights struggles to enable supportive modes of governance that sustain food commoning initiatives.

From the genesis to the intermediate stage of Brussels' local food policies (years 2005-2013)

Around the mid-2000s pioneer alternative food initiatives began to emerge in the BCR - giving origin to a Regional movement on sustainable food (Manganelli 2013; Manganelli 2019). Indeed, in this period bottom-up organizations, involving among others concerned citizens as well as farmers, were set up. These initiatives began to claim and implement alternatives food projects such as collective gardens, small scale urban agriculture, and other types of alternative food networks. The above mentioned Brussels' based Community Supported Agriculture network GASAP is among the key pioneer initiatives (Manganelli and Moulaert 2018).

Soon, these and other bottom-up initiatives started to interact with Municipal and Regional state actors of the BCR, in search for resources, support and collaborative networks. These interactions involved institutional as well as resource governance tensions. At that time, the Cabinet of the Environment and its Administrative Agency 'IBGE' had already developed an interest and a first set of actions for sustainable food, in particular around food waste and public procurement. Key figures among the green political coalition running the Environmental Cabinet were sensitive to the challenges of sustainable food systems and soon became very sympathetic towards local food initiatives and inclined to support them. Thus, in this nascent stage, the proximity and interactivity among diverse actors nurtured organisational and institutional governance tensions; as a result, alternative food values and discourses started to scale out among diverse actors, inciting a nascent interest as well as support towards food commoning.

 Soon, in this early stage, initial forms of self-organizing, networking, associating with other actors, and thus, experimenting with forms of collaboration, and more or less institutionalized relations, emerged. Local food associations or citizens' groups started to foster local food projects, especially in the more supportive Municipalities of the BCR. At the Regional level, the Agency IBGE provided loosely institutionalized types of support towards food commoning initiatives. One example is the launch of the call for projects on urban gardens from 2011 on by the IBGE, involving a partnership with the urban agriculture

organization *Début des Haricots*, another pioneer bottom-up initiative around food (see also Manganelli 2019).

Following the proliferation of food initiatives and projects across the BCR, in the intermediate stage of Brussels' institutional action on food (2013-14), the need to engage in sense-making, to 'coordinate and create synergies among projects', as well as to engage in 'co-construction' and in a 'participatory approach', emerge with greater strength among Brussels' Regional food actors and initiatives (see also Manganelli 2019 p. 179). Thus, attempts to bring into dialogue a diversity of food actors and initiatives in the BCR become stronger. Struggles to establish links with other Regional divisions, negotiating a legitimate space for a sustainable food agenda within a Regional policy arena, become more pressing as well. Thus, consultative workshops were set up by Regional sustainable food actors, gathering a diversity of actors, initiatives, projects, engaged or interested in sustainable food strategies, and a series of actions were conceived and partially started to be implemented.

From the intermediate to the late stage (2014-nowadays)
The latest stage of the BRC's food policy development coincides with new Regional elections followed by the launch of the current Food Strategy in 2015. Indeed, in the year 2014 Regional elections took place and changes in the political colour of the Regional Environmental Ministry which turned from a green-left coalition into a more centre-right Cabinet. This caused institutional governance tensions as revisions of political priorities, reshuffling of programmatic axes as well as budgetary lines took place (see also section 3.1 above). Yet, the newly elected Ministry of the Environment supported the launch of the 'Good Food Strategy', as a framework to provide support to food commoning initiatives (see Manganelli 2019, pp. 180-181).

The current early implementation stage of the Strategy shows the ways in which institutional governance tensions manifest. Overall a greater awareness by Brussels' food actors about the importance of collaboration and alliance building across organizations as well as institutional spheres is visible. This is for instance exemplified by the set-up of a "Consultative Committee" by the food strategy team. Indeed, the *'Conseil Consultatif'* of the Good Food Strategy attempts to involve a diversity of food system actors in advising the

food strategy development. This can be regarded as a recognition of the importance of collaborative (or commoning) modes of governance by Brussels food institutions.

However, being in a very experimental and early stage, doubts emerge on the capacity of the Consultative Committee with its current modes of operation, to fully undertake that role. Some tension for instance emerges around mechanisms for the implementation of the Food Strategy, for instance around developments in the modalities of issuing public tenders. Some of the local food initiatives are experiencing constraints in meeting the criteria imposed by the public tenders in terms of budget, timeframe, administrative burdens, delivering modes, and so on (see Manganelli 2019, pp. 181-182). This also leads to tensions in collaborating across organizations, as

> *"through the tenders we are put into competition with other associative actors, or even with private actors, or any more powerful actor or consortium which may apply for a given tender, also considering that tenders are becoming larger"* (cit. from the association *Rencontres des Continents,* quoted in Manganelli 2019 p. 182)

These empirical insights show that institutional dynamics around the delivery of local food policies encompass not only attempts to find areas of convergence and alignment among actors around shared objectives. Besides, local food policy delivery also encompasses the need to involve new actors and thus, to deal with conflicts and tensions among an increasing diversity of actors looking for supportive criteria for policy implementation.

4. Discussion. Potential contributions of the HGA to debates on commoning initiatives.

Capitalising from my PhD research (Manganelli 2019) on the Hybrid Governance of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), this article presented a re-conceptualisation of the governance of food commoning initiatives as Hybrid Governance. Indeed, the HGA - illustrated in section 2 - has fostered a socio-political perspective on governance dynamics, able to pinpoints to key tensions hampering or, rather, enabling food commoning initiatives in their will to scale out or up, exercising socio-political transformation in

established food or socio-political systems. The three identified types of governance tensions - i.e. organizational, resource-related and institutional - and the interrelations among them were illustrated through three case-studies of food commoning initiatives or processes in the BCR. Namely, the establishment and scaling out of the Community Supported Agriculture Network GASAP (section 3.1); the multi-agent governance of the access to land for urban agriculture and its scaling out in the BCR (section 3.2); and the aspired as well as contested dynamics of institutionalizing alternative food systems through the development and implementation of local food policies (section 3.3).

A key contribution of the HGA is to foster a dynamic and interconnected view on governance. Thus, first of all (food) commoning initiatives and their governance systems are analysed in their dynamic evolution, to better understand key struggles and tensions these initiatives face as they go through their scalar dynamics and transformative ambitions. Moreover, the HGA brings organizational, resources, and institutional dynamics together into one analytical space. Doing so, it provides a new frame to analyse (food) commoning initiatives and to understand conditions under which these initiatives operate, succeed, or, rather, struggle and fail.

As a consequence, this article argues that this interconnected approach can provide valuable analytical lenses to analyse and understand the agency and struggles of collective action initiatives in other fields. Examples of these fields are urban/landed commons (Eizaguirre *et al.* 2017; Foster and Iaione 2015; Turner 2017), or different forms of bottom-up or citizen-led initiatives in diverse domains, such as housing, mobility, culture, neighbourhood regeneration and so on. The sequel of this section outlines possible directions through which the HGA can contribute to the a wider debate on the governance of collective action initiatives. It does so by highlighting three aspects, illustrated respectively in three following sub-paragraphs: namely, the need for a more complex characterization of the *agency* of collective action initiatives and their socio-political dynamics; the role of value systems and their connections to praxis and collaborative relations; the challenge of exercising socio-political transformation in established modes of operating of states or markets.

Reframing agency and socio-political dynamics of collective action initiatives

Through a socio-political and relational perspective on governance, the HGA provides analytical lenses to (re)examine and (re)defining the *agency* of (food) commoning initiatives and their socio-political dynamics. In particular, the analysis has shown how the socio-spatial reproduction of (food) commoning initiatives involves not only the scaling out of local food organizations, i.e. the increase in the number producers, consumers, actors involved, material resources required, etc. Besides, it also encompasses ambitions of AFNs to communicate and foster alternative food values, to transform existing institutions and modes of governance and to build enabling institutions across spatial-organizational spheres and institutional scales. Thus, diverse governance forms and modes of coordination (i.e. bottom-up solidarity, hierarchical, market-oriented, networked) co-exist and interact with each other in different ways, characterising the the agency of (food) commoning initiatives and their scalar dynamics. Section 3.1, for instance, showed how changes in the governmental coalition of Brussels' state institutions has fostered restrictions in the allocation of funding for food and environmentally-oriented initiatives. These sharpened hierarchical modes of governance necessarily affected the GASAP and other initiatives in the BCR. On the other hand, the approval of a Food Strategy by the newly elected environmental cabinet provided new institutional opportunities for cooperation and joint-action among state and food initiatives. Thus, tension results from both, conflict between diverse organizational or institutional logics, as well as from opportunities for cooperation and co-construction of empowering and supportive organizational modalities and institutional structures. In synthesis, the analysis suggests that collective action initiatives are not merely defined by the endogenous or autonomous self-governance of coalitions of actors aligned towards common objectives (Böhm *et al.* 2010). Besides, self-governance refers to both, shared governance by all actors in the network, but also the impact of state policy regarding food security, (urban) agriculture, land use planning, regulations established by corporate or market players affecting the agency (including value systems, organizational modalities, resource basis and so on) of (food) commoning initiatives in their dynamic reproduction. These factors – far from being 'exogenous' dynamics - are part and parcel of the governance reality of commoning initiatives as these initiatives develop and scale out in diverse ways.

Connecting value systems to praxis and collaborative dynamics

Related to the above considerations about the agency of commoning initiatives, the HGA invites to reflect upon the **relationship between values systems, agency and cooperation** among diverse actors in their drive towards socio-political transformation.

Empirical findings show that Hybrid Governance tensions can be vehicles of coalition building and cooperative practices among actors, but can also lead to conflictual dynamics or tensions among divergent rationalities and value systems. Indeed, the analysis of the BCR food policy trajectory (section 3.3) has shown that the praxis of implementing and governing alternative/commoning food networks encompasses efforts to mediate between heterogeneous, sometimes conflictive, value systems (Levkoe and Wakefield 2014), lived up to by diverse agents and embedded in institutional structures within and beyond food commoning initiatives. Thus, on the one hand, opportunities to find **alignment around shared values**, or to recognise areas of convergence and synergy between strategies targeting seemingly diverse objectives, agendas, priorities, are possible (Ashe and Sonnino 2013, Sonnino 2018). Alongside, implementing (food) commoning initiatives also involves the need to devise **pragmatic or win-win solutions, based on very instrumental or ad hoc forms of cooperation among agents**. This may include, for instance, efforts to show that food commoning initiatives can connect to day-to-day operations and behavioural routines of actors and organisations - such as city divisions or community agencies - providing ground for win-win solutions. In some circumstances, however, **conflicts**, **constraints to collaboration**, or even **inertia, deadlocks, or impossibility of cooperation** can occur. A bottom-led food sovereignty organisation, for instance, may fear the risk of co-optation (Ferguson 2010; Schiavoni 2017). Thus, it may collaborate under very peculiar, *ad hoc*, or strict conditions, or it may refuse to collaborate with actors holding divergent ethics or visions around food systems.

The above reflections can feed the scholarly debate on co-governance, namely, on the potentials and limits of collaborative design and decision-making to foster (urban) commons (Foster 2011, Foster and Iaione 2015). In particular, Hybrid Governance analysis suggests that along with shared objectives, *strategic leadership, conflict mediation and resolution capacities, pragmatic and instrumental rationality*, are also required in actors and organisations aiming to realise transformative action (Eizenberg 2012; Parés *et al.* 2017). This also suggests the need for accountable, resourceful and resilient organisations which

can mediate or facilitate forms of collaboration. Bottom-linked (Eizaguirre *et al.* 2012; Pradel *et al.* 2013) or collaborative sections of the State, policy initiatives like Food Policy Councils, Food Strategies, resourceful food security/sovereignty organisations, can be examples of those types of organisation in food commoning initiatives.

Exercising socio-political transformation

One last point concerns the capacity of (food) commons to **trigger socio-political transformation at multiple levels**, including reforming or changing dominant modes of operating of states or markets. This relates, for instance to altering behaviour or modes of operation of path-dependent institutionalised agencies (Pradel *et al.* 2013) towards the recognition and support to (food) commoning initiatives, as to pursue more structural and long-lasting socio-political change. It also refers to changing dominant narratives, paradigms or power structures reproduced by the dominance of conventional food system players - such as big corporations, financial players, supermarket chains. These agents contribute to foster commodity based food systems. Such systems propagate a consumption culture that, among others, leads to reliance on cheap processed food, obesity, disparity in distribution of and access to nutritional and quality food (IPES Food 2017).

The Hybrid Governance analysis shows that governance tensions operate as both, opportunities to build relations across organizational and institutional spheres, but also constraints to tackle more systemic challenges. In the case of food commons, these challenges relate to influencing or reforming key policies (e.g. land use, agriculture, food, and so on), at higher institutional scales, or dealing with the conventional food sector. Section 3.2, for instance, showed how enabling a territorial governance of urban-peri-urban agriculture fostered multi-scalar institutional governance tensions in Brussels' food actors and institutions, i.e. challenges to remove institutional barriers hampering the access to land, and to develop collaborations with other jurisdictions (e.g. planning institutions) and policy levels (e.g. the bordering regions of Flanders and Wallonia). Proactive forms of leadership and cooperation were instrumental to engage diverse actors into the BBP coalition. This coalition in a way re-politicised access to land for urban/peri-urban agriculture in the BCR. However, transformative socio-political forces thus far have not

reached the point of proactively engaging allies from other jurisdictions or more structurally influencing the mode of operating of relevant jurisdictions and policy levels.

It is arguable that these insights from the Hybrid Governance analysis can foster fruitful dialogue with contributions that emphasise the politics of commoning initiatives, e.g. their emancipatory and radical struggles against neoliberalism or hegemonic power structures (Becker *et al*. 2015; Chatterton 2010; Eizaguirre *et al*. 2017; Harvey 2012; Hodkinson 2012). Alongside, the HGA can link to contributions that stress the scaling up of commoning practices towards greater transformation (Cumbers 2015; Susser and Tonnelat 2013). Indeed, Hybrid Governance helps to shed light on actors' struggles to export commoning principles and values across professional-organisational spheres and interconnected spatial scales. More precisely, by focusing on governance tensions, the HGA helps to unlock the dialectical and contested relations among diverse agencies - i.e. state leaders, markets players, multi-scaled organisations and networks - diversely interacting with (food) commoning initiatives and their scalar dynamics. By analyzing commoning movements in their specific socio-spatial contexts and development dynamics, the HGA allows to understand how diverse agencies - such as state, other organizations or hybrid networks - can constrain, but also provide opportunities to sustain transformation of social and power relations from below. Forms of reflexive or bottom-linked governance - supported by resourceful and accountable organisations or institutions - help to sustain socio-political transformative agency (Eizaguirre *et al*. 2012; Manganelli 2019; Pradel *et al*. 2013). initiatives.

5. Conclusions

Capitalising from conceptual apparatus and empirical findings of my PhD dissertation (Manganelli 2019), this article has re-visited food commoning initiatives from a Hybrid Governance perspective. Indeed, the Hybrid Governance Approach (HGA), illustrated in section 2, spotted to key governance tensions - i.e. organizational, resource-related, and institutional - experienced by (food) commoning initiatives in their socio-spatial reproduction. Each of these tensions and their interrelation were used as entry ways to the analysis of three types of food commoning initiatives in the BCR, briefly presented in section 3: the Brussels-based consumers-producers network GASAP (organizational governance tensions); the politics of land access for small-scale ecological agriculture in the BCR (land-

resource governance tensions); the building of institutional support towards food commoning initiatives through state policies (institutional governance tensions). This paper has argued that the HGA offers a more nuanced and grounded analysis of the agency and socio-political dynamics of (food) commoning initiatives as these initiatives diversely develop and struggle to realise alternative and transformative socio-political action. Indeed, section 4 outlined how the Hybrid Governance analysis on food commoning initiatives can link and contribute to recent debates and studies on collective action initiatives in general. First, the HGA advances a more complex characterization of the *agency* of collective action initiatives and their socio-political dynamics; second and related to that, it allows to better understand the relation between positionalities, value systems and cooperative practices among diverse agents; finally, the HGA allows to understand challenges and tensions of self-organizing initiatives in exercising greater socio-political transformation.

It is arguable that the HGA can be further valorised, thus widening its scope and impact. First, as this article has attempted with commoning initiatives, it is arguable that the HGA can build bridges with analyses on social movements or citizen-led initiatives in other fields. Social innovations initiatives (Moulaert *et al.* 2013), social resilience movements (Paidakaki 2017; Paidakaki and Moulaert 2017), bottom-up transition movements (Feola and Nunes 2014, Seyfang and Haxeltine 2013; Shove and Walker 2012), urban/landed commons (Eizaguirre *et al.* 2017; Foster and Iaione 2015; Turner 2017) are examples. Cross-fertilizations with these fields of study can help the understanding of common challenges faced by the transformative agency of citizen-led initiatives in diverse fields. Furthermore, the HGA can widen its geographical impact by extending the analysis to Global-South initiatives, thus supporting a fruitful comparison and dialogue between (food) commoning initiatives located in different geographical areas. This analysis would uncover similarities and differences in the ways in which collective movements of the Global North and the Global South experience and deal with critical governance tensions.

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