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**Cultivating Home: Food Democracy and Practices in the Urban
Lives of Displaced Persons**

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Introduction

Food is one of our basic human needs, shaping our lives culturally, physically, and environmentally. The foods we eat connect us to one another, fuel our daily lives, summon memories, and can therefore impact our lives in both the short and long-term. The production, distribution and consumption of food is a topic that has been debated both locally and internationally, with organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund weighing in (Creswell, 2017). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic cast a spotlight on the fragility of the food supply system as it stands today (Lopez-Cifuentes & Fiala, 2022), with states enacting export restrictions to ensure food security within their territory and lessening travel restrictions for farm workers deemed to be essential (Petetin, 2020).

Today's food network is international, relying on trade partnerships and agreements managed by national-level governments and transnational corporations. This system views food items as commodities based on the social relational foundations of capitalism (Tilzey, 2019), and has drawn contestation from activists in both the Global North and South, with individuals and organizations looking to shift our understanding of and relationship with food. These movements have been formulated through the conceptions of Food Democracy in the Global North, and Food Sovereignty in the Global South. Although the application of these terms differ, they are both seen to revolve around enacting emancipatory political processes in the food system while striving to achieve justice and equality (Moragues-Faus, 2016). Food Democracy attributes problems within the food system to a limited amount of opportunities for citizens to participate, while Food Sovereignty considers food as a basic human right, arguing for equal access to healthy, nutritious and culturally-appropriate food for all (Bornemann & Weiland, 2023).

Applications of both Food Democracy and Sovereignty vary from country to country, from the founding of Food Policy Councils (Michel et al., 2022), to Urban Food Strategies (Zerbian & de Luis Romero, 2019), and Urban Agriculture and community garden projects (Hasson, 2019). These implementations aim to localize urban food production, and understand the bi-directional relationships between cities and food production, both locally and rurally. Toronto Metropolitan University's "Carrot Project" (2009-2014) brings together projects from around the world to explore how local food production and food security is

changing urban design and built form, including the implementation of city policies, developer trends and local activism. Many projects look to examine and re-define our relationship to food in an attempt to value food beyond a commodity-driven understanding, and provide alternatives to the market (Morgaus-Faus, 2016).

Today's urban food system integrates partnerships between a variety of stakeholders and relies on urban planning policy to invoke challenges to the 'business-as-usual' approach to the hegemonic food system. This democratic approach to food production, distribution and consumption is susceptible to current power dynamics of both resident and political elites. A humanistic understanding is needed in order to understand the capacity of engaging marginalized groups and operationalizing the ability to empower all members of society to participate in a democratic food system that allows for equal access to healthy, nutritious and culturally-appropriate food for all (Bornemann & Weiland, 2023). To address this need, I propose engaging in a qualitative study with recently displaced refugees in order to better understand the role that food plays in re-establishing community links, re-creating a sense of belonging and home, and what challenges the current food system invokes in allowing residents to find the necessary ingredients within this process.

Food has been widely theorised as a connector, both socially and spatially, by scholars such as Prost et al. (2019), Gerodetti and Foster (2016), and Gray et al. (2014). Social food-related practices, including gardening, cultivation, and communal meals, are often positioned as mechanisms through which newly arrived residents build social capital, assert spatial presence, and shape their imaginaries of home in unfamiliar urban contexts. This research engages with Ukrainian citizens displaced by the 2022 Russian invasion to explore how food practices contribute to the re-establishment of home, belonging, and place-making in the Indre-et-Loire region of France. The central hypothesis is that food plays a meaningful role in the re-creation of home and belonging for individuals who have experienced displacement. Further, this study proposes that food contributes to the ideological and affective construction of landscape - even among those who are not directly engaged in food cultivation, urban agriculture, or community gardening.

To investigate these hypotheses, the paper begins with a review of the relevant literature, outlining the conceptual foundations of Food Democracy, Food Sovereignty, and Food Justice, and examining their intersections with urban planning practices. These

frameworks are then brought into dialogue with theoretical perspectives on place-making, home-making, and belonging - highlighting the often-overlooked role of food in these spatial and emotional processes. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's (Schmid, 2022) theory of the social production of space and the Right to the City (Butler, 2012; Purcell & Tyman, 2015), alongside Kirsch's (2012) materialist analysis of space and power, the paper establishes its theoretical grounding. The methodology is then outlined, including qualitative research instruments and sample questionnaires (provided in the appendix), which are designed to capture participants' lived experiences and spatial practices surrounding food and home. These tools will be utilised in the coming months through connections with Ukrainian refugee assistance agencies, including Ukraine L'Avenir and Tourraine Ukraine, as well as snowball sampling through connections forged during food related events and Ukrainian social gatherings.

Literature Review

A common theme across the studies available points to the difficulty in ensuring access to affordable, nutritious and culturally-appropriate foods to marginalized individuals, particularly in the amplification of already-privileged voices of upper middle class participants in democratic systems and the gentrification of neighbourhoods across Global North cities (Hasson, 2019; Johnston, Biro & MacKendrick, 2009; Tilzey, 2019). Additionally, many studies focus on the outputs, not impacts, of initiatives and thus fail to understand the social, health and well-being benefits of coming together around food (Davies, Cretella & Franck, 2019). This qualitative gap in the research remains evident despite the consistent attempts of authors to bring attention to the shortcomings of both Food Democracy and Food Sovereignty application across cities studied (Candel, 2022). This literature review looks to synthesize the available literature on Food Democracy and Food Sovereignty in order to understand the development of these concepts, their link to and applications within urban centres, and finally to bring to light the social relationships of food and home- and place-making practices of urban citizens. In doing so, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of how a qualitative approach to understanding the role of Food Democracy and Food Sovereignty in urban planning has the ability to shape the experience of marginalized city dwellers.

Concept Development: Food Democracy and Food Sovereignty

Food Democracy gained traction as a political concept in Hassanein's (2003) work arguing for a pragmatic approach to make an impact on the democratisation of the agri-food system. She examines the tension between the alternative food movement's attempts to completely transform the food and agricultural system and the opposing perspective focused on incremental changes made by actors in their daily lives. Hassanein (p.78) argues that a thoughtful practice of pragmatic politics combined with coalitions across various organizations is key to the transformations of agri-food systems in the long run. In combining these approaches, she argues that involvement of various actors is simplified through increased citizen power, allowing different groups to learn about one another and enact changes at the community-level of food systems. This democratisation of food systems contributes to food security on a community level, going beyond the individuals' security (p.79). Hassanein notes that the dominant food system is neither immovable nor inevitable, and food democracy is seen as a way to facilitate and encourage making choices that creatively and constructively involve all voices of a food system (p.85).

A post-political understanding of Food Democracy was explored in Moragues-Faus' (2016) work in relation to buying groups in Valencia, Spain. This author argues that food democracy has the ability to be both an alternative market, and an alternative *to* the market (p.458, original italics), depending on whether or not actors work within the limitations of neoliberalism. Alternative food networks such as farmers markets may advocate for differing ethical considerations, but do so under the constraints of neoliberal markets and are typically only available to those with time and money to spare (p.459). Reconnecting and building close relationships with producers through buying groups creates a new form of political association and mutual support that challenge the corporate food system (p.467), thus allowing for food democracy to make a larger impact beyond the individual's consumption practices. Both practices fall in line within the dimensions of food democracy, namely by encouraging knowledge mobilization, the sharing of ideas, and emphasizing collective action in order to build common public goods, albeit with different outcomes for participants and the larger agri-food industry.

Food democracy was seen as an important factor in a post-COVID-19 food system based on the challenges outlined by Petetin's (2020) analysis of pandemic-related effects of

the current agri-food system. This author argues that the current food system offers limited food security for countries around the world, characterized by ‘just in time’ market practices (p.331) that do not fare well under disruptions caused by pandemics and economic crises such as the 2007-2008 financial crash. The COVID-19 pandemic not only showcased the reliance on international produce, but also on international labour that is both necessary and under-valued with low wages and poor working conditions (p.334). Petetin (p.333) points to the resiliency of small-scale local shops and agricultural producers during these times in an attempt to outline the important characteristics of food democracy that were triggered by COVID-19. She argues that genuine choice, democratic decision-making, good health and food safety, and sustainable agriculture and environmental improvements are necessary components of a changing food system that can withstand the turbulent disruptions to the centralised food network.

Candel (2022) conducted a systematic literature review in order to analyse food democracy’s ability to contribute to democratic goods, namely in the form of inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgement and transparency (p.1478). He goes on to distinguish between Liberal Food Democracy, which is rooted in political consumerism and Strong Food Democracy which aims to depart from a market-oriented approach (p.1478), arguing that individual actions may lead to incremental change, but a wider systemic change can only be accomplished by combining changes at political systems at large (p.1486). Candel (p.1486) points to the lack of involvement of marginalized groups, insufficient resources and lack of political will that transcends the literature on food democracy’s inability to make a strong impact on democratic goods.

Policy change is an important pillar in researchers’ calls for a shift in our food system, from commodity-based consumerist practices to a community-centred good that is critical to social capital in our cities. Prost et al. (2019) conducted a two-year long project looking at the potential for infrastructuring food democracy within a socioeconomically deprived neighbourhood in England. In doing so, these researchers combined technological platforms and businesses in order to replace market-based food transactions with trusted relationships via short, value-based supply chains (p.12). Importantly, these authors highlight that civic food networks that emphasize individual education and skills continue to invoke neoliberal tendencies to focus on personal responsibility, without challenging the global corporate impacts within the food system. These authors note that organising social activities allows

food to become a vehicle for communities to socialise, rather than a subject of education (p.16), showcasing a humanistic approach to food democracy that can be overlooked by other scholars.

Welsh and MacRae (2011) use the Toronto Food Policy Council as a case study to underscore the centrality of food citizenship and democratic engagement in fostering a political awakening around community food security. They contend that the way a society organizes its food system both reflects and shapes its broader social and economic development (p. 240), emphasizing that few other systems intersect with daily life as intimately as food does. The authors critique charity-based models and the corporate consolidation of the food chain, arguing that such approaches undermine the principles of food citizenship. Instead, they advocate for recognizing the deep interconnections between food, agriculture, and health as foundational to transforming the food system. Welsh and MacRae (p. 251) call for community-level interventions that redistribute control from dominant corporate actors to local and public arenas, positioning this shift as essential to achieving genuine food democracy through the emergence of people's active participation in shaping the food system.

Food Sovereignty has gained traction as an attempt to bypass the limitations of Food Democracy by establishing a human-rights based approach to food (Creswell, 2017), while still invoking a democratic approach for citizens to regain control over their own lives. This has led to the establishment of the Right to Food Guidelines and the Right to Adequate Food legislation ratified by 160 countries in order to make access to food an inalienable human right that is the obligation of each signing state (p.10). As with any human right, Creswell (p.18) argues for social mobilisation to be at the heart of food sovereignty. This is a direct challenge to the replacement of sovereignty of people by the sovereignty of the market under neoliberalism. The engagement of local populations is seen as a necessary factor in holding states accountable (p.89) to their obligations to enact and report their progress in securing healthy and nutritious food for all citizens.

Tilzey (2019) emphasizes the deficiencies of formal food democracy in the Global North, arguing that a meaningful food democracy is more intune to 'radical' food sovereignty (p.202) that invokes a counter-hegemonic approach to social-property relations underpinning the capital-state nexus. Radical food sovereignty goes beyond citizen engagement within

cultivation, to re-establish land as a collective right, emphasizing stewardship over dominion (p.210). This allows radical food sovereignty to produce use value unmediated by the capitalist market and moves to better address the imbalance of class interests within larger society. Tilzey (p.206) argues that current models of food democracy attempt to challenge neoliberalism/capitalism whilst simultaneously relying on funding from states and a divestment of formal state responsibility to community-led schemes.

Food Sovereignty and Food Democracy are both rooted in a strong belief of integrating food justice within the dominant food system. Horst, McClintock and Hoey (2017) invoke the ability of food justice advocates to bring attention to the ways in which both the dominant and alternative food systems often perpetuate the disparities that exist in broader society. Utilising this lens, these authors conducted an in-depth literature review to bring attention to the ways in which urban planning is able to utilise urban agricultural practices to invoke food justice. Although the authors acknowledge that urban agriculture can obscure systemic conditions that contribute to food injustice, such as poverty, low wages, and income disparity (p.281); they note that it is still a useful way to build inter-generational connections and share culturally specific agricultural and culinary knowledge (p.282) making it an important mechanism to appropriate urban space and cultivate belonging among residents. These authors argue that planners can play a stronger role in advocating for urban agricultural practices by confronting processes of gentrification, increasing the amount of land permanently available for urban agricultural activities, developing mutually respectful relationships with advocates, targeting disadvantaged communities directly and embedding urban agriculture into long-term planning efforts. These activities would effectively entrench food production within urban communities, bridging not only the spatial, but also the social gap between urban and rural planning practices.

Urban Link and Applications

Cities are important drivers of global environmental and societal change, and play a role as promoters of sustainable transformations (Bornemann & Weiland, 2023), particularly through the urban spaces where democratic participation is demanded in a meaningful way (p.97). These authors argue that decisions affecting urban spaces are increasingly transferred away from parliaments and citizens towards corporations and other private organizations

(p.97) which negatively impacts the democratic access to urban spaces. These authors see urban spaces as central nodes in global streams of goods, people and information, and therefore, as powerful shapers of social relations and processes of socio-economic change (p.98). Cities are therefore integral in the fight for food democracy both within and beyond their boundaries. Bornemann and Weiland (p.100) argue for expanding opportunities for participation within food-related decisions at the city level, but make note of the possibility that participation may work to amplify the voices of the already informed and capable middle-classes, leaving marginalized groups behind in the process.

Cities' recognition of the complexity of food security has led to the creation of Urban Food Strategies and new governance mechanisms that connect civil society, private actors and local government (Zerbian & de Luis Romero, 2023). These authors utilize Madrid, Spain's Urban Food Strategy to showcase that urban food governance can create a more inclusive, democratic solution to food security in the form of inter-organizational dimensions of policy-making as well as involvement of societal actors, stakeholders and citizens' groups in decision-making (p.796). This can be achieved by establishing new places of deliberations, such as food policy councils, as well as drafting policies surrounding urban food strategies that display how a city envisions a change in its food system and intends to achieve this change (p.798). Social inclusion and equity within the urban food system allows for a democratic shift in the shaping of the available alternatives to the current agri-food system.

Covid-19 posed both a challenge and opportunity for urban food systems to transform toward food democracy, as was evident in Vienna, Austria (Lopez Cifuentes & Fiala, 2022). These authors found that direct contact of food buyers and suppliers seemed to produce a stronger and more resilient food supply network (p.2), while residents' increase in time allowed for more meals to be cooked at home (p.8). This showcases the interaction of the food system with other systems that need to be taken into account under the guise of democratic freedoms. Food democracy has the ability to empower citizens to shape food systems through participation and political engagement (p.2), but only within a coordinated system that encompasses both resident and state actors.

Lopez Cifuentes and Sonnino (2024) bring together our understanding of the right to city and food democracy by analysing the role of urban food environments in East-Central London, England. Reiterating that the right to the city is a political claim that demands social

justice and change through a perpetual process of democratisation of urban spaces (p.1), these authors argue that food initiatives are driven by a desire to create communities that foster diversity, empower individuals and create space for people to meet and exchange knowledge (p.3). These urban food environments look to shift power away from capitalist markets, while simultaneously relying on the state's support for co-designing and co-managing democratic food environments (p.6). These authors note that future research should incorporate notions of place and focus on relations to better understand the processes that construct food democracy (p.7).

Hasson (2019) sees food democracy as the ability of citizens to conquer political spaces in order to have the power to determine agri-food policies and practices at all scales, pointing out that urban planning practices are one of the few powers local politicians have over food production and food systems (p.156). Urban Agriculture and community garden spaces in London, England are seen as direct catalysts of groups in political spaces of representation, however, the author notes that the power imbalance persists in these spaces meaning that democratic decision-making is still a far reach off (p. 157). Residents with lower incomes spend a larger percentage of their income on food, and are more likely to be time-poor and unable to engage in urban agricultural practices and organizations (p.159). Additionally, the selling off of land to private developers throughout the city makes urban agriculture and community garden spaces unstable sources of engagement as the location and scale of operations is constantly changing. While urban agricultural practices of the 1970s saw the integration of immigrant communities as a way to preserve culture and practice traditional farming knowledge (p.159), nowadays these projects are more likely to be frequented by the middle and upper-middle classes linking urban agriculture to processes of gentrification.

Additionally, urban agricultural practices, along with other alternative food networks, exist within neoliberal paradigms operating under the capitalist logic of the food system (McClintock, 2013). Capitalism both creates opportunities for urban agriculture, while simultaneously limiting its expansion (p.153). McClintock (p.160) argues that urban agriculture is a spatial process that contributes to the maintenance of everyday life of urban citizens, not only through the production of nutritious food, but also through the intellectual fulfilment necessary for social reproduction. Urban agriculture is seen as one of many tools that is able to work towards a unified vision of food justice by becoming a hegemonic tool

used to reclaim “the commons” (p.153) and occupy already-produced urban space for new uses. Urban gardens cultivate urban ecological citizenship, allowing residents to reclaim their right to the city while simultaneously regaining food production and consumption practices from market logic (p.148). By recognizing both the radical and neoliberal aspects of urban agriculture, activists, policymakers, and practitioners can harness its transformative potential more effectively, viewing it as one tool among many to achieve food justice and sustainability (p.166).

Davies, Cretella and Franck (2019) examined food sharing initiatives’ impact on urban food democracy across three European capitals, Dublin, London and Berlin. These authors found that food sharing initiatives took various forms, from growing food together to redistribution organizations aimed at reducing food waste, to cooking collaborations that engaged local communities. These authors argue that current policies stand in the way of these non-profit organizations due to the legal responsibilities placed on organizing members to operate under the same guidelines as for-profit businesses (p.13). In many cases, food sharing initiatives attempt to quantify their outputs, such as attendance rates or number of classes offered (p.9), making it difficult to establish whether activities actively improve individual’s lives or make a greater impact on the food system as a whole. These authors point to the difficulty in identifying, isolating and measuring impacts that relate to the social, health and well-being benefits of coming together around food (p.9), despite the information and communication technologies that have played a role in allowing people to come together around food sharing initiatives.

In the Upper-Rhine region, Michel et al. (2022) analysed food policy councils across French, German and Swiss borders to highlight the challenges and opportunities these initiatives create in contributing to food democracy’s role in transitioning towards sustainable food systems and the maintenance of food security (p.3). These authors found that food democracy recognizes the need to empower marginalized people to become active agents in food system transformation (p.6), however, this need is not operationalized in the four cities included in this study. Michel et al. (p.21) note that the main role of food policy networks across Strasbourg, Mulhouse, Basel and Freiburg appears to be one of preparatory and supporting network building between stakeholders from municipal, non-profit, and community levels. These authors found that larger agri-food sector actors were actively left out of food policy councils due to a fear of their ability to overshadow small-scale voices.

The main activities that were involved pertained to raising awareness, educating the public on sustainable food issues, and creating concepts, plans, proposals and studies for future activation (p.10). These authors found that the majority of participants were highly educated, fluent in the local language, and were able to communicate comfortably with other stakeholders within the food policy councils (p.14), once again showcasing the lack of accessibility of these spaces to marginalized groups.

Cities accommodate an ever growing majority of the world's population, making them the sites where pressures that shape food insecurity converge and become visible (Smaal et al., 2020). Despite these pressures, many governments utilise abstract language to avoid committing to targeted action steps within policy documents addressing urban food strategies (p.721). These authors highlight that the understated and fragmented incorporation of social justice in European Urban Food Strategies could impede public awareness, discussions, and collective actions concerning food system inequalities. Reiterating in their research that marginalised groups have more difficulty voicing their concerns regarding today's food system and getting involved in making positive changes due to institutionalised obstacles (p.712). Additionally, these authors draw attention to the social capital brought forward through engagement with the food system. Food has the capacity to bring people together, practice their cultures and traditions, and utilise social food events to bring people out of isolation (p.716). These factors are an important aspect of connecting people within and throughout communities, and encouraging urban residents to make their city their home, a place where they belong.

Link to Place, Home and Belonging

Johnston, Biro and MacKendrick (2009) examine the transition of organic food production from small-scale farms that challenged the agri-food corporations, to the agglomeration of organics production within the large-scale production. These authors note that corporations continue to utilize imagery to invoke a false sense of connection to the consumer (p.525), relying on the social construction of foodscapes that capture and constitute cultural ideals of how food relates to specific places, people and foods (p.512). Food does not simply come from a place, it also makes place through symbolic constructs and imaginative geographies (p. 513). These authors see food democracy as an opportunity to connect

producers and consumers in a new political space while distinguishing food as a human right, and not a commodity. The current lack of transparency within the agri-food system denotes a false sense of place, invoking imagery of nostalgic farm scenery, in an attempt to mislead consumers into what they believe to be ethical consumption choices.

The spatial imaginary and nostalgic elements invoked by large-scale agri-food businesses play into the sense of belonging and social connections that humans utilize to connect to one another and their surroundings. These same elements can be found in Blunt and Dowling's (2022) work on the critical geography of home, showcasing 'home' as a spatialised understanding that moves beyond the physical structure of a dwelling to encompass 'home' as both a material and imaginative experience (p.27). Home is shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions, and is multi-scalar, with the ability to be extended to the neighbourhood, city, and even nation (p.30). It is a sense of belonging and ease invoked by the familiar, transcending public and private spheres to encompass the human experience of belonging, peace, and comfort (p.28). These elements are integral in understanding the human experience, particularly in the sense of urban dwellers and their relationships to their surrounding cities.

Authors such as Shillington (2013) showcase that home can be understood in three broad ways: as a material space where social reproduction takes place, as a space shaped by broader social and socionatural relations, and as a foundational space that works to shape broad socio-spatial arenas. The ways in which food is accessed, produced and consumed in cities are entangled in the socionatural production of urban space at different scales (p.105), including the home, as the most mundane and everyday space of the city (p.104). Food rituals, cultures and identities are continually produced and re-produced within the domestic realm connecting residents with one another, while simultaneously being the key to understanding broader relations and processes (p.104). Urban agriculture in Shillington's (p.103) case study of Managua, Nicaragua operates not only as a central aspect of producing the home environment, but also as a way through which many inhabitants claim their right to the city. Making decisions regarding what is grown in their patio spaces, where the agricultural practices take place, and how these resources are utilised and shared allows urban residents, particularly women, to claim their right to produce and appropriate urban space (p.104).

The production and appropriation of urban space through food cultivation can also be seen through the use of community gardens. Gerodetti and Foster (2016) assert that community gardens are neither fully private, nor fully public spaces, therefore producing sites that offer possibilities to understand how individuals and groups in urban communities construct their own sense of place within the city. These authors connect the physical cultivation taking place in community gardens with the feelings, sensualities, and character expression that takes place when space is being produced (p.809). Additionally, these spaces are at the forefront of residents' understandings of themselves and their belonging in time and place, allowing gardeners to associate memories and landscapes from their past and integrate these connections with their present environment (p.810). In this way, both gardens and food become containers of memory that reaffirm peoples' connections to their places of origin while grounding them in their current spatial environment in the city.

Moving beyond an understanding of food as a nutritional commodity allows us to acknowledge the social relations and cultural practices that constitute a larger whole (Mares and Peña, 2011). These authors see a garden as a space for the charting of individual autotopographies, a way of grounding of self and communal identities through place making (p.204). Gardens have the ability to re-territorialise place as a home by transnational communities through the creation of a deep sense of place among inhabitants (p.204). The cultivation and preparation of food becomes a conduit for fostering community, and building social and cultural relationships within a new environment, making it an important asset in resisting the industrialization and globalisation of the food system (p.216).

The social capital that is gained through gardening transcends the spaces used, from community to home gardens, researchers ascribe the most important function as one of creating participatory landscapes that provide immigrants a connection to their cultural heritage (Gray et al., 2014). These authors found that Latino communities in San Jose, California utilised the cultivation of food to build communities that represent a deep social and cultural relationship in contingency with their ability to construct place-based identities (p.190). Gray et al. (p.188) examined a home-gardening program initiated to assist low-income residents with the construction and maintainance of their home gardens in order to gain a deeper understanding of what makes these projects function well, as well as the societal impacts of home gardening. Their findings point to the importance of gardening and gardening programs as providing social capital that directly impacts the ways in which

individuals and communities create trust, and maintain social networks (p.189). Gardens are a form of place-based connection of residents to their home environment as well as their neighbours and larger community.

The study of home is crucial to understanding what it means to live in the city, despite the widely held separation between ‘city life’ and ‘home life’ (Sheringham, 2022, p.143). The boundaries of public and private are negotiated in complex ways through the domestication of public space (p.155). The relationship to food, in particular dining out, is seen by this author as a way to claim public space for private activities (p.156), drawing forth connections between residents and their surroundings. Sheringham (p.174) notes that a sense of home is frequently undermined by designs that fail to respond to daily needs of urban residents. The social, geographical and historical context of cities is important to incorporate into the sense of home and belonging of city life, as urban dwellers’ home and city lives are closely intertwined (p.144). A deeper understanding of the elements of connection between urban residents and their respective feelings of home are called for in the exploration of modern cities.

Theoretical Framework

The social production of urban space has been a focus of sociologists, urban theorists, and human geographers since the mid twentieth century with the foundational works of Henri Lefebvre and his conception of the spatial triad consisting of perceived, lived and conceived space (Schmid, 2022; p.395). The intricate relationships between urban space, food and home can be understood through this framework as it clearly advocates for the understanding of space as a social product, and not merely a neutral background. Perceived space encompasses spatial practices through the analysis of everyday activities, perceptions and material arrangements (p.481), while conceived spaces allows us to better understand the representations of space through territorial regulations and spatial strategies that work to embed power relations into space (p.516). These formulations are combined with lived space that is shaped by culture, symbolism and everyday life (p.397) to help us understand urban space and its inhabitants. As we work towards gaining a deeper understanding of a predominantly globalising system at a local scale, we encounter the various power dynamics between governments, corporations and urban individuals.

As we have seen several scholars touch upon, growing food in the city has the potential to be a radical intervention in urban life (Purcell and Tyman, 2015). These practices allow residents to challenge the dominant regime of neoliberalism and growing privatisation of urban space, and re-assert residents' right to the city. Since the 1970s urban space has increasingly been viewed as a commodity, with capital accumulation through land use and values seen as the single economic function of the city (p.1135), while residents are viewed as passive consumers. By creating spaces of encounter to interact and share experiences, residents are able to overcome individualisation and atomization commonly experienced in the capitalist city. Food cultivation and related activities allow for residents to exercise their entitlements to urban space and community-based decision making (Mares and Peña, 2011), taking control back from market-based forces and re-instating the use value of urban spaces. Purcell and Tyman (2015) argue that in the short term the state can either be a hindrance or a catalyst for urban agricultural projects, however in the long-term inhabitants should produce and manage these spaces themselves.

The autogestion of urban spaces is a further development on Lefebvre's social production of space in which differential space is created in the urban centre (Butler, 2012). Through the assertion of both the right to the city and the right to difference, inhabitants recognise the potential for resistance ingrained in urban spaces and the dynamism of power balances in urban settings. These understandings of urban space and its potential carry hope forward in our ability to emphasise the use value of central city locations and establish equitable access to these spaces for all users. Through increased land values, central urban spaces become exclusive enclaves for productive activities under a capitalist system, pushing marginalised users and activities to the outskirts of urban areas (Schmid, 2022; p.226). The right to difference provides us with a mechanism to envision a changing understanding of urban space and its uses, belongings, and values. The urban environment is a space where differences converge, explore and acknowledge each other (p.367), making it imperative that diverse food systems and practices are welcomed and reflective of the residents that call the city home. Different skill levels, physical abilities and cultural backgrounds are all present within our society and must be made evident within the food system itself. The right to difference recognizes the importance of participatory governance and decision-making in shaping urban food policies and programs (McClintock, 2013), allowing residents to create meaning within their cities.

The tangible aspects of the urban food system, such as resource allocation, infrastructure, and the physical environment are all important material conditions (Kirsch, 2012) that are overlaid with cultural meanings and values attached to food. Kirsch (p.434) argues that the ways in which meaning becomes shared have a critical role to play in the construction and maintenance of asymmetrical arrangements of power. By adopting a materialist approach, we can continue to uncover the complex relationships between food, culture and urban space through the perception of inhabitants, particularly those who may be seen as ‘outsiders’ by the dominant cultural group. Negotiating pre-established power systems, whether in social, cultural or food related perspectives may impact the ways in which people feel a sense of belonging, ease and security in their lived space. It is important to better understand the ways in which these systems impact one’s ability to establish their home and re-establish their feelings of belonging in a new setting.

Methodology

Climate change, political conflicts, persecution and human rights violations have led an estimated 120 million people to be displaced as of April, 2024 (The UN Refugee Agency, 2024). Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are forced to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into communities in the cities and countries that host them, while simultaneously navigating a difficult psychological period in their lives. Recreating the material and affective space shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions (Kerr et al., 2021) is integral in not only the conception of home, but also in a person’s ability to express themselves (Blunt & Dowling, 2022). The study of home is crucial to understanding what it means to live in a city (Sheringham, 2022), particularly in the unique context of displaced persons as home-making practices can emerge outside the domestic spaces’ boundaries (Cancellieri, 2017) and allow residents to build a sense of comfort, safety and belonging to a space.

One way these connections may be forged is through food sovereignty in the urban context. Defined as the “right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Creswell, 2017), food sovereignty refocuses control of food production and consumption in localized systems. Through Schmid’s (2022) overview and

reconstruction of Henri Lefebvre's work on the Production of Space, we are reminded that public space is a site of tension and contradiction, at once a location of freedom and expression, but also control and surveillance. Schmid (p. 284, original italics) reminds us that "*every* space is also a space of representation because it always has a social meaning and refers to something, expresses or symbolises something". The neoliberal paradigm of food production and availability may be at odds with dietary needs and restrictions of newly arrived displaced persons, and it is through the democratisation of the food system that residents are able to stake their political claim to the right to the city and demand social justice and change (Lopez Cifuentes and Sonnino, 2024).

Through the medium of food, this thesis project proposes to explore the relationship between food democracy, food sovereignty, and displaced populations. Engaging with the Ukrainian refugee agencies Ukraine L'Avenir and Tourraine Ukraine (Ville de Tours, 2024) we look to explore questions surrounding the access and availability of culturally appropriate food in a new setting, asking what role does food play in grounding and connecting displaced persons? And exploring interventions on an urban planning scale that are available for building an inclusive city for all through local food access. Two specific research methods have been selected to drive data collection and analysis. First, a survey questionnaire has been created (Appendix A) including 30 questions that have been formulated to gain a quantitative understanding of the dishes prepared, frequency of preparation and residents' involvement with culturally-specific foods through local events, gatherings with friends, and at-home practices. This survey has been translated into Ukrainian, Russian, French and English, and will be distributed through QR codes and emailed links connecting participants to a Google Form.

Additionally, a qualitative survey has been formulated (Appendix B) to gain a deeper understanding of residents' experiences surrounding food and home in their new lived environment. Residents will be interviewed in either Russian, Ukrainian or English, with recordings made whenever agreed upon by the interviewee. Recordings of interviews or interview summaries (where applicable) will be translated to English, transcribed using SONIX.AI, an online transcription service and proofread by the principal investigator. Following the transcription, ATLAS.TI will be utilised to code the interviews for themes of home, place-making, sentiments of belonging, understandings of urban space and uses, and residents' affective-sensory memories pertaining to food production, consumption and rituals.

Through these coding themes we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the residents' connections to their present landscapes, how they incorporate past experiences and what systems are at play in their cultural connections to the past and present.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research looks to engage with Ukrainian citizens displaced by the 2022 Russian invasion to explore how food practices contribute to the re-establishment of home, belonging, and place-making in the Indre-et-Loire region of France. The central hypothesis is that food plays a meaningful role in the re-creation of home and belonging for individuals who have experienced displacement. Further, this study proposes that food contributes to the ideological and affective construction of landscape - even among those who are not directly engaged in food cultivation, urban agriculture, or community gardening. The literature review on food democracy, food sovereignty and a critical geography perspective on home has showcased a need to better understand the social sustainability of our urban food networks, particularly for residents that are marginalized, whether economically, racially, or by ability. While food democracy and food sovereignty are used to initiate food policy councils, urban food strategies, urban agriculture and community gardens to challenge the agri-food conglomerates there remains a missing link in understanding the social, health and well-being benefits of coming together around food.

Social food-related practices, including gardening, cultivation, and communal meals, are often positioned as mechanisms through which newly arrived residents build social capital, assert spatial presence, and shape their imaginaries of home in unfamiliar urban contexts. This research project looks to assess these connections through theoretical perspectives grounded in Henri Lefebvre's (Schmid, 2022) theory of the social production of space and the Right to the City (Butler, 2012; Purcell & Tyman, 2015), alongside Kirsch's (2012) materialist analysis of space and power. Today's urban food system integrates partnerships between a variety of stakeholders and relies on urban planning policy to invoke challenges to the 'business-as-usual' approach to the hegemonic food system. This democratic approach to food production, distribution and consumption is susceptible to current power dynamics of both resident and political elites. It is hoped that this study will provide a humanistic understanding that can be utilised to better understand the capacity of

engaging marginalized groups and operationalizing the ability to empower all members of society to participate in a democratic food system.

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Appendix

A. Quantitative Survey Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a Master's thesis exploring the relationships between food, migration and belonging. All answers are anonymous and cannot be traced back to any individual person. There are a total of 30 questions, estimated to take less than 5 minutes to complete. Thank you for taking the time to provide your personal experiences, and if you would like to stay in touch or participate further through an in-person interview, please leave your contact email or phone number at the end of the survey.

Language selection

- Українська
 - Русский
 - English
 - Français
-

Background

Q1. What is your cultural heritage?

- Fully Ukrainian
- Half Ukrainian, Half Russian
- Other: (Fill in the blank)

Q2. How long have you lived in France?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4+ years

Q3. Are you a French citizen?

- Yes
- No

Q4. Are you planning to remain in France?

- No
- Yes

Q4a. If yes, for how long?

- Open answer

Q5. What was your purpose for coming to France? (Select all that apply)

- Education
- Work
- Displacement due to Russia/Ukraine Conflict
- Partner/Family decided to relocate here

Q6. Are you involved with any Ukrainian organisations? (Select all that apply)

- No
 - Yes, Ukraine Avenir
 - Yes, Touraine Ukraine
 - Yes, Other:
-

Food at Home

Q1. Are you the primary cook in your household?

- Yes
- No

Q2. Do you cook/eat Ukrainian dishes at home?

- Yes
- No

Q2a. If yes, how often do you/your household cook Ukrainian dishes?

- Everyday

- At least 4 days a week
- Once a week
- Every few weeks
- Only on special occasions/holidays

Q3. What dish(es) do you associate with home/family/your heritage? (Select all that apply)

- Borscht
- Solyanka
- Hvar
- Varenyky
- Piroshki
- Gretchka
- Nalisniki
- Smetana
- Chicken Kyiv
- Holodets
- Holobtsi
- Olivier Salad
- Deruny
- Other: (open answer)

Q4. Where do you/your household obtain the majority of your groceries

- Carrefour
- Aldi
- Leclerc
- Intermarché
- Les Halles
- Other: (open answer)

Q5. Are there ingredients you find difficult to obtain in France?

- Yes
- No

Q5a. If yes, which ones?

- (Open answer)

Q6. Do you substitute any missing ingredients or adapt recipes using local ingredients? If so, what is an example of these substitutions?

- No
 - Yes: (open answer)
-

Food Relationships

Q1. Do you prepare Ukrainian food when hosting friends/family?

- Yes
- No

Q2. If yes, what dishes do you typically prepare?

- Open Answer

Q3. Have you attended any events involving Ukrainian food?

- Yes
- No

Q3a. If yes, select all that apply

- Ukrainian Food Day at Villa Rabelais
- International Language Event at Place les Halles
- Friend/family's home
- Other: (Open answer)

Q4. Do you consider growing your own food part of your cultural heritage?

- Yes
- No

Q5. Did you have a vegetable, fruit or herb garden before coming to France?

- Yes

- No

Q5a. If yes, what did you grow?

(Open Answer)

Q6. Do you grow any vegetables, fruits or herbs in your current home?

- Yes
- No

Q6a. If yes, what do you grow?

(Open Answer)

Q6b. If no, is this something you would like to engage in?

- Yes
- No

Demographic Questions

Q1. What is your age range?

- <18
- 18-25
- 26-34
- 35-50
- 50+
- Prefer not to say

Q2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other:
- Prefer not to say

Q3. What is your household composition including yourself?

- 1
- 2-4
- 5+

Q4. Would you like to participate in an in-person interview?

- Yes
- No

Q4a. If yes, please provide your email/phone number

- Open answer

B. Qualitative Survey Questions

(If they filled in the quantitative questionnaire skip to next section):

Background/Demographic questions

1. What is your cultural heritage?

2. Where in Ukraine are you originally from?

3. How long have you lived in France?

4. Are you a French citizen?

5. Are you planning to remain in France? If yes, how long?

6. What was the purpose for coming to France?

7. Are you involved in any Ukrainian organisations?

8. Age/Gender/household composition

Food at Home

1. Do you/your household cook Ukrainian food at home? How often?

2. Are there any foods you miss having readily available?

3. What is your favourite food/memory around food?

4. Did you or your family have a garden/grow any food in Ukraine?

5. Do you grow any food now?

6. Is this something you would like to start? Why? Why not?

7. Where do you usually get your groceries? Do you find it difficult to get any specific ingredients in France? Do you ever shop at slavic-specific stores?

8. Have you altered any of your traditional recipes due to differing availability of produce?

Food Relationships

1. Do you prepare Ukrainian food when hosting friends/family? What do you typically prepare?

2. Have you attended any events or gatherings involving Ukrainian food?

3. Are there any foods you associate with people in your life?

Cultivating Home: Food Democracy and Practices in the Urban Lives of Displaced Persons

English abstract :

This dissertation explores the intersection of food practices, displacement, and urban belonging through the lens of food democracy and sovereignty. Focusing on Ukrainian refugees in the Indre-et-Loire region of France, it investigates how food contributes to the re-establishment of home, identity, and social connections in unfamiliar urban environments. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space and concepts like the Right to the City, this study looks to situate food as both a material and symbolic tool in place-making and community integration. Through a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and qualitative interviews, the research examines the accessibility of culturally significant foods, adaptation strategies, and the role of communal food-related events. Findings look to highlight food's capacity to generate social capital, challenge neoliberal food systems, and empower marginalized groups in participatory urban planning. The study calls for inclusive food policies that recognize food as a right, not a commodity, and cities as central actors in fostering equitable, sustainable food environments.

Résumé en français :

Ce mémoire explore l'intersection entre les pratiques alimentaires, le déplacement et le sentiment d'appartenance en milieu urbain à travers les concepts de démocratie et de souveraineté alimentaires. En se concentrant sur les réfugiés ukrainiens dans la région d'Indre-et-Loire en France, il examine comment l'alimentation contribue à la reconstitution du foyer, de l'identité et des liens sociaux dans des environnements urbains inconnus. S'appuyant sur la théorie de la production de l'espace d'Henri Lefebvre et sur la notion de Droit à la ville, l'étude considère la nourriture comme un outil matériel et symbolique de fabrication de lieu et d'intégration communautaire. À travers une approche méthodologique mixte — incluant des questionnaires et des entretiens qualitatifs — la recherche analyse l'accès aux aliments culturellement significatifs, les stratégies d'adaptation, et le rôle des événements alimentaires collectifs. Les résultats mettent en lumière le rôle de l'alimentation dans la création de capital social, la remise en question des systèmes alimentaires néolibéraux et l'autonomisation des groupes marginalisés dans la planification urbaine participative. L'étude appelle à des politiques alimentaires inclusives, reconnaissant la nourriture comme un droit fondamental plutôt qu'une marchandise, et la ville comme un acteur clé dans la construction de systèmes alimentaires équitables et durables.

Keywords :

Food Democracy; Home-making; Place-making; Right to the City; Urban Planning

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