

Participatory foodscape mapping in Almere, The Netherlands: Making the case for a more inclusive and just access to food

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It is not just about making food more accessible to the increasing urban dwellers as a whole. We have to constantly keep track of how different demographic groups perceive access to food – a more inclusive perspective on access to food. In this article (based on research conducted with Flevo Campus), Almeerders (residents of Almere) show how inclusive access to food is critical to everyday living and also how this reinforces migrants' sense of belonging. Therefore, it is vital to recognize citizens' voices in city foodscape planning in order to attain social sustainability.

Food security or insecurity has been high on policy agenda worldwide. Although significant progress has been made towards ameliorating its impact on nutritional imbalance (for example, public health concerns), improving food access is still a huge concern due to its complexity. This is because access is a social issue which resonates with social, economic and environmental factors. Since people's desires are embedded in everyday practice, it is important to hear what people think. This is important in ensuring fair access to food. For this reason, there is a continuous need to improve people's access by understanding what people's visions would be concerning where they would like to get their food. This is based on the assumption that food access is a key component of food security. In other words, we

cannot be food secure if we do not know where to get food – a question embedded in everyday challenges and which manifests differently based on socio-cultural orientations. This is why we argued that it is important to let people have an influence in decisions regarding where they can access their food.

In order to contribute to this argument, we decided to conduct this investigation in which we asked people from Almere about where they are currently getting their food and where they would 'ideally' like to get their food in the future. The participants were as diverse as possible with people from the following cultural backgrounds amongst others: Dutch, Surinamese, Canadian, Venezuelan, Turkish, Syrian, Ghanaian, Guatemalan and Thai. These Almeerders were asked to map their preferences on food access and the findings were as follows:

1. Almeerders want greengrocers selling local products to be closer to home. Almeerders (like most people) value convenience in access to food. This implies that food retail stores and fresh food markets should ideally be closer to where people live although not necessarily where they live. From the experience of some participants, having a greengrocer nearby saves a lot of time and energy as they would not have to cover long distances for their perishable food products. For example, several respondents believe the current fresh food farmers' market in De Kemphaan (see Figure 1) is great and offers a wonderful opportunity to eat local and fresh but happens to be too far out of town. One respondent said:

If I can really be wishfully thinking about the future, I would like a shop where I can buy local products nearby. If there would be one shop, a bit like that farmer market maybe in De Kemphaan that will be very good. However, De Kemphaan is a little bit too far away for us. So, we end up not really going there. We want something like that closer... Never go that far to buy fresh things. For instance, it is not ideal to cycle for half an hour to get to the market, and then have to cycle another half hour back with perishable food. Smaller fresh food shops nearby and not necessarily supermarkets with shorter food chains will be my ideal food future in Almere. (Annelies, 45-year-old woman from Stedenwijk, Almere)

Figure 1: The Kemphaan farmers' market



A major difference observed between the current and future consumer preferences on food access is that the farmers' market (De Kemphaan market) observable in its current location in Overig Almere Hout on Figure 2 does not feature in the future vision on Figure 3. This is because people consider the element of distance in the current location a bit problematic. This is particularly an obstacle concerning purchasing fresh food everyday due to the perishability of the products. Hence, there was a general interest for a De Kemphaan-like shops within or closer to the city in neighbourhoods such as the Stad or Parkwijk – see Figure 3. The green squares on Figure 3 (in the Stad and Parkwijk neighbourhoods) represent locations for ideal future preferences of consumers for the location of farmers' markets. This supports the preference of Almeerders for more De Kemphaan - like food sources within or closer to the inner city. In other words, grocery shops should be closer to home.

Figure 2: Current locations for food access

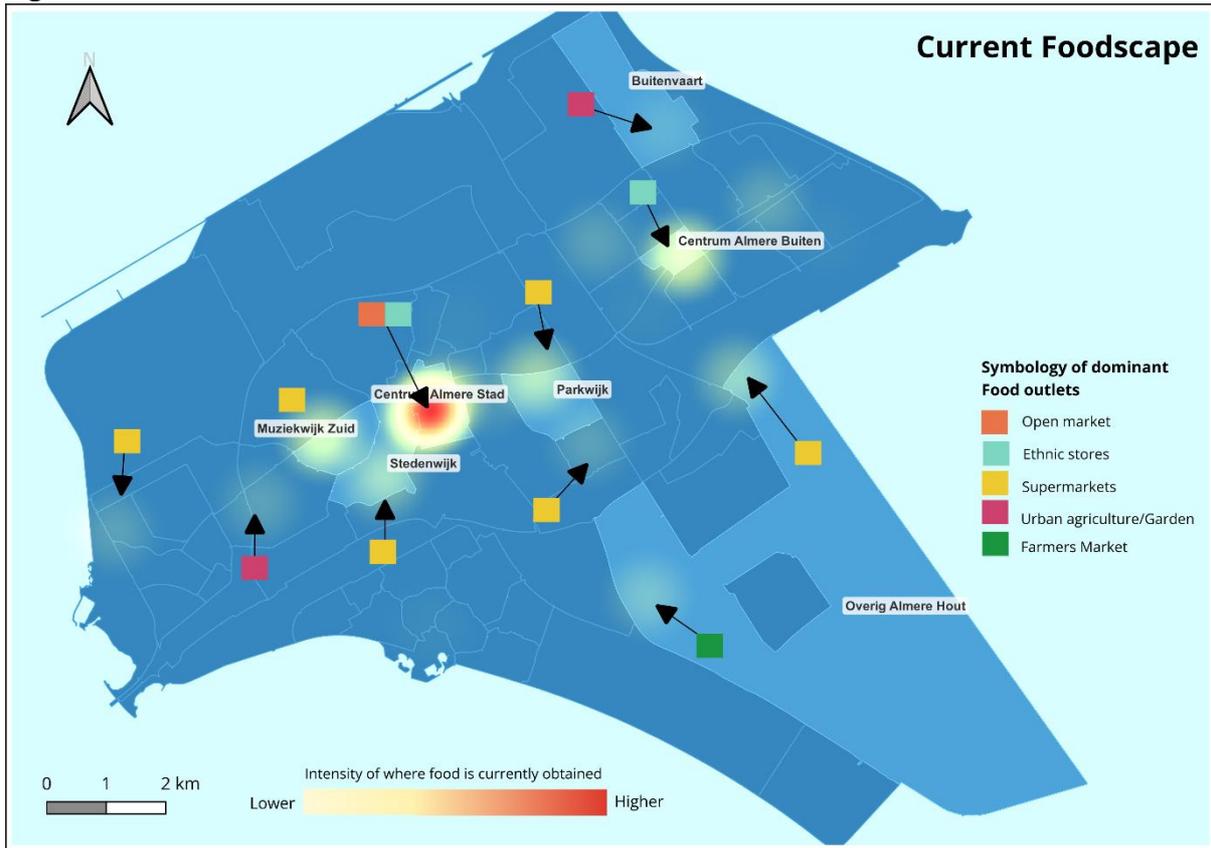
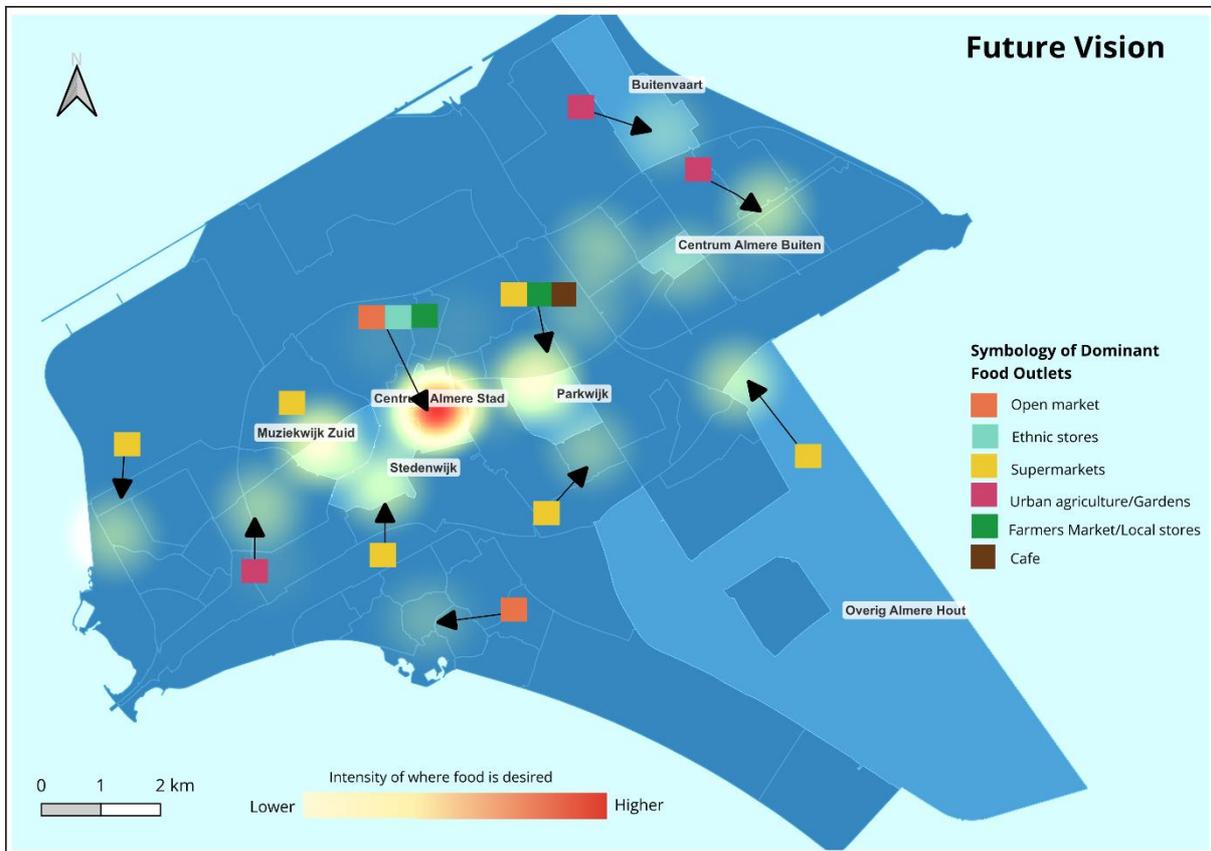


Figure 3: Desired food access future vision



Also, there was strong preference for more open market days and a farmers' market in the Centrum or Stad because it will help in conveniently accessing fresh/perishable foods and also keep the city lively at all times. Markets are known to create an atmosphere of conviviality around cities. Currently, the open market days in Almere Stad are only on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

2. People with migrant and non-migrant backgrounds have different priorities concerning access to food. People with migrant backgrounds expressed a preference for more ethnically diverse shops in the city centre while people with non-migrant backgrounds expressed the wish to have more cafés and bakeries around their neighbourhoods. For those with migrant backgrounds, preferences are rooted in their cultures of origin. Hence, people with migrant backgrounds still want to have connections with the foods from their countries of origin. A participant with a migrant background said:

I would like more international shops from which we can get foods from other parts of the world. I get most of my ingredients [okra, egg plants, palm oil] from the only African shop in Almere Stad. That is the only place I know in Almere where I can get food ingredients to prepare my culturally-based dishes. (Ashanti, female, Ghanaian origin, 55-year-old)

For people with a non-migrant background, a cosy community feeling is more important than the kinds of shops from which they can purchase certain foods. This is because most of their foods are easily accessible here in Almere and the Flevoland province in general. One respondent with a non-migrant background from Filmwijk neighbourhood said:

For me, I would like to have a Café in my neighbourhood. In a wide avenue like the Cinemadreef (see Figure 4), it is unbelievable that there is no place to sit (outside) and have a coffee. Everywhere I lived in Amsterdam, we had a neighbourhood café and always sat there to have a drink and get to know the people in the neighbourhood. Here, I don't have that kind of place available. These kinds of cafés are very important for community building. With a lack of that, I feel there is no bonding in the community. (Hanneke, Female, 35-year-old from Filmwijk, Almere)

Figure 4: Cinemadreef in the Filmwijk neighbourhood



As part of sustainability, it is important to consider people's visions in the planning of the foodscape of a city. When people's visions are recognised, justice and sustainability will prevail (Awuh & Veen, 2022). This is part of a wider literature on a concept known as just sustainabilities. According to Agyeman and colleagues (2003), just sustainabilities is an acknowledgement that:

Sustainability cannot be simply a 'green', or 'environmental' concern, important though 'environmental' aspects of sustainability are. A truly sustainable society is one where wider questions of social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems (Agyeman et al. 2003: 78).

Inclusion of citizens' or consumers' perspectives in planning is part of just sustainabilities. Such inclusion is the target for making our cities more sustainable (Sustainable Development Goal 11). Based on this goal, it is important for city planners to consciously keep a positive track of their actions by addressing issues around inclusion in all domains – including access to food. Since food access is a socio-cultural issue that manifests spatially, people's visions of food access must prominently feature in policies regarding food access. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will be difficult if we are not proactive about inclusive visions. This participatory mapping of food access preferences in Almere is ongoing. Therefore, if you live in Almere and would like to provide your opinion on where you would ideally want to get your food, please visit the following online participatory mapping platform and provide your input:

<https://tinyurl.com/yfhhuuvf>

Reference

Agyeman, J., Bullard, R. D., & Evans, B. (Eds.). (2003). *Just sustainabilities: Development in an unequal world*. MIT press.

Awuh, H.E., & Veen, E. (2022). Why acknowledging and celebrating diversity in food is not just an aesthetic thing to do. Accessible through: https://flevocampus.nl/why-acknowledging-and-celebrating-diversity-in-food-is-not-just-an-aesthetic-thing-to-do/?mc_cid=aa901dc882&mc_eid=f00f66309b