

Municipal food systems planning in Sweden: Barriers, enablers, and the role of regional collaboration

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Abstract

Municipal food systems planning, which involves integrating different food policy areas and collaborating both within municipalities and with external food system actors, is increasingly recognized as essential for building resilient food systems. While

local governments globally are giving greater attention to food systems planning, practical gaps persist and barriers to transformation remain underexplored. In Sweden, municipalities hold extensive food-related responsibilities, ranging from public meal provision and public food procurement to spatial planning, contingency planning, and the promotion of sustainable development. This provides a relevant and interesting context for examining local-scale food systems planning. Drawing on an institutionalist view, recognizing the interrelationship between structural factors and agency in planning processes taking a particular focus on

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Consent

All participants have given informed consent to participate in the research.

context, interviews and document analysis were conducted to investigate food systems planning in three Swedish municipalities. We focus on identifying key barriers and enablers, and we examine their collaborations with regional food system actors. The municipalities employed three distinct approaches to food systems planning: emphasizing local food procurement, working through food-related projects, and implementing a local food strategy. Across all cases, committed officials—whom we refer to as “food champions”—were found to be central to advancing transformative efforts. Barriers included constraints linked to regulations and limited time and resources, particularly regarding the procurement of local food. In contrast, having a local food strategy provided mandate and direction, supporting both internal and external collaboration. Project-based work enabled innovation but suffered from unstable funding and limited long-term continuity. Regional actors played a crucial role in facilitating collaborative platforms and knowledge exchange. Together, these findings emphasize the contextual interplay between structural and agential factors in advancing municipal food systems planning, and how they act as barriers or enablers. The findings highlight that in addition to developing local food strategies, local food systems identity and norms, collaborative routines, strong political support, resources for implementation, and officials responsible for coordinating food systems planning in the municipality, are key enabling factors.

Keywords

collaboration, food system, food systems planning, food systems resilience, local food strategy, local food systems, municipalities, projectification, public food procurement

Introduction

Climate change, COVID-19, and recent conflicts have disrupted global supply chains, showing that an overreliance on both global and national supply chains has increased vulnerability and food insecurity, emphasizing the potential of local food systems in decreasing the dependence on distant sources and provide food in times of crises (Ballamingie et al., 2020; Carey et al., 2021; Keegan

et al., 2024). At the same time, local and regional food systems are connected to national and global flows of food and inputs, and it is not possible to provide all food locally (Blay-Palmer et al., 2018; Carey et al., 2021). In the global North, national food policy is often conducted within silos and focused on market-based and production-driven priorities (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Sonnino, 2019). In light of this, the local and regional scale of food systems is increasingly seen as a space for actions and collaborations (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Keegan et al., 2024; Parsons et al., 2021; Sonnino, 2019), with municipalities and regional food system actors highlighted by scholars as key actors in promoting food systems resilience and transformation (Carrad et al., 2022; Giambartolomei et al., 2021; Keegan et al., 2024; Moragues-Faus & Carroll, 2018). Food systems resilience includes being prepared for various shocks and crises, and being able to provide food for all (Tendall et al., 2015). Municipal food systems planning, involving integration and the consideration of different aspects of the food system, cross-departmental collaboration, and collaborations with various actors, has been described as a crucial planning approach in developing food systems resilience (Ballamingie et al., 2020; Borrelli et al., 2023; Hoey, 2022; Mansfield & Mendes, 2013).

The strong local self-government of Swedish municipalities, and the varied mandates they carry related to food systems, make them an interesting case. Their responsibilities related to food range from providing public meals in schools and pre-schools (including procurement of food) to spatial planning, contingency planning, and promoting sustainable development. However, there is a lack of empirical research that investigates food systems planning in Sweden at the regional and local level. While there are national survey studies (Andersson et al., 2026; Granvik et al., 2026) and a few case studies (L. Molin & Östensson, 2015; Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015), there has been little consideration of planning practices across different municipal departments, or the interplay and collaborations between municipal and other regional food system actors.

Municipalities can support local food systems resilience in various ways, such as by setting certain

criteria in the procurement process to promote local food production, sustainable agriculture, and healthy diets (E. Molin et al., 2024; Morley, 2021; Swensson & Tartanac, 2020); through local food community projects that can inspire collaboration between different actors and organizations and take the local context into consideration (Dawkins et al., 2024; Mansfield & Mendes, 2013; Munck Af Rosenschöld & Wolf, 2017); and through local food strategies integrating food across policy areas and enabling collaborations (Morgan, 2009; Sonnino, 2016; Zerbán & de Luis Romero, 2023). Finally, while there has been a growing interest in food systems planning from local governments around the globe, there are still gaps in practice (Hoey, 2022), and empirical examples of challenges and opportunities are lacking (Sonnino et al., 2019; Vignola & Oosterveer, 2025). Therefore, this study aims to contribute to filling this gap by drawing on an institutionalist view on planning (Calderon & Westin, 2021). The study was guided by the question: How do contextual factors shape food systems planning in three Swedish municipalities, and what are the main barriers and enablers in such work?

Regional and Local Food Systems Governance in Sweden

Sweden is considered a well-developed and egalitarian welfare state, where food insecurity has generally been low relative to the global level (Rost & Lundälv, 2021). Sweden's food systems governance operates across multiple territorial levels, involving national, regional, and local actors. The European Union (EU) influences work at the national, regional and local scale, particularly through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which sets objectives for agricultural development and provides funds for agriculture and rural development (European Commission, n.d.), and the EU directive on public procurement (Directive 2014/24/EU). Sweden is divided into 21 counties and regions, and 290 municipalities. Counties and regions represent similar geographical areas, and in this article, 'regional' refers to both the county and the region geographically, although there are separate administrative bodies for counties and regions. Within each county, a county administrative board

(CAB) represents the state and is responsible for ensuring that national objectives are implemented in ways that reflect regional conditions (The Government Offices of Sweden, 2020). The CAB has a responsibility to implement actions according to the national food strategy. There are regional food strategies in all counties (The Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure, 2025). At the regional scale, another institution led by elected politicians is the regional council which works with matters such as food provision for hospitals. At the regional level there are also regional food business organizations who support business development in the food sector (Gröna kluster Sverige, n.d.). These types of organizations often receive funding from municipalities, CABs and/or regional councils.

Municipalities mainly operate at the local scale, but they are guided by regional strategies as well as national laws and guidelines. They are run by locally elected politicians (The Government Offices of Sweden, 2020) and have a high level of autonomy to formulate goals or strategies (Dawkins et al., 2024) and adapt these to the local context (Erlingsson & Ödalen, 2017). Different responsibilities related to food are dealt with at different municipal departments, including public meal planning, procurement, business development, rural development, and contingency planning. There are other local and regional food organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Sweden, but this study is limited to actors who were perceived as main collaborators to the case municipalities. Figure 1 illustrates the above described governance structure.

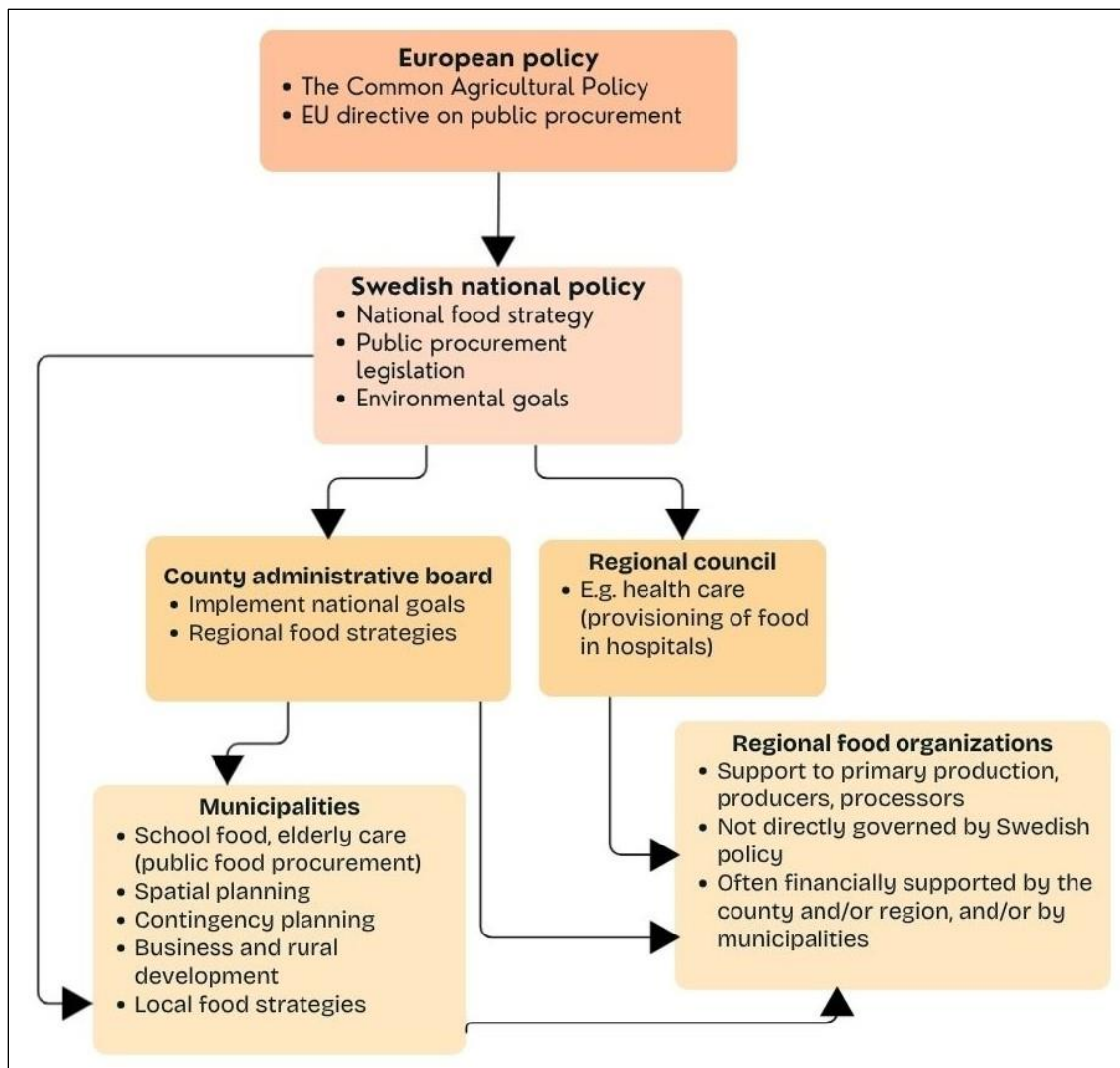
Food Systems Planning

In this study, food planning at the local level is considered as both strategic and operative work carried out by municipal officials at different departments. Drawing on Morgan (2009), we define food planners as all municipal officials who work to strategically plan and/or coordinate different aspects of the food system. Food systems planning concerns working with food planning from a systems approach, both strategically and in practice (Hoey, 2022; Morgan, 2015). This entails considering food as complex systems consisting of many

actors, factors, and activities like the environment, institutions, inputs, infrastructures, and more, to how we produce, process, market, and consume food (Ericksen, 2008; Zurek et al., 2022). Defining food as a system enables taking the interconnected relationships between factors into consideration, in turn facilitating more integrated policy mechanisms (Arthur et al., 2022; Blay-Palmer et al., 2018). Starting from a consideration of local food systems as city-region food systems (CRFS): “a complex network of actors, processes, and relationships involved in food production, processing, marketing, and consumption within a geographical region

of an urban center and its surrounding peri-urban and rural hinterland” (Arthur et al., 2022, p. 1288), where food system processes are understood through place-based and contextual factors, offers a potential to incorporate such a systems lens (Arthur et al., 2022; Blay-Palmer et al., 2018; Sonnino & Milbourne, 2022). In sum, in combining CRFS and food systems planning, this study focuses on the need for both localizing food systems and working with food planning from a systems approach in order to promote food systems resilience and transformation (Keegan et al., 2024; Sonnino et al., 2019).

Figure 1. A Non-Exhaustive Illustration of Food Systems Governance in Sweden, Providing an Overview of Governing Authorities with Arrows Showing how they are Connected



Analytical Framework: An Institutional Approach to Planning

In order to explore food systems planning in municipalities, this study draws on communicative planning theory (CPT), which is informed by an institutionalist approach highlighting the relational aspects of planning (Calderon & Westin, 2021; Healey, 1997, 2003). CPT is partly built on the notion of structuration, which sees structures and agency as interactive (Giddens, 1984; Healey, 1997). Drawing on Calderon and Westin (2021), this study focuses on the “interplay between institutions and agency” (p. 15) where institutions are seen as shaped by contextual and complex formal regulations and procedures, and informal norms and routines that influence planning processes and act as barriers or enablers to what planners and other stakeholders can do within these processes. At the same time, actors have certain agency to decide what actions to take, which can either reproduce existing structures or change them (Calderon & Westin, 2021). Calderon and Westin (2021) suggest institutional factors (*norms, regulations and routines*), and agency factors (*understandings, values, resources and relationships*), to analyze the influence of context in planning processes. In this study, these are complemented with and exemplified by drawing on studies in food systems planning.

Norms are informal rules guiding and legitimizing certain ways of acting and behaving; for example, the norm may be hierarchical structures or collaborative approaches. *Regulations* are legislation or written guidelines that specify planning practices (Calderon & Westin, 2021). They could be international or national policies or laws influencing local food systems planning (Béné & Abdulai, 2024; Dawkins et al., 2024), or local food strategies (Morgan, 2009; Sonnino, 2016). Food systems planning literature states that leadership from higher governance levels is important in making decisions such as national food policies and goals (Béné & Abdulai, 2024; Dawkins et al., 2024). *Routines* are the regular and embedded everyday practices employed by individuals and organizations in planning processes (Calderon & Westin, 2021), which in a municipal context could be the usual way of working in departmental silos (Baldy et al.,

2021; Grundel & Trygg, 2024) or adapting the organization to a project-based form of work (Fred, 2020; Jacobsen, 2022). *Understanding* considers the knowledge that actors have about the issue at hand (Calderon & Westin, 2021); in this case, whether the actors understand food as a complex system (Sonnino, 2023), as well as their understanding of collaborative processes. *Values* are the motivations and attitudes of actors (Calderon & Westin, 2021); for example, whether there are individuals who are committed to food issues (Dawkins et al., 2024; Hoey, 2022). *Resources* are both material and human resources available in the planning process (Calderon & Westin, 2021). Political will, staff, and financial resources have been noted as crucial in developing food system strategies and projects (Carey, 2013; Doernberg et al., 2019; Vara-Sánchez et al., 2021). *Relationships* can be both interpersonal relationships and stakeholder relationships (Calderon & Westin, 2021). Collaboration between a diverse set of actors such as municipalities, farmers, businesses, and NGOs are considered key in fostering solutions to food system challenges (Carey, 2013; Morgan, 2015; Zink et al., 2022).

Methods

In this study, we present case studies from three Swedish municipalities. Case studies can give detailed, contextual knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of complex issues in a real-world setting (Yin, 2018). Document analysis and interviews were used as empirical data to explore food systems planning at the local and regional level. Interviews were also conducted with representatives from county administrative boards (CABs) and regional food organizations in the three regions. Regional actors were included to obtain an understanding of food systems planning at the regional level and to explore how these actors collaborate and interact with municipalities. Regional actors were identified by the case study municipalities as key collaborators and as influential stakeholders shaping food systems planning at the regional level. The analysis was based on the institutionalist approach described above and the factors *norms, regulations, routines, understandings, values, resources and relationships* were operationalized to

analyze the specific context shaping food systems planning in three Swedish municipalities and how these factors act as enablers or barriers.

Case Studies

The three municipalities were chosen through information-oriented selection, choosing cases that were believed to be information-rich and considered as frontrunners in municipal food systems planning in Sweden (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Patton, 2015). A limitation of case studies is the difficulty of generalizing findings to other contexts; still, as information-rich and as frontrunners, we consider these case studies as able to provide insights valuable to other contexts as well. Municipalities were selected based on responses they submitted to a survey study conducted in a larger research project that explored municipal food systems planning, in which they stated that they are engaged in supporting local food systems and exhibited some degree of collaboration. The selection strategy sought variation in population size and urban–rural context, recognizing that these factors shape municipal preconditions, organizational structures, and resource capacities. Accordingly, one small rural municipality and two larger urban municipalities were included, with an additional aim of ensuring representation from different counties (Table 1; Figure 2).

In all cases, a representative from the CAB was interviewed. In Värmland, an employee from the regional food organization Nifa was interviewed. Nifa's goal is to support food sector businesses in Värmland with such efforts as business development and networking. In Västra Götaland and Östergötland, the regional food cluster organizations Agroväst and Vreta Kluster were interviewed who focus on development mainly for primary producers, with one key aim

being to promote collaboration between food system actors within their region and to promote different projects.

Figure 2. Map of Sweden with Three Case Study Municipalities and their Respective Counties

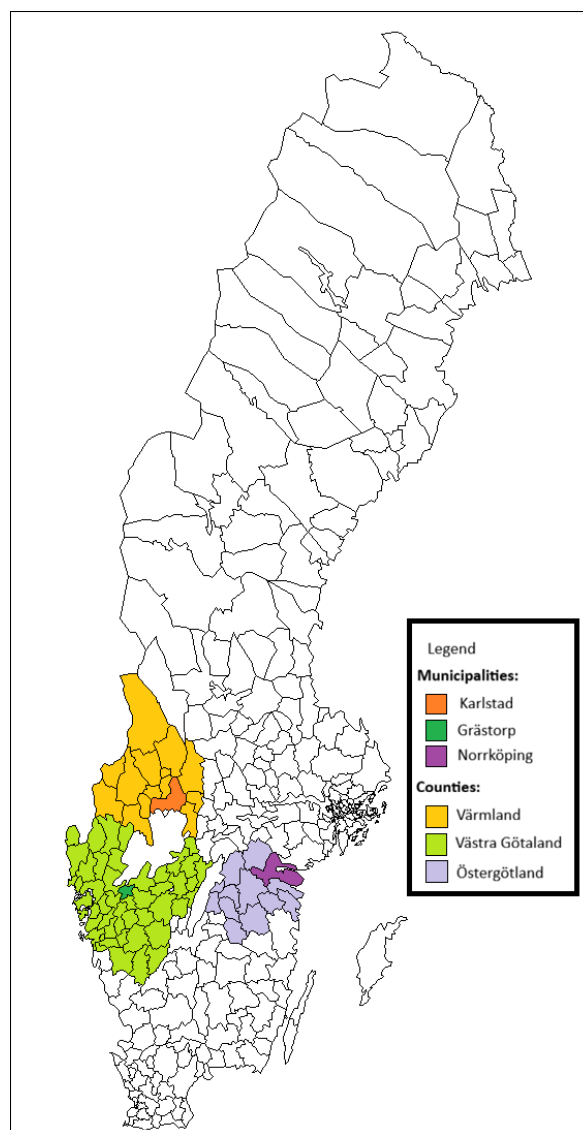


Table 1. Characteristics of the Three Case Study Municipalities

Municipality	Population	Rural population (%)	Agricultural land area (%)	County
Karlstad	98,000	10	19.5	Värmland
Grästorp	5,600	46	58	Västra Götaland
Norrköping	145,000	8.5	26.3	Östergötland

Source: The municipalities in numbers: <https://kommunsiffror.scb.se/>

Interviews

In each municipality, the first author conducted semi-structured interviews during 2023 and 2024 with non-elected officials from different departments responsible for food-related issues. The interviewees were selected on the recommendation of the official who had responded to the survey and/or was identified as the person working strategically with food systems. For the CABs, officials working with the regional food strategy were chosen, and at the regional food organizations, interviews were conducted with employees with extensive knowledge about the overall work of the organization. See Appendix A for a full list of interviewees. The interview questions aimed to explore how municipal officials and regional actors work to promote resilient local food systems, how they collaborate, and what they perceive as barriers and enablers in their work and why. The municipal interview guide (see Appendix B) was formulated based on the study's aim and background. For the regional actors, separate interview guides were used adapted to their context (see Appendix C). The interviews lasted around one hour and were carried out either face-to-face or online. All interviews were audio recorded and one of the authors transcribed the interviews in full.

Steering Documents

We analyzed steering documents such as plans, policies, or strategies that related to food in each municipality to some extent. These documents guide decision-making and describe issues and solutions. As such, they provide useful information on how the municipalities work with issues around food. We found the documents by searching the municipalities' websites. See Appendix D for a full list of documents. The documents provided information and insights about the case studies and were used as inspiration for the interview guide, as well as to complement and verify findings from the interview data.

Analysis

Qualitative text analysis was used to analyze both the steering documents and the interviews. This method entails reading the texts carefully with the research questions and relevant literature in mind,

highlighting key terms, concepts, and passages (Kuckartz, 2014). In a first step, the data was coded using NVivo. The research questions and reviewed literature on food systems planning were used as a starting point to arrive at initial codes. Starting with this deductive approach ensured that the coding reflected important topics and issues related to the research (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). While reading the document and interview transcripts, codes were changed or added if additional interesting themes were found, enabling us to stay open to different interpretations of the data while at the same time remaining close to the theory and background of the study (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). A complete codebook can be found in Appendix E. After this initial sorting, the coded segments were grouped into themes: local food, food preparedness, climate change/environment, governance, barriers, enablers, internal collaboration, and external collaboration. This allowed for the analysis of different themes from the interviews and documents. This data was then sorted into *norms*, *regulations*, *routines*, *understandings*, *values*, *resources*, and *relationships*, according to the analytical framework.

Results

This section presents the main results from the three case studies.

Karlstad: Dedication to Procure Local Food

In Karlstad, a main focus was to procure local food for the meal services offered by the municipality. Existing regulations such as the Meal policy states that the municipality should aim to procure locally produced food, defined as food produced in Värmland county, and that small and medium-sized companies should be encouraged to submit bids for procurement contracts (or *tenders* in European terminology). However, there is no formalized and quantifiable goal for this. Environmental and climate issues related to food were highlighted in several steering documents. For example, the Meal policy had a goal regarding the amount of organic food procured in the public organizations. There was an aim to reduce climate impact from food by serving more vegetarian food and reducing food waste.

A strong focus on procuring local food for the municipal meal services was noted by four of the municipal interviewees, largely driven by the work of one committed official. This has been a focus since 2013, when this official, the head of public meal planning in high schools, started working in the municipality. The procurement of local food is a close collaboration between the public meals services departments and the procurement department in the municipality. In regards to relationships, this collaboration was said to work well and facilitate the procurement process.

Considering resources, the officials reported experiencing support from local politicians for the aim to procure local food. Still, as one respondent pointed out, politicians did not increase the budget for procurement. Another relationship aspect was the central part of the approach to procure local food through establishing a close collaboration with farmers. As illustrated by one of the interviewees, this has enabled the municipality to ask for products suited to the municipal organization, e.g., packaging size or organic products, and in exchange the municipality promises to buy their product(s):

You can ask the producer to change their product to suit us [the municipality] better. Regarding price, size, packaging, and quality. This cannot be done with someone who is further away because the connection is broken. This provides an added value, more than just a product, it is a service connected to a product. (KI_3)

In relation to understandings, one interviewee stated that having knowledgeable staff who are committed to promoting local food systems is essential, which has also been a key enabler in establishing collaborations. For example:

I think that a key factor is that we have people in our organization who are passionate about this and push it forward. I think that is absolutely a key factor in this case. Especially when the political direction is not that clear. (KI_4)

Another challenge mentioned related to rou-

tines was that farmers find it complicated selling to the municipality, and some already have long-term agreements with market-dominant and large-scale food co-operatives. Three respondents mentioned the Swedish Public Procurement Act as a regulation barrier since this law prohibits municipalities from buying locally if above a certain sum. There were ways to work around it, however. For example, Karlstad municipality asked producers to visit schools to talk about their product(s) (and therefore they needed to be within a two-hour distance from the municipality). Officials also stated that they had to make the case to local politicians for buying locally, since such products are normally more expensive than conventional foods. One such argument was that the municipality could support local businesses.

A resource in the county of Värmland is a wholesaler who provides food from local producers around the region, which was said to facilitate procuring local food for the municipality. As interviewees explained, the local wholesaler has also enabled producers to grow new products such as plant-based proteins, involving the municipality as a buyer of that product, creating security for the farmer. A norm that was mentioned was the regional interest in local food, and the importance of Nifa, a regional food organization, as a resource:

They [Nifa] support locally and regionally produced basic food commodities and products. So Nifa is very important for the development of the local food supply chain in Värmland. (KI_5)

Additional relationships were described by the Nifa and CAB interviewees. The interviewee from Nifa said that they have supported municipalities to adapt procurement in order for smaller businesses to be able to submit tenders. This has led to 12 out of 16 municipalities in the region procuring local food. The CAB interviewees mentioned a project led by their organization that aimed to highlight the importance of locally produced food in school meals and strengthen local food production. The project included study visits to farms for schoolchildren, chefs, and politicians as a way to increase the understanding of where and how food

is produced. Karlstad municipality was one of the collaborators in the project, and one of the staff responsible for school kitchens worked part-time on the project, which created a close collaboration between the municipality and the CAB. One barrier mentioned by the CAB interviewees was the regulation and routine of working on short-term projects with short-term funding, making it difficult to work strategically and with a long-term perspective. Applying for projects and doing administrative tasks was said to be time-consuming.

Grästorp: Agricultural Identity and Collaboration Through Projects

In Grästorp, in the county of Västra Götaland, the main approach to food systems planning was through two EU-funded projects, establishing a temporary routine of working with food issues through projects. Grästorp's identity as an agricultural and rural municipality became evident in both the interviews and when analyzing steering documents. The steering documents also provided regulatory means to promote food systems resilience. The Comprehensive plan stated that the municipality should protect agricultural land, and several documents (Comprehensive plan, Goals for environmental work, Meal policy, Development plan) stated that local food production should be supported. The Meal policy stated that locally produced food should be encouraged in the procurement process and that the municipality should have preparedness for three weeks in the event of a crisis. The Goals for environmental work included goals to reduce food waste and minimize climate impact from public meals, such as by procuring organic food and serving more vegetarian food.

Project documents and one interviewee outlined the municipality's two food system projects, which have provided resources to work with food issues focused on increasing local food production and processing, sustainability, preparedness, and collaboration. The first project started in 2019. Farmers were provided support from the municipality to test the production of plant-based proteins in an attempt to explore both what could be grown locally and how locally grown food could be consumed locally. The second project lasted between 2023 and 2025. In this project the municipi-

ality again worked with farmers and experimented with new crops that could potentially strengthen the resilience of the local food system. The project also explored if residual flows from local food industries could be used to create new foods by local small-scale processors. Lastly, the project developed a "crisis-product" to be used during crises, composed of local food.

In relation to understandings and values, knowledgeable officials and local politicians who are committed to the issues were mentioned by the municipal interviewees as important enablers in promoting local food systems in Grästorp. One interviewee reflected on the lack of a local food strategy, making actions related to food quite dependent on officials' interests. Still, both officials and politicians wanted to keep Grästorp's strong identity as an agricultural and rural municipality; as one interviewee explained:

There is political will and interest in the rural community in Grästorp because it is such a large part of Grästorp's municipality and history. But I think it is also because of the strong initiatives from officials who are passionate about these issues and who have seen the opportunity to apply for funding for these types of projects, so I think it is a combination. (GI_2)

However, more clarity from politicians was also asked for by one of the interviewees:

There is ambiguity and insecurity around who should do what and how much, the level of ambition. Those are the biggest problems. If it had been clear—we are supposed to do this—then it would have been easy. (GI_4)

Another challenge was making the whole food chain local; a lot of food is produced in the municipality, but there is a lack of local processors and packaging companies. This has led to an understanding of the need to work beyond the municipal organization and collaborate with other actors regionally. One goal in the second project was to find ways to include processors. Illustrating this, one interviewee said:

We lack the processing step in our municipality ... local food is bigger, it goes beyond the municipal borders. ... We need to collaborate with other municipalities around us in order to contribute to short and secure food supply chains. (GI_7)

In both projects, relationships have been crucial, and interviewees remarked that the aim was to collaborate with a variety of actors. The second project included seven municipalities, businesses, farmers, local food organizations, and researchers. From the municipalities, officials from different departments participated. The projects provided knowledge exchange and network events with a strong focus on learning, increasing the understanding of food systems issues. Agroväst, the regional food cluster organization, acted as a communications platform to share the knowledge gained in the project between different actors. The interviewee from Agroväst said that at the regional level, they work to share and transfer knowledge between actors.

Collaboration in various forms was mentioned by all interviewees as necessary for working with complex issues like the food system, and two stated that once relationships are established, it is easier to collaborate in the future. The interviewee from the CAB described leading a project about local food in public meals, supporting municipalities to procure local food, and creating opportunities for producers, municipalities and wholesalers to meet and discuss. Additionally, this person explained that projects such as those in Grästorps illustrate how municipalities are beginning to move beyond their traditional services, by supporting local producers and strengthening food preparedness:

They work with talking to the primary producers or considering the distribution in the municipality. Or bigger issues, than just their own operations so to say. (VG_1)

While the projects have provided resources and opportunities for collaboration and working with food systems, concerns regarding working in projects were also raised in relation to what happens when the projects end and the lack of

resources that might follow, illustrated by one of the interviewees:

It is important with these projects where you get dedicated funds for personnel resources. But it is also important to think about how we can implement it in the permanent organization. ... Perhaps there is a risk. I won't say that it will be completely deprioritized, but simply that there will not be enough time and personnel resources to keep it going. (GI_6)

Norrköping: Political Will and a Local Food Strategy

In contrast to the other municipalities, Norrköping in the county of Östergötland has developed a local food strategy. It was initiated by local politicians and finalized in 2022. As a regulatory framework, the strategy is at the core of the municipality's food systems planning, including a broad range of policy areas such as agricultural land, environmental issues, procurement of local food, food preparedness, and supporting local food businesses. In other documents, agricultural land (Comprehensive plan, Knowledge base document agricultural land, Overall goals and goal fulfillments 2023-2026) and agricultural businesses (Direction for rural policy) are recognized as important for preparedness and sustainable food supply. Organic and locally produced food should be promoted in procurement processes (Guideline for food and meals, Guideline for public meal services, Guideline for procurement and purchases).

One municipal interviewee explained the municipality's work with the local food strategy in more detail. In contrast to the regular process, where officials develop strategies, this interviewee explained that they had aided in the drafting of the strategy, and that the politicians were highly involved in this process. The strategy contributes to clarifying the role of municipal officials, provides mandate, and shows a clear political will for working with food system issues, also by providing financial resources:

We have chosen to develop a strategy. ... In addition, 4 million (SEK) has been delegated

to reach the goals of the food strategy and the meal policy ... and a politician has been appointed as responsible for the local food strategy. That shows political will and that the questions are prioritized. (NI_3)

The strategy promotes building relationships and has enabled new collaborations between different municipal departments and with external actors. For example, there is a project to collaborate more closely with producers and other local food businesses, according to a municipal employee:

I think it [the strategy] is good, because then we have one more platform. And a chance to really discuss with external parties who will be affected by it. ... We often say that the best steering mechanism for the food issue are the municipal steering documents. (NI_3)

In relation to personnel resources, the employee (NI_3) is now responsible for coordinating the implementation of the strategy, from an understanding that it is of value to have officials from different municipal departments involved in the process, as well as external actors. The interviewee explained that this type of role is rare in Sweden: it is usually officials at the public meal services department who work with food, but they only have responsibility for the municipal food services. They might not have the knowledge or resources to work with food strategically or connect it to other issues.

One focus area in the strategy was procurement of local food, in relation to which interviewees mentioned regulatory and routine barriers such as local food being expensive and the difficulty of receiving tender submissions. Another regulatory barrier mentioned by three interviewees was the Public Procurement Act. Action at the national level to change the act would be beneficial, two interviewees argued. It was stated to be easier to procure organic food since that can be added as a requirement in the tender, while this is not possible for local food.

In regards to relationships, interviewee NI_3, the CAB, and Vreta Kluster mentioned a regional collaborative group coordinated by the CAB, work-

ing strategically with food. For example, they have developed an action plan for the regional food strategy, as well as key indicators to measure if actions are met. Vreta Kluster supports innovation and development for primary production, in turn increasing food production in Östergötland, which contributes to fulfilling the strategy. The CAB remarked that the regional collaborative group enables knowledge exchange between actors, building connections, and helping each other, aiding implementation of the strategy. The group consists of three municipalities (of which Norrköping is one), as well as other actors from the regional food supply chain. They also arrange workshops and similar events to spread the knowledge to other municipalities in the region. While it was stated by the CAB interviewee that broad collaboration both in developing and implementing the strategy has been essential, concrete action is still difficult due to a lack of regulations and resources from the national level:

Ten years have gone by, and we have not reached much further. However, much is due to the lack of clarity in assignments (from the national level), with no connection to funding. (Ö_1)

The interviewee from Vreta Kluster explained that they organize a network for all of the heads of public meal planning in the municipalities in Östergötland, where they can learn from each other and collaborate around, for example, procurement of local food. The network is a way for Vreta Kluster to understand the needs and interests of the municipalities, organize meetings or projects around those topics, and involve other relevant actors in such processes. This interviewee expressed that working on projects provided a common space to meet, while more long-term resources in the form of financing and assignments from municipalities, businesses or other organizations could ensure continuity, flexibility and lower the administrative burden of projects.

Cross-Case Analysis

Table 3 provides a comparison between the factors: norms, regulations, routines, agency, under-

standings, values, resources, and relationships, in the three municipalities. This illustrates similarities and differences between them, which are further explored in the discussion.

Discussion

The results showed that work with food systems planning in the three case study municipalities is shaped by different contexts. In a decentralized state such as Sweden, where municipalities have relatively high autonomy, it is not surprising that municipalities take different approaches. One benefit of such a system is that actions can be adapted

to the local context, while a downside might be that certain issues are not prioritized due to the lack of interest from local politicians and officials. Especially considering food systems planning, where conducting food system projects in the local community or developing food system strategies are not a requirement, it is reasonable that actions and initiatives will vary from place to place and often become dependent on individual food champions.

In the studied municipalities, the various interests, resources, and knowledge of food champions can be one explanation for differences in

Table 3. Contextual Factors Influencing Working with Food Systems Planning in the Three Case Study Municipalities

Factors	Karlstad	Grästorps	Norrköping
Norms	• Interest in supporting local food in the region • Food from a systems perspective not a prioritized policy area	• Strong local food and agricultural identity in the municipality • Agriculture a prioritized policy area	• Interest in supporting local food in the region • Food from a systems perspective is a prioritized policy area
Regulations	• Steering documents • Public Procurement Act • Lack of clarity from national level • Lack of clarity/mandate from local politicians	• Steering documents • Public Procurement Act • Lack of clarity from national level • Lack of clarity/mandate from local politicians	• Steering documents • Public Procurement Act • Local food strategy • Lack of clarity from national level • Mandate from local politicians
Routines	• Working in silos	• Working in silos, except for projects	• Coordinator gathering officials from different departments
Understandings	• Officials are specialized in their area	• Food systems understanding from one official. Other officials more specialized in their area	• Food systems understanding from one official. Other officials more specialized in their area
Values	• Official committed to local food procurement • Politicians with interest in local food	• Official committed to food system issues • Politicians with interest in agriculture and local food	• Politicians and official committed to food system issues
Resources	• No additional staff or budget for local food procurement or other food issues • Local wholesaler	• Projects creating resources to work collaboratively and systemically • No additional staff or budget	• Staff and budget for implementing both meal policy and local food strategy
Relationships	• Partly collaboration between departments • Collaboration with local farmers to increase procurement of local food • Regional actors coordinating collaborations	• Cross-departmental and external collaboration in the projects • Lack of working across policy areas outside the projects • Regional actor as communications platform	• Local food strategy enabling cross-departmental and external collaboration • Regional actors coordinating collaborations

approaches. In both Karlstad and Grästorp there is no local food strategy, and there is a lack of financial and personnel resources for working with food systems, showing a lack of leadership and clear regulations. In both cases, committed officials whose values and understanding support food systems, have been crucial in taking actions despite these institutional barriers. This study reinforces that such food champions have a key role in promoting action and establishing collaborations (e.g., Carrad et al., 2022; Giambartolomei et al., 2021; Hoey, 2022; Milestad et al., 2026). However, relying heavily on people's personal motivation and commitment risks exhaustion (Giambartolomei et al., 2021), and losing a food champion can result in the loss of collaborations, in turn limiting food systems transformations (Dawkins et al., 2024). Moreover, such food champions might not exist in all municipalities.

Another explanation for the differences between the municipalities can be local identity and local political economy. In the case of Grästorp, the local agricultural identity and close contact with local farmers can explain why the municipality chose to focus on projects that could enable concrete actions for farmers rather than a food strategy that might not lead to direct action and implementation. In the county of Värmland, where Karlstad is located, there is a strong interest in food-related issues. This was also identified as a motivating factor for Karlstad, reflecting a well-established norm of engaging with food issues. In contrast, Norrköping's approach can be explained by a beneficial local political economy with regulations in the form of a politically developed local food strategy accompanied by both financial and personnel resources, providing a mandate and direction for municipal officials to work from a systems approach. A dedicated official holds a coordinating role for the local food strategy, which has been pointed out as significant in previous studies (Mah & Thang, 2013; Minotti et al., 2022; Sibbing & Candel, 2021). This illustrates the importance of both committed officials and politicians having values that support food systems planning, as well as an understanding of food systems complexity. These factors reduce the likelihood that efforts on local food systems will cease if a food champion

were to leave. This shows that committed political leaders who support the ideas of food champions in practice are critical in providing resources and formally mandated regulations (Carrad et al., 2022). The local food strategy has also enabled collaborations between departments in the municipal organization involving different policy areas in implementation, as well as with external actors, creating a norm of working collaboratively, which could enable a systemic approach. However, our results challenge the emphasis on local food strategies in creating coordinated action. In Grästorp and Karlstad, having food champions and a sense of political support has led to considerable action. This adds additional nuance to the role of local food strategies in relation to other factors such as local identity, political will, support to food champions, as well as establishing local governmental staff positions centered on local food systems (Berglund et al., 2021, p. 88). At the time of this study, the implementation of the local food strategy in Norrköping had just started and it was not clear what outcomes the food strategy will lead to and whether the outcomes would be more beneficial than those in Karlstad or Grästorp.

In Karlstad, the work has mostly been focused on procuring local food, mainly due to the interest and commitment of one official, with the norm of working in departmental silos staying intact. This indicates a lack of a systems approach where different aspects of the food system are taken into consideration (Andersson et al., 2026). Still, an increase of local food production could strengthen preparedness, and the close collaboration with farmers could encourage organic agriculture. However, while Sweden has been pointed out as a country with good opportunities for procuring local food (Stein & Polychronakis, 2024), this study reveals strong structural barriers in the form of regulations, namely the Public Procurement Act, reinforcing previous findings (Adamson et al., 2026; Granvik, 2012; Granvik et al., 2026; Milestad et al., 2026). According to the Swedish Public Procurement Act (SFS 2016:1145), which is informed by the EU directive on public procurement (Directive 2014/24/EU), it is normally not allowed to specify local food, or even Swedish food, as a requirement in the tender, but encouraging smaller and local

producers to answer the tender is allowed. Another barrier is the reliance on the two biggest national wholesalers in procurement (E. Molin et al., 2024; Stein & Polychronakis, 2024), which means that the norm and routine is to buy from them.

Karlstad has access to a local wholesaler, which facilitates the procurement of local food in the Värmland region. However, such possibilities are not available everywhere in Sweden. In summary, even though individual interests can lead to an increase of local food procurement and the establishment of collaborations with farmers, there are regulations, norms, and routines, as well as a lack of resources, strongly inhibiting local food procurement. Changes to the Public Procurement Act and national goals could facilitate procurement of local food, but such a change has to be made at the national or EU level, since EU policy affects goals and laws set at the national level. Still, municipalities can raise these issues to higher governance levels.

In Grästorps, the projects show a higher capacity to work from a systems approach, as shown by a broad involvement of different actors and a focus on different food policy areas such as local food, food security, and environmental issues, and recognizing the relationships between them. This was partly due to the understanding and value of food systems of one committed official who initiated the projects, with the support of local politicians. The projects have enhanced the understanding of food systems through regular meetings and knowledge exchange. The projects had a clear focus on beneficial relationships through the collaboration of many actors, both within the municipal organization and externally, since this was considered crucial in being able to draw a comprehensive picture of the food system and to find solutions, which is in line with previous research (e.g., Adamson et al., 2026; Arthur et al., 2022; Berglund et al., 2021; Carrad et al., 2022). The lack of local processing and packaging that was identified in the first project led to an understanding and focus in the second project on targeting local processing businesses as collaborators in the project. This can be seen as an attempt to include the often “missing middle” in the collaborative effort, potentially enabling a more systemic food systems approach,

rather than focusing on primary production and consumption (Sonnino et al., 2019). Grästorps reflects a norm and routine of projectification in public planning (Jacobsen, 2022; Munck Af Rosenschöld & Wolf, 2017), where interviewees stated an uncertainty as to what impact the projects will have in the long term, which is consistent with previous research showing that initiatives are scaled down or shut down when the project is finalized (e.g., Jacobsen, 2022). Several of the regional actors also mentioned the struggle of working in projects and the lack of possibility of working strategically over the long term due to a lack of resources. Projects were seen as administratively burdensome, having unstable funding, and only lasting for a short time. Other studies have also seen that the end of project funding can lead to the end of collaborations and partnerships, in turn limiting the potential for long-term change (Dawkins et al., 2024). This reliance on short-term initiatives risks undermining the continuity and institutionalization of food systems planning and collaborative efforts, limiting their long-term effectiveness in shaping resilient local food systems. In the case of Norrköping, where a strategy has been developed, this suggests a more long-term commitment to the issue. At the same time, the projects in Grästorps have been a way to create a routine of working collaboratively and provided extra resources for working with food systems planning, challenging the traditional norms and routines of working with food through sectoral silos with limited opportunities for collaborating closely with other actors and testing and developing new initiatives. This raises a potential conflict between the long processes of developing strategies and promoting more direct action through projects. Future studies could further explore the relevance of developing food strategies versus other approaches such as projects.

Furthermore, in all the case studies, it became evident that enabling values of regional food organization and the CABs as committed and motivated to local food systems are essential in creating arenas for beneficial relationships between different food system actors, increasing the understanding of food system issues, and in turn strengthening a systems approach to food planning. This is an example of vertical governance

between the local and regional levels, creating coherence between governance scales, which is one key aspect in promoting food systems transformation (Béné & Abdulai, 2024). Previous studies have shown a lack of vertical collaboration, creating knowledge gaps and limiting a systems perspective (Sonnino et al., 2019). In our case studies, these regional collaborations enable actions from production to consumption, as well as supporting public procurement of local food, possibly offering an avenue into a systemic approach.

This study poses the localization of food systems as a potential strategy to promote more resilient food systems. However, this presupposes that everyone should have access to food at all times. Previous studies have found structural injustices, for example, that people with low income or ethnic minorities do not have the same access to locally produced food (Allen, 2010; Enthoven & Van den Broeck, 2021). One of the examples in this study, of municipalities increasing procurement of local food to preschools and schools, might offer an avenue into considering some social justice issues (Allen, 2010), especially in Sweden, where nutritious school food should be provided free of charge (SFS, 2010:800). Previous research has also found that including marginalized groups and actors with oppositional viewpoints in collaborative efforts is lacking (Manganelli, 2020; Sonnino, 2023), and that dominant actors often are favored (López Cifuentes et al., 2026). It is also likely that people within the local community will have different opinions (Allen, 2010; Borrelli et al., 2023) and planners will probably have to deal with trade-offs between various desires and needs (Zurek et al., 2022). There is also a risk that powerful actors steer which issues or aspects are prioritized (Allen, 2010). For example, when municipalities hold the power of who is included or not, their perceptions of who to include or when highly shapes the collaborative processes (Brons et al., 2022). Therefore, the question concerning who has access to local food and who gets to participate and how in collaborative efforts is important for municipalities to consider. With increasing rates of food insecurity in Sweden (Rost & Lundälv, 2021), aspects of justice and inclusion are increasingly becoming central to food planning processes. Future studies could

explore dimensions of food justice in Swedish food systems planning since this is an understudied topic (Rost & Lundälv, 2021).

In summary, one main contribution of this study is to show how highly dependent food systems planning is on each specific context and how the interplay between institutional and agential factors influences this. Another key finding is the vital role of relationships and collaborations in enabling a systems approach to food planning. One limitation of this study is that it is based on three case study municipalities, which might limit the understanding of contextual factors shaping planning in other municipalities. Considering that these municipalities were identified as frontrunners in food systems planning, we can assume that there would be both similar, different, and even additional barriers in municipalities working less intensively on these issues.

Conclusions

Drawing on an institutionalist view, this study analyzed the contextual factors shaping food systems planning in three Swedish municipalities, including barriers and enablers they face in such work. First, while national regulations and norms influence the municipalities in similar ways, local and regional factors lead to distinct opportunities for promoting food systems planning. The results demonstrate that food systems planning is highly context-dependent and shaped by an interplay between institutional structures and individual agency. While Sweden's decentralized system of governance allows municipalities to tailor approaches to local conditions—due to differences in local resources and needs, political priorities and economic resources—it also leads to different developments of food systems initiatives across municipalities.

Second, the results further show that across all cases, committed officials—“food champions”—were found to be central in ensuring that initiatives are taken and advanced. They play a critical role in fostering collaborations, particularly in contexts where formal local food strategies, resources, and political mandates are lacking. However, this reliance on individual actors raises concerns regarding continuity, scalability, and long-term resilience. The comparison between the three cases highlights that

no single approach guarantees effective food systems planning. Formalized strategies, as seen in Norrköping, can provide direction, legitimacy, and institutional stability, enabling a systemic and coordinated approach. At the same time, the cases of Karlstad and Grästorp illustrate that action can emerge in the absence of a food strategy, driven instead by local food champions, identity, political support, and project-based initiatives. These findings challenge the assumption that local food strategies are critical for coordinated actions, suggesting instead multiple pathways to food systems transformations. Nevertheless, structural barriers (particularly regulations such as public procurement legislation), limited time and resources, and entrenched institutional norms continue to constrain municipalities' ability to implement systemic approaches. Project-based work, while valuable for experimentation and collaboration, often lacks continuity and risks undermining long-term impact if not institutionalized. This tension between short-term initiatives and long-term strategic planning remains a central challenge.

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Third, the results also underscore the importance of multilevel governance and collaboration. Regional actors play a key role in facilitating knowledge exchange and coordination across sectors and scales, supporting a more integrated approach to food systems planning.

Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of both structural conditions and human agency in the local context. It highlights the need for balancing flexibility with institutional support, short-term action with long-term commitment, and efficiency with equity. Future research could further investigate comparative effectiveness of strategies versus project-based approaches, as well as explore the role of justice and inclusion in shaping sustainable and resilient local food systems.



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Appendices

Appendix A. Interviewees

Table A. Number of Interviews in Each Case Study, Identifier Codes, and Their Municipal Department or Organization

Municipality and date of interviews	Identifier code	Municipal department or organization
Karlstad, May 2023	KI_1	Spatial planning
	KI_2	Business development
	KI_3	Head of public meal planning
	KI_4	Procurement
	KI_5	Rural development
	KI_6	Contingency planning
February 2024	V_1	County Administrative Board (2 interviewees)
March 2024	V_2	Nifa (regional food organization)
Grästorps, October 2023	GI_1	Spatial planning
	GI_2	Local government head
	GI_3	Contingency planning (2 interviewees)
	GI_4	Public meal planning
	GI_5	Head of public meal planning
	GI_6	Head of spatial planning
	GI_7	Business and rural development
April 2024	VG_1	County Administrative Board
April 2024	VG_2	Agroväst (regional food organization)
Norrköping, May 2024	NI_1	Spatial planning
	NI_2	Procurement
	NI_3	Head of public meal planning
	NI_4	Business development
	NI_5	Sustainable development
	NI_6	Contingency planning
	NI_7	Food safety
November 2024	Ö_1	County Administrative Board
October 2024	Ö_2	Vreta Kluster (regional food organization)

Appendix B. Interview Guide for Municipalities

Introduction: Go through information about the project and personal data, etc., and make sure they consent to handling of data (see separate document information sheet for interviewees).

Explain what we mean by local food systems and that we will analyze from a resilience perspective:

By local food systems, we mean activities within a defined geographical area (the region) that affect the production, processing, distribution, trade, preparation and consumption of food. The system contains many different actors. It includes different areas such as preparedness, agricultural land, local food and the environment. Resilience is a broad concept, which can be said to deal very broadly with vulnerability and the ability to handle and respond to crises. For example, natural disasters, climate change, war, or pandemics. To analyze from a resilience perspective, we will look at certain factors that are mentioned in the research as important for resilient local food systems. Among other things, the importance of local and environmental issues, to be prepared for crises, to have good collaboration, and opportunities for learning.

All questions concern how you work in your municipality. We have chosen your municipality because the answers in the survey showed that you are already working with these issues to a certain extent.

Background questions

- What is your role in the municipality?
- How long have you worked in the municipality?

1. **In the survey, the municipality answered that you have worked to promote local food systems for X years. Can you describe this work? How have you been working?** Those who did not participate and answered the survey, do they agree? Depending on what they cover and don't cover, ask questions about, e.g., agricultural land, local food, food security, environment/climate and food. For example, if local food and organic go together. Ask them about specific projects.
2. **In the survey, the municipality replied that there is political will to work on promoting local food systems. In what ways? What is done in practice?** Those who did not participate and answered the survey, do you agree?
3. **What are the main reasons the municipality works to promote local food systems?**
4. **Besides political will, are there other factors enabling the municipality to work with local food systems? Something that is absolutely central?** Ask in what way it is an enabling factor.
5. **If you have encountered barriers in your work to develop local food systems, what have been the main ones?** What are the obstacles? What are the biggest challenges now/going forward? Follow up/depending on answer: lack of national support/national instruments, lack of cooperation externally (with neighboring municipalities and/or other actors), lack of resources in the municipality (budget, personnel)
6. **Would you say that there is a holistic policy/holistic thinking (around local food systems) in the municipality that permeates all administrations and encourages working with local food systems?**
 - What does this look like in practice?
 - Is there a strategy in which these questions come together? Advantages/disadvantages of this?
 - Is there an opportunity for competence development and learning around these issues? Workshops, trainings etc.

Now there will be 3 questions about cooperation/collaboration. First, I will ask about how you work internally, then with neighboring municipalities, and then with other actors.

7. Can you describe how you collaborate around local food systems within the municipality?

- How does it work in practice? What has the process leading up to this been like? What conditions have there been for cooperation?
- How have you worked to find synergies between different issues and administrations?
- Is there a call from politics to cooperate? How?
- Are there obstacles? Goal conflicts? What works well, what can be improved?
- Need for more collaboration? With other administrations? Does it need to be developed? Around what?
- Has the collaboration helped you? How?
- Are there routines or functions that enable coordination and collaboration in the form of regular meetings or collaboration forums where food issues can be discussed?

8. Can you describe how you collaborate on local food systems with neighboring municipalities?

- Joint strategy, with whom? What is included? Purpose/goal? What should be done? If not, is it needed?
- How does it work in practice? What has the process leading up to this been like? What conditions have there been for cooperation?
- Is there a call from politics to cooperate? How?
- Are there obstacles? Goal conflicts? What works well, what can be improved? Need of more collaboration?
- Has the collaboration helped you? How?
- Are there routines or functions that enable coordination and collaboration in the form of regular meetings or collaboration forums where food issues can be discussed?
- Are there weaknesses/strengths based on your similar/different conditions that you can help to collaborate on? Do you have similar problems or not?
- Is there a need to cooperate with other municipalities that you do not cooperate with today? Which? Why?

9. Can you describe how you collaborate on local food systems with external actors?

- Joint strategy, with whom? What is included? Purpose/goal? What should be done? If not, is it needed?
- How does it work in practice? What has the process leading up to this been like? What conditions have there been for cooperation?
- Is there a call from politics to cooperate? How?
- Are there obstacles? Goal conflicts? What works well, what can be improved? Need of more collaboration?
- Has the collaboration helped you? How?
- Are there routines or functions that enable coordination and collaboration in the form of regular meetings or collaboration forums where food issues can be discussed?
- Is there a need to cooperate with other actors that you do not cooperate with today? Which? Why?

10. The municipality answered in the survey that you are interested in taking a leading role in strengthening collaboration between neighboring municipalities and external actors to develop local food systems. Do you agree? How do you see that role?

- How can this happen? What are the conditions? What is the main task in such work?
- What is your vision in taking a leading role?

11. How do you see the work to develop local food systems going forward? Are there possibilities to be able to realize it? What would facilitate or enable this, any specific conditions that would be needed?

Conclusion

Is there something I missed, something you want to add?

Do you have any questions?

Talk about the process going forward: how we move forward; might we see you again for a meeting about the continuation of the project?

- Do you have a suggestion for something we can focus on going forward in the project? Your needs?
- How could we proceed with a workshop?
- It is also fine if you respond via email later.

Appendix C. Interview Guides to Regional Actors

Interview Guide for County Administrative Boards

Can you tell us a little about your role at the County Administrative Board and how long you have worked there?

1. How do you see the County Administrative Board's role in implementing the national food strategy?

- How is it done in practice? Projects?
- How is it financed?

2. How did the process go about developing the regional food strategy?

Has the strategy given you the conditions to work with regional food systems and if so, in what way? What advantages do you see in having a strategy? (if you see advantages)

3. How do you see the role of municipalities in implementing the national/regional food strategy?

4. What do you think is needed for Sweden to have more resilient food systems?

- Who are the main actors in this?
- What is the role of the County Administrative Board? How can you contribute?
- What is the role of the municipalities? What responsibilities do they have?
- What do you consider to be the main obstacles to being able to develop resilient food systems in Sweden?
- What do you consider to be the main conditions for being able to develop resilient food systems in Sweden?

5. How do you work with food preparedness?

Is this new for you to work with? What is the role of the County Administrative Board in this?
How do you view the concept of food security?

6. Do you collaborate with municipalities to promote resilient food systems? If yes, how?

7. Do you collaborate with other actors to promote resilient food systems? If yes, how?

With whom? Also, with other authorities?

8. Are issues around agricultural land, food preparedness, and local food addressed in a coherent way in your work on promoting resilient food systems? Do you see connections between these areas? If so, in what way?

9. Can the County Administrative Board in any way influence municipalities' preservation of agricultural land for food production? How?

Is there any such discussion?

10. What do you think are the main measures that Sweden needs to take to strengthen its food supply capacity?

Conclusion

Is there anything I have missed, something you would like to add?

Do you have any questions?

Interview Guide for Regional Food Organizations

Can you tell us a little about your role at X and how long have you worked there?

1. Can you tell us a little about what X is and why it was started? What is your main purpose?
2. What kind of actors are part of the organization?
3. How do you define local food? Is there a common definition for local food?
4. Can you tell us a little about how you work more concretely? How is your work organized? Do you promote local food systems? If so, in what way?
 - Specific things/areas that you focus on?
 - In projects? (who is involved in the projects, why these projects in particular) Strategy? Working method?
 - Do the members collaborate with each other in any way?
5. Do you collaborate with municipalities on local food systems? If so, in what way?
6. Do you collaborate with any other actors in the county? If so, in what way?
7. Do you take the regional food strategy into account in your work? Were you involved when it was developed? Do you also relate to the national one?
8. Are there specific preconditions that help you in your work to support resilient local food systems?
9. If you have encountered challenges in your work to support resilient local food systems, what have been/are the main ones?

Conclusion

Is there anything I have missed, something you would like to add?

Do you have any questions?

Appendix D. Steering Documents

Swedish municipalities can to some extent choose what type of documents to develop, so they do not necessarily have the same titles in different municipalities. Therefore, exactly the same documents have not been analyzed in each municipality, but we ensured a comprehensive set of documents were sourced for each case.

Table D. Steering Documents Analyzed in Each Municipality

Municipality	Documents and year
Karlstad	Procurement policy (2015) Strategic plan (2022) Guideline: Public meal services in preschools, schools, and youth recreation centers (2022) Comprehensive plan (2012) Comprehensive plan 2050 (not adopted) Environmental and climate strategy (2013) Food policy (2013) Knowledge base document agricultural land for comprehensive plan 2050 (n.d.) Meal policy (high schools) (2008) Green structure plan (2021)
Grästorps	Business strategy (2016) Comprehensive plan (2016) Guiding document 2020-2024 (2021) Strategy for rural development (2014) Goals for environmental work (2015) Meal policy (2022) Policy for procurement and purchases (2018) Project presentation (2023) Project report (2023) Development plan (2020)
Norrköping	Guideline for food and meals (health care) (2022) Comprehensive plan (2023, not adopted) Guiding document for environmental policy (2017) Direction for business development (2021) Direction for rural policy (2020) Guideline for procurement and purchases (2023) Knowledge base document agricultural land (2021) Guideline for climate adaptation (2020) Guideline local food strategy (2022) Guideline for public meal services (2021) Overall goals and goal fulfillments 2023–2026 (2021)

Appendix E. Codebook

Table E. Codes Used for the Inductive and Deductive Coding of Interview Transcripts and Documents

Deductive codes	Definition and selection	Examples
Agriculture and agricultural land	Everything related to the use and value of agricultural land in the municipality, as well as other references to agriculture	"Agriculture has long been an important industry and remains so today."
Barriers	Things mentioned as barriers in the interviews or things that can be interpreted as a barrier to developing local food systems or to collaborations, etc.	"Challenges, yes. It's the procurement, of course. It's the Public Procurement Act."
Climate change	Specific references to food or agriculture in relation to climate change	"We need a different type of agriculture than what we have today. And there is almost no one who knows what that means. I often ask the question, what does agricultural change mean based on climate change?"
Collaboration	Statements or sections mentioning collaboration within the municipality or with other actors	"Information and training opportunities offered for interested suppliers and producers. Opportunities for dialogue can advantageously take place in collaboration with other municipalities and external actors."
Enablers	Things mentioned as enablers in the interviews or things that can be interpreted as enablers to developing local food systems or to collaborations, etc.	"From a political perspective, I find it very clear that it is important that we also try to promote local agriculture and farming and that industry."
Environment	Specific references to food in relation to environmental issues	"Eating habits also have a major impact on health and the environment."
Local food	Mentioning of local food, locally produced food, urban farming, local consumption of food, local food systems	"... testing growing alternative crops and protein sources. To simply develop the food supply and for food consumption."
Resilience	If this specific word was used in interviews or documents	"... which in turn is an important function for a more resilient agriculture."
Inductive codes	Definition and selection	Examples
Business sector	Things related to businesses and the business sector within agriculture and food	"There is an interaction between the business sector, green industries, to create these contact points with the producers."
Governing	Things around participation, trust, information, and how they govern. Who is committed. Goals and strategies related to food.	"That politicians make certain decisions. It provides control and guidance that can be, or is absolutely crucial, I would say."
Learning	Things related to learning, knowledge, and understanding of food systems, opportunities to learn about food and food systems	"It is those officials who happen to have interest and knowledge who drive but there is no coordination."
Preparedness	Mentioning of food preparedness, food security, measures to be prepared in case of crisis	"So that is about us being able to have a storage that has both food and water, or access to heat and other things to be able to ... as a preparedness for our residents, but also primarily our own services."
Procurement	Things related to the public procurement process of food	"In order to give local companies a greater opportunity to participate in the procurement, the municipality must be creative in the requirements specifications to seek to find new opportunities to give local small businesses the chance to participate."
Rural development	Food and agriculture mentioned in relation to rural development, or possibilities to work and live rurally	"Norrköping has a vibrant countryside where agricultural land is an important part of supplying the municipality with local food."
Sustainable development	If this specific word was used in interviews or documents	"The plan's proposals should support positive and at the same time long-term sustainable development in the municipality."