

Use Case – City-Region Amsterdam

This user case of the city-region Amsterdam starts with a snapshot of the CRFS, identified vulnerabilities, assets, and potential avenues within the existing food system, shedding light on pivotal dynamics and trends that could either impede or expedite the transformation of the food system. Following this, a comprehensive examination of the urban food landscapes in Amsterdam Zuidoost and Amsterdam Noord is presented. Concluding, the outcomes of the power tree sessions are presented, offering a perspective on the present food environment, its underlying causes, and suggested remedies, as articulated by the interviewees.



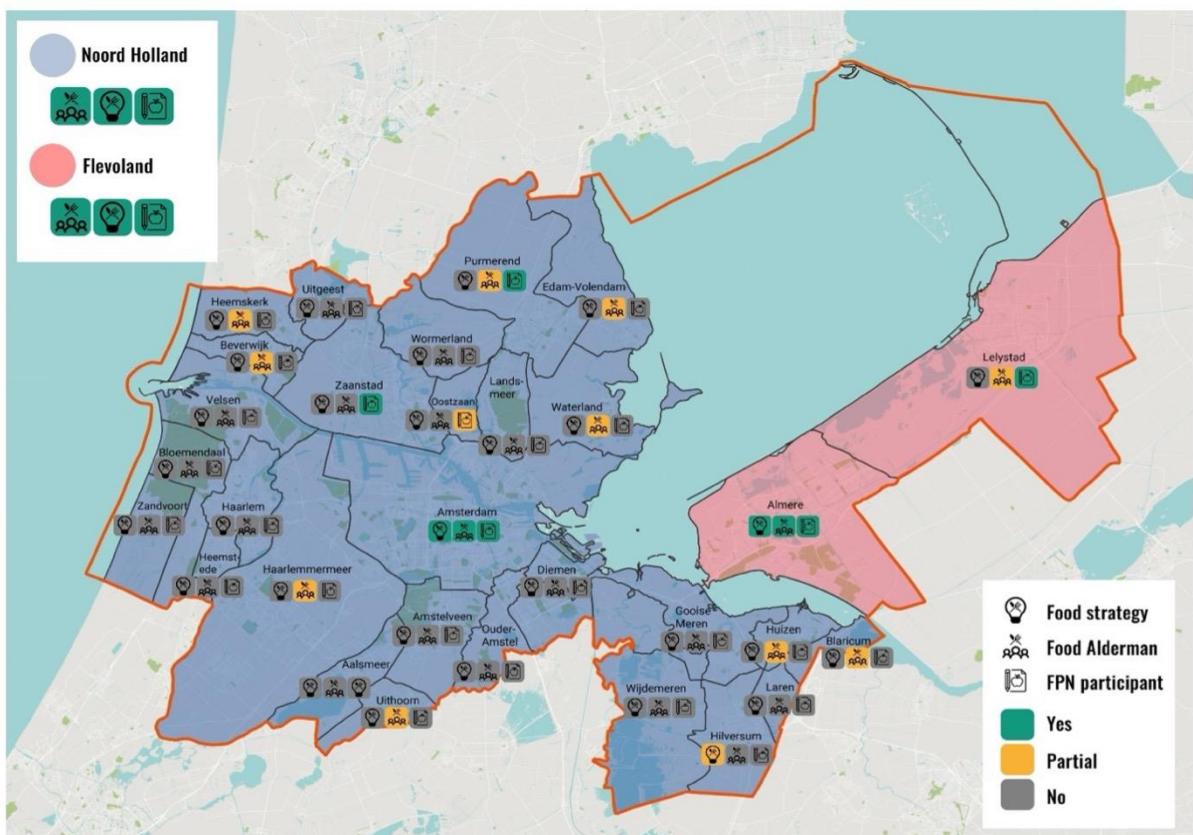
Step 1 – Mapping the city-regional food system

The city region of Amsterdam – Amsterdam Metropolitan Area (AMA) – is a bustling hub with a population of 2.5 million in 30 municipalities, spanning two provinces – Noord Holland and Flevoland (partially). While the exact volume of food consumed is yet to be determined, preliminary estimates suggest that only 4-7% of the food is locally sourced.

The diverse agricultural landscape spans 42% of AMA, showcasing arable lands, greenhouses, and varied livestock distribution. A significant opportunity resides in the institutional food sector, which contributes substantially to the region's food consumption, offering a potential route to sustainable and healthy food practices.

Figure 9 - Land Use & Livestock in AMA

Political context: The AMA's political attention to food can be seen as an indicator of the importance given to food systems and policies in the region (see figure X). Only four of the total 34 governmental bodies in the area – two municipalities, namely Amsterdam and Almere, and the two provinces – have a strategy on food. For example, one of the goals is to increase its locally sourced food from the current 4-7% to 25% by 2030. Furthermore, both Amsterdam and Almere, for instance, are signatories of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. In addition to having drafted a food strategy however there are also two other indicators used to better understand the current political momentum. The role of an alderman in the AMA's municipalities and two provinces serves as a litmus test for the emphasis on food. With an alderman focussing on food in the broadest sense, so not just from an economic or health standpoint, one could argue that the governmental body is concerned with a more integrated approach to food. However, same as with the food strategy, again Amsterdam, Almere and both Noord Holland and Flevoland have such an alderman. In addition, there are 10 other municipalities who have an alderman that has an element of food within their portfolio. In the remaining municipalities food is not mentioned at all in the list of portfolio thematises.



AMA Political Focus on Food

Opportunities

Institutional Food Environment as a Pivotal Component: The AMA showcases a significant role for the institutional food environment in its broader food landscape. This term covers meals provided by catering and banqueting services within a plethora of institutions, spanning schools, universities, governmental entities, healthcare facilities, and prominent corporations. Notably, a substantial portion of the AMA's meals—about a third—are consumed within this setting. This proportion is even more pronounced in areas like Zuid Kennemerland, Flevoland, and Gooi en Vechtstreek. Specifically, in Amsterdam, every day sees over 254,000 lunches consumed in these environments, a figure that rises to nearly 700,000 when considering the entire AMA (see figure X).

Opportunities in Institutional Food Procurement: The focus on institutional food environments in the AMA is not without merit. Institutional food channels have the potential to offer a consistent and controlled food supply, with their operational modalities largely influenced by respective institutional policies and the latitude given to caterers. By emphasizing this realm, there's a significant opportunity to steer the AMA towards healthier, more sustainable, and inclusive food consumption paradigms.

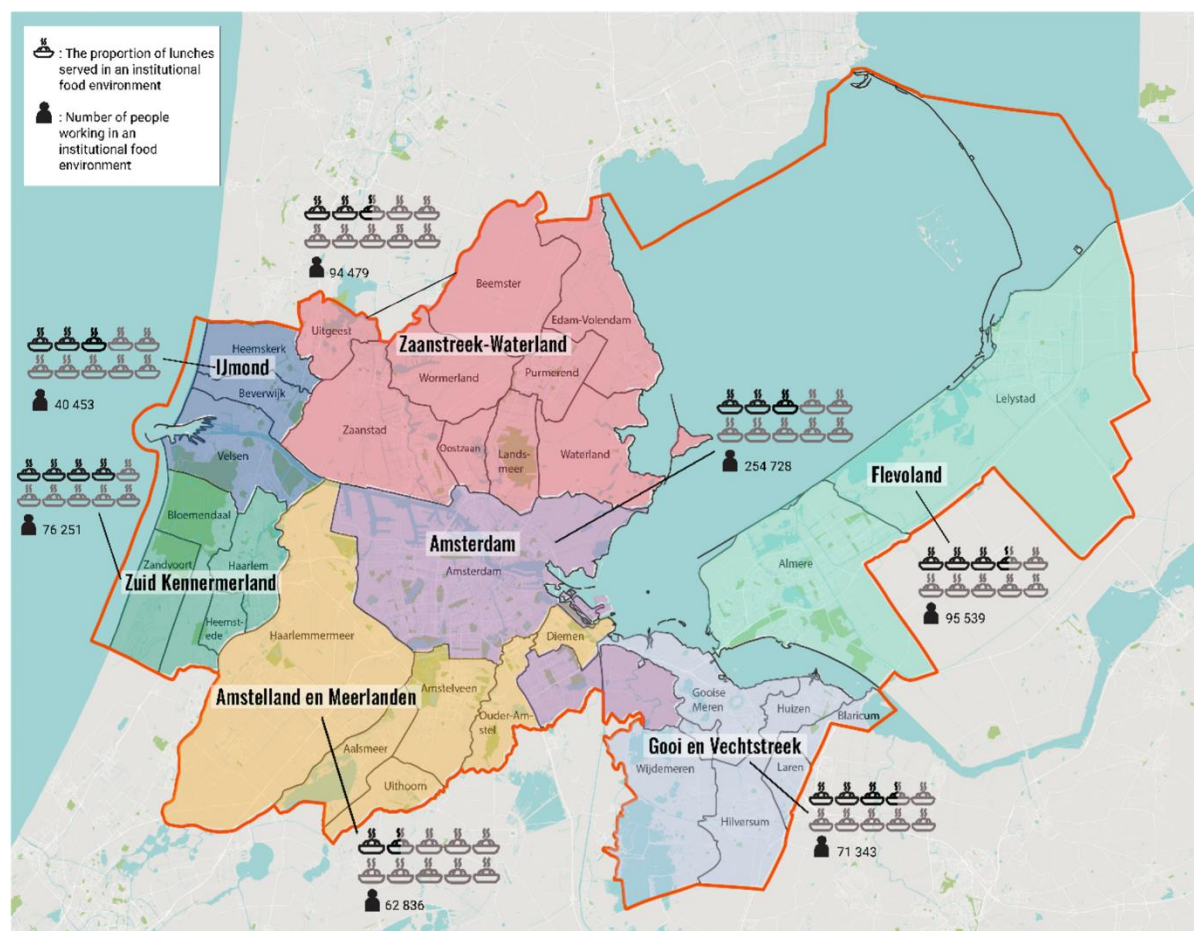


Figure X - Institutional Food Environment in the AMA

Food Policy Networks: There are various food policy networks in the AMA. The ‘Food Connects’ Network, which was established in 2019, includes in its membership the provinces Noord-Holland and Flevoland and holds ties with several municipalities including Amsterdam, Almere and a few others like Zaanstad, Purmerend, and Lelystad. It also comprises other stakeholders such as Other relevant food policy networks are Food Council MRA and Haarlem Food Future

Step 2 – Identifying and mapping neighbourhoods



Tasked with identifying neighbourhoods characterized by pronounced food scarcity among at-risk groups, the team employed a city-regional strategy. Specifically, the team used data on income, health, and food security to highlight **Amsterdam Zuidoost** and **Amsterdam Noord** as crucial areas needing attention. Their choices were further solidified by an understanding of the local dynamics, transformative capacities, and significant local trends, enriching the research methodology. Comprehensive data results, along with detailed profiles of each neighbourhood and their respective momentum, are detailed in Appendix X. This sets the stage for a more in-depth exploration in the following section.

Transformative Potential in Amsterdam Zuidoost

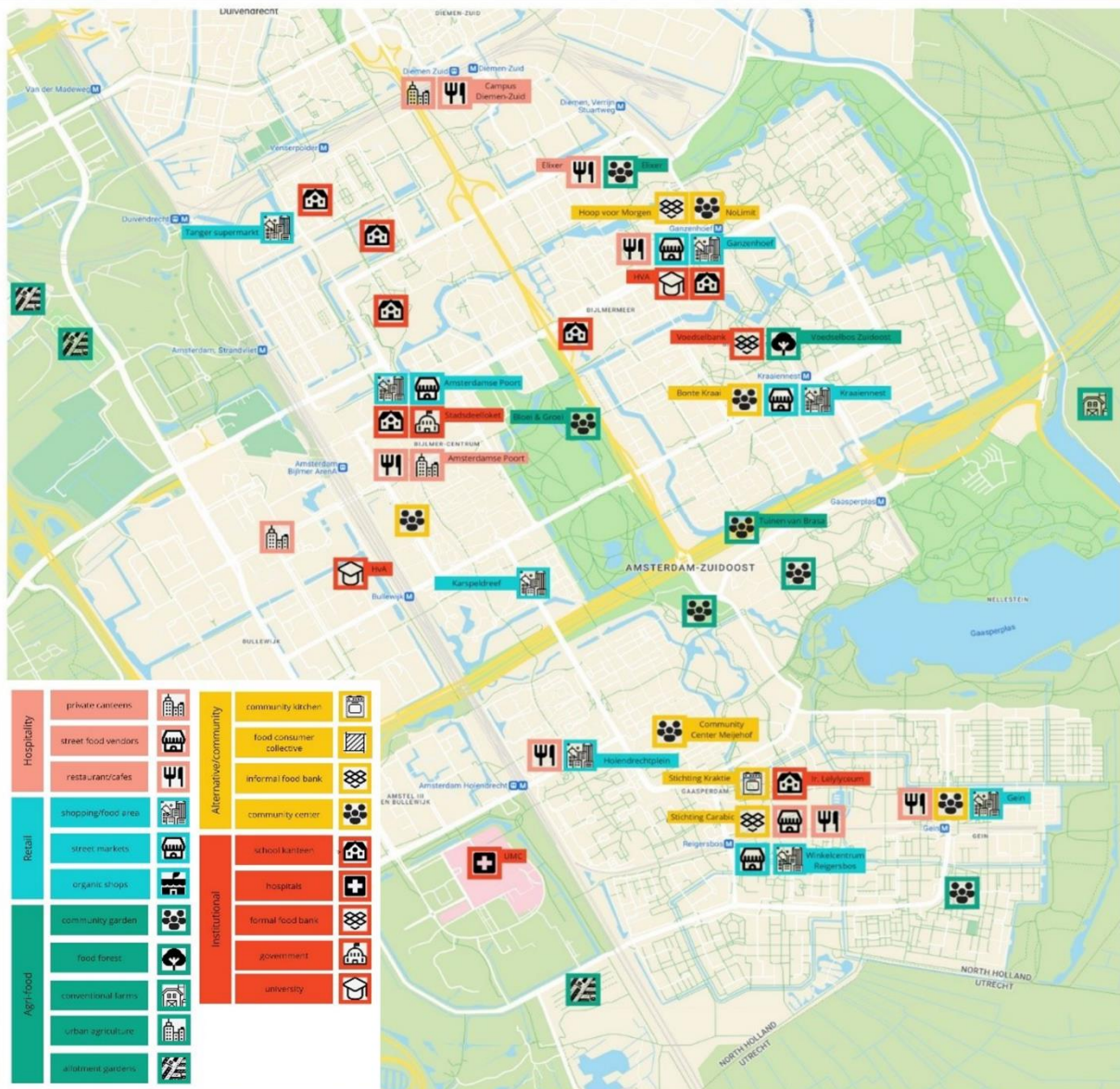
Amsterdam Zuidoost is home to various community centres and neighbourhood 'living rooms' that offer transformative food spaces and kitchens. These spaces are often organized by local organizations such as PBAZO or independent neighbourhood 'rooms' ('Buurtwerkkamers'). The urban planning style of the 1960s has allowed for ample parks, greenspace, and community or allotment gardens, offering transformative potential for urban agriculture and food forests.

Organizations like ‘Groenplatform’ and ‘Bloei & Groei’ are actively involved in community and urban agriculture, supporting mental well-being through gardening and greenspaces.

The Masterplan Zuidoost, initiated by the municipality in 2020, aims to improve housing, work, the built environment, safety, and opportunities for young people, further enhancing the potential for transformative food initiatives. Non-profit organizations like Carabici have expanded their activities to support various community needs, including informal food banks and community centres, contributing to the transformative potential of the area.

Availability and density of different kinds of food spaces: In Amsterdam Zuidoost, particularly in the subdistricts of Bijlmer Oost and Reigersbos/Holendrecht, there are various shopping and food centres like Ganzehoef, Kraaiennest, and Reigersbos (see Figure X). These areas house large supermarkets, corner stores, street vendors, delis, restaurants, cafes, public libraries, bars, and street food markets. The community centres NoLimit and Bonte Kraai shape the alternative and community food environments, offering affordable meals and hosting food banks. Informal food banks like Stichting Hoop voor Morgen and Stichting Carabici also play a vital role in the food landscape.

The availability and accessibility of green spaces: Figure X of Amsterdam Zuidoost reveals a significant amount of green space, including parks, community gardens, and food forests. The area is characterized by high-rise buildings surrounded by greenspace and inner-building gardens, maintained by residents. Official or institutionalized gardening projects, community gardens, and food forests contribute to the green landscape. However, conflicting greening policies and communication challenges between municipal departments can create precarious situations for agri-food and community gardening initiatives.



Food Spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost

Housing types: The housing types in Amsterdam Zuidoost vary across different subdistricts. Reigersbos/Holendrecht exhibits a suburban style of urban planning with medium to low-built houses, while Bijlmer Oost is home to a relatively high amount of high-rise buildings and large apartment complexes. The urban planning of the '50s, '60s, and '70s has shaped the built environment, focusing on accessibility and greenspace.

Transport routes: The transport routes in Zuidoost, focus on connecting the main shopping and food areas. The transport system is designed to be easily accessible by car, with main roads connecting key areas. Within smaller-scale neighbourhoods, transport is limited, and residents rely on cars, bikes, scooters, or other types of transport.

Socioeconomic profiles of the local neighbourhood: Amsterdam Zuidoost has historically been considered a deprived district, with areas like Bijlmer Oost and Reigersbos/Holendrecht characterized as vulnerable or deprived. The area has faced challenges such as gentrification, particularly after the redevelopment of areas like 'Amsterdamse Poort'. Local groups like 'Hart voor de K-buurt' have united to advocate for democratization of governance and address issues related to health, safety, and affordability. The term "participation fatigue" ('participatiemoetheid') has emerged in public discourse, reflecting residents' disillusionment with citizen engagement practices. The socioeconomic landscape is also shaped by organizations like Stichting Carabic, which supports various community needs, including education, social work, neighbourhood festivals, women's groups, and undocumented people. The presence of both formal and informal food banks, community kitchens, and social restaurants further reflects the socioeconomic diversity and challenges faced by the local community.

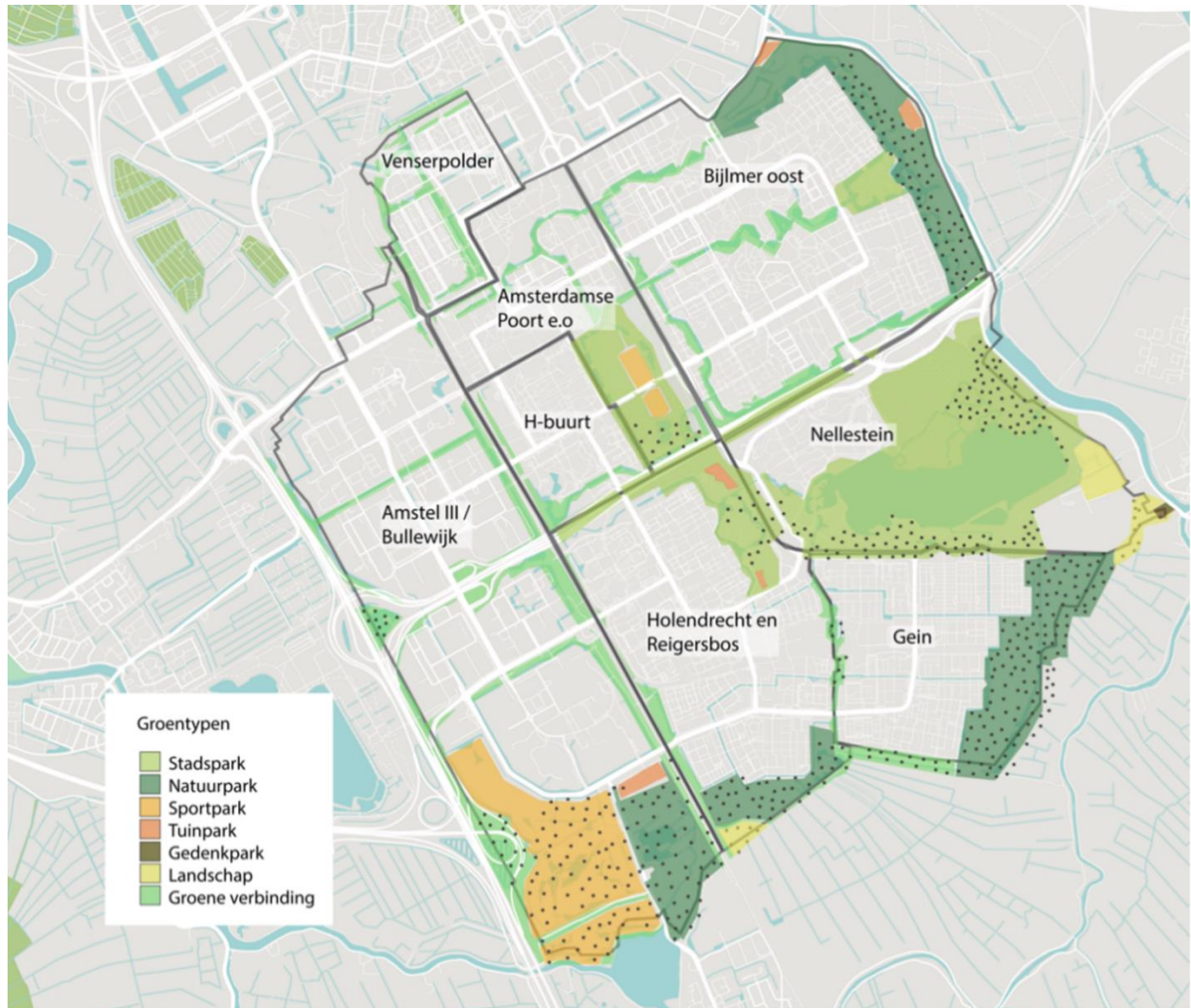
Transformative Potential in Amsterdam Noord

Amsterdam Noord is a district with significant transformative potential, particularly in its centre and eastern parts. The community garden Voedseltuin IJplein, known for its longstanding reputation, contributes to food production, with a large portion of the vegetables grown being donated to the food bank. A resident network called Verdedig Noord (Defend Noord) or Redt Noord (Save Noord) has emerged to voice opposition against rapid neighbourhood developments and gentrification.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, resident-led volunteering organizations began to save food waste and surplus from supermarkets to distribute among those in need. This effort has grown into a bi-monthly meeting structure, leading to the formation of the Food Circle, an organization representing similar initiatives across Amsterdam. These community-based organizations have key transformative potential, and there is strong momentum in Noord for further contributions to this movement.

Availability and density of different kinds of food spaces: The food environment in Amsterdam Noord (Figure X) is characterized by a mix of traditional markets, shopping areas, corner shops, low-built shop areas, and community gardens. Notable areas include the Van Der Peck market, Mosveld food and shopping area, Buikslotermeer, and Waterlandplein. The district also hosts urban agriculture projects like NoordOogst and popular community garden Voedseltuin IJplein. Recent developments have seen new players in the food environment, including urban agriculture hubs, creative areas with new hospitality environments, and initiatives offering affordable and healthy food to vulnerable groups. Cafés like De Ceuvel and De Verbroederij function as hubs for sustainable food practices, although some of these spaces are temporarily developed and play a role in the gentrification of the district.

The availability and accessibility of green spaces: Figure X of Amsterdam Noord shows the presence of green spaces, especially in the outskirts of Noord, where allotment garden areas and rural areas are home to conventional farmers. The district's planning style has allowed for youth, community, and neighbourhood centres, contributing to the green landscape. Voedseltuin IJplein is a prominent community garden close to the river IJ.



Green Spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost

Housing types: The housing types in Amsterdam Noord vary across different areas. Central Noord is characterized by former working-class housing areas, bordered by (former) industrial areas now undergoing rapid redevelopment. The district also features densely built houses in Central Noord and high-rise buildings and apartments from after WWII in the north and east. The gradual development of the area has led to a mix of housing types.

Transport routes: The transport lines in Amsterdam Noord are quite dispersed due to the high mix of houses and gradual development of the area. Public transport accessibility varies across the district, with connections focusing on key areas.

Socioeconomic profiles of the local neighbourhood: Amsterdam Noord's socioeconomic profile is shaped by a mix of traditional markets, community gardens, urban agriculture projects, and resident-led initiatives. The district has seen the emergence of organizations focused on food saving, fighting hunger and poverty, and environmental aspects of food waste. The 'breed informeel voedseloverleg' (broad informal food meeting) brings together various stakeholders, including social organizations, the Red Cross, social workers, municipality representatives, and local food distributors, to improve the district's food environment. The socioeconomic landscape also reflects challenges such as gentrification, rapid neighbourhood developments, and legal barriers to food donation. The collaboration between different food environments and the connection of retail, alternative, and agri-food environments through informal meetings adds to the transformative potential of the district.

Step 3 – Understanding power dynamics

In this step it is explored what it is that makes the current food environments unhealthy and exclusive, what the disempowering roots are and shed light on potential solutions as brought forward by the various experts spoken to.

What makes the neighbourhood food environment unhealthy or exclusive?

In Zuidoost and Noord, unhealthy foods dominate due to their affordability and availability, influencing residents' dietary habits. Commercial pressures in Zuidoost underscore the challenge of promoting healthier options. In Noord, many view healthier foods as a luxury. Cultural ties to food and socio-economic stress further entrench unhealthy choices among residents.

Availability and Accessibility of Unhealthy Foods: In urban neighbourhoods like Zuidoost and Noord, the food environment plays a pivotal role in shaping residents' dietary habits. A common thread that emerged from our findings is the predominant availability of unhealthy foods at cheaper prices compared to healthier alternatives. This disparity in availability and cost has profound implications for the health and well-being of the community.

In Zuidoost, the narrative is clear; unhealthy foods are not only more affordable but also more accessible. This accessibility influences and limits food choices, nudging residents, especially children, towards unhealthy consumption patterns. For instance, many children in Zuidoost are given small amounts of money by their parents, which they often spend on sweets. These sweets are not only affordable but also shareable among peers, making them a popular choice. The lack of healthy, low-cost snack options further compounds this issue.

Commercial Landscape and Retail Pressures: One might wonder why healthier options are scarce. A deep dive into the commercial landscape of Zuidoost provides some insights. High rents in shopping centres, intense competition among stores, and commercial pressures push

retailers to stock what sells best. A poignant example of this dynamic is the recent closure of a Caribbean food store that exclusively offered vegan options, suggesting that healthier food options might not be as commercially viable. Noord presents a similar story. Here, the perception is that healthy foods are more expensive, making them less accessible to a significant portion of the population. The overwhelming availability of unhealthy foods in retail outlets not only limits healthy food choices but also muddies the waters regarding what is genuinely healthy.

Social Factors and Stress: Moreover, unhealthy foods have become intertwined with identity and social interactions, especially among low-income residents. This association further cements unhealthy eating habits within the community. However, the issue is not just about availability and cost. Stress and poverty play significant roles in driving unhealthy food choices. In Zuidoost, the stress experienced by low-income households, particularly single parents, often leads to a preference for comfort foods rich in sugar and fats. The district has a high number of single-parent households, and many single mothers reportedly lack the time or mental space to prepare healthy meals. This lack of time and resources pushes them towards more accessible, unhealthy options. Furthermore, for a significant portion of Zuidoost's population, the concept of food choice is a luxury they can't afford. Some undocumented migrants even suffer from severe health issues due to a lack of access to fresh foods.

What are the disempowering roots of unhealthy or exclusive food environments?

In Zuidoost and Noord, food choices reflect more than taste—they're indicators of stress, poverty, and societal pressures. Zuidoost's single parents often lean on unhealthy foods, while in Noord, food intertwines with cultural identity. Systemic issues, from the challenges faced by undocumented migrants to the aftermath of global events, further shape these food landscapes. The region's intricate welfare system, intended to help, can sometimes exacerbate these challenges.

Stress and Identity: In the urban landscapes of Zuidoost and Noord, the food environment is not merely a reflection of individual choices but is deeply intertwined with broader socio-economic factors. Delving into the roots of unhealthy or exclusive food environments, it becomes evident that stress and poverty are pivotal drivers that shape the dietary habits of residents in these neighbourhoods. Stress, particularly among low-income households, acts as a significant deterrent to healthy eating. In Zuidoost, this is most evident among single-parent households, a demographic that is notably high in the district. The daily grind, coupled with the responsibilities of raising children, often leaves single parents, especially mothers, in a state of perpetual stress. This stress manifests in dietary choices, with many opting for comfort foods laden with sugars and fats. Such foods, often cheaper and more readily available, offer a momentary respite from the challenges of daily life. However, this short-term comfort comes at the cost of long-term health implications.

The narrative in Noord, while echoing the themes of stress and poverty, adds another layer to the story: identity and social interactions. For many low-income residents in Noord, food is not just sustenance but a marker of identity. Unhealthy foods, often tied to cultural or social norms,

become integral to social interactions and gatherings. This association further cements unhealthy eating habits within the community, making it challenging to promote healthier alternatives without seeming to undermine cultural or social identities.

Poverty and Systemic Challenges: Poverty, a pervasive issue in both neighbourhoods, further complicates the food environment. In Zuidoost, the stark reality of poverty is evident in the plight of undocumented migrants. Lacking the means or the rights to access fresh foods, many suffer from severe health issues like scurvy. This is not just a reflection of individual financial constraints but points to a systemic issue where the most vulnerable are left without access to basic nutrition. The proliferation of informal food initiatives and food banks in the area is a testament to this growing crisis. While these initiatives aim to bridge the gap, they also highlight the increasing number of individuals who, despite facing food insecurity, don't meet the criteria for formal assistance.

Noord's tale of poverty is intertwined with recent global events. The aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with global challenges like the energy crisis and inflation, have eroded the financial stability of many residents. With dwindling financial buffers, households are forced to make tough choices, and food expenses are often the first casualty. This form of food poverty, often hidden from plain sight, underscores the silent crisis many families face. Compounding these challenges is the complexity of the welfare system. Many residents, already grappling with financial constraints, find themselves navigating a maze of bureaucracy. Some don't receive the benefits they're eligible for, while others are caught in a catch-22 situation where seeking employment might result in a net loss due to reduced allowances. This system, rather than alleviating the burdens of poverty, often exacerbates them.

In conclusion, the unhealthy or exclusive food environments in Zuidoost and Noord are not mere outcomes of individual choices but are deeply rooted in socio-economic challenges like stress, poverty, and systemic issues. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that goes beyond promoting healthy foods and delves into the underlying socio-economic factors that shape the food environment.

How to make healthy and sustainable food accessible to all?

Zuidoost highlights the need to reshape food habits through community programs. In Noord, the focus is on financial security and trust-building with local institutions. Both areas advocate for urban agriculture and supporting food initiatives. Achieving healthier food access requires a blend of policy changes and community involvement.

Changing Food Behaviour and Community Engagement: In the quest to ensure that every individual has access to healthy and sustainable food, suggestions from the community in Zuidoost emphasize the need to change food behaviour. It is recognized that merely providing access to healthier food options might not suffice; there's a need to shift the deep-rooted perceptions and habits surrounding food. Suggestions include targeting the younger generation to instil lifelong healthy eating habits and addressing the dietary habits of parents by introducing them to affordable and nutritious dishes. Furthermore, community cooking programs are

suggested as a means to equip individuals with the skills to prepare nutritious meals and foster a sense of community.

Financial Security and Trust Building: Noord presents a more intricate tapestry of challenges and solutions. At the heart of its strategy, suggestions focus on the need for financial security. Economic stability is seen as directly influencing food choices. Suggestions include allowing undocumented migrants to participate in the official workforce, addressing the housing crisis to ensure that individuals don't have to compromise on food quality, and revising the state system of allowances to ensure that those in need truly benefit. Trust is often overlooked but is suggested as a cornerstone in the relationship between residents and public institutions. Dialogue platforms for residents to voice their experiences and concerns directly to bureaucrats are suggested to foster understanding.

Support for Food Initiatives and Urban Agriculture: Food initiatives, especially the informal ones, are suggested as the lifelines of many communities. However, these initiatives are fraught with challenges. Suggestions for addressing these challenges include both grassroots activism and systemic change, advocating for changes in supermarket laws, and engaging with supermarket employees and their unions. Lastly, urban agriculture emerges as a beacon of hope. Suggestions include integrating agriculture into urban planning, with public parks dotted with fruit trees or community gardens, making healthy and sustainable food not just an option, but a norm.

In conclusion, ensuring access to healthy and sustainable food is not a singular challenge but a mosaic of interconnected issues. The suggestions provided require a holistic approach, one that combines policy changes, community engagement, and a shift in societal perceptions about food. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities in each neighbourhood, fostering a more inclusive and healthy food environment for everyone.

Video

In this [short video](#) 'Léon Feenstra presents how the FOODCLIC project mapped out the city-region food environment in Amsterdam Metropolitan Area.'