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Relational autonomy highlights how interdependencies shift in the transformation of food provisioning

SPECIAL ISSUE
Community-Based Circular Food Systems

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Abstract

In the past decade, there has been a surge in the Netherlands in food initiatives that seek to transform the prevailing agro-industrial model of food provisioning. This has evolved into a wide range of values-based territorial food networks (VTFNs). This article aims to understand the evolving diversity in VTFNs by looking more deeply into how community, circular, and territorial-based food networks operate. In doing so, the article examines how citizens, rural workers, and farmers cooperate

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Author Notes

Margriet Goris started working with the framework relational autonomy in her PhD dissertation, "Emancipation of young agroecological peasants in Zona da Mata, Minas Gerais, Brazil: An identity in-the-making" (Goris, 2020). Daphne Schoop contributed to the research during her internship at Agrosystems Research. Preliminary findings have been presented by Margriet Goris at XXIXth European Society for Rural Sociology Congress, "Crises and the Futures of Rural Areas," July 3–7, 2023, in Rennes, France.

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to change and create connections between livestock, land, water, and other resources. Furthermore, it aims to assess to what extent the evolving food provisioning practices of these VTFNs are re-embedded in the territory, how their collective capacity to transform food provisioning practices has expanded, and the impact that the expanded capacity has on the degree of relational autonomy over their operations. Twelve participatory observations and 16 interviews with farmers and citizens engaged in three different VTFNs are analyzed by identifying themes that emerged from the data, and themes that originate from the concept relational autonomy. Relational autonomy is introduced by feminist scholars and entails that autonomy is not an individual matter but is created in relationships. The concept allows for a deeper understanding of how a transformation of relations can raise the autonomy of all living beings, both human and non-human. The analysis demonstrates how relational autonomy in the three VTFNs studied is emerging along the three interdependent and co-evolving dimensions identified by Catriona Mackenzie (2019): determination, governance, and authorization. All three VTFNs studied crafted their own pathway toward relational autonomy by creating opportunities and building capacities. A relational autonomy lens enables us to articulate the interconnectedness between human and non-human systems; for example, phasing out agrochemicals increases our reliance on natural processes. This necessitates farmers and rural workers' ability to mimic these processes and requires a rearranging of market relations to share risks more equitably with citizens.

Keywords
values-based territorial food networks, relational autonomy, agroecology

Introduction

Food provisioning can be viewed as a deliberate configuration of practices embedded in a complex web or network of relations that shape, or govern, these practices. The web of relations of a VTFN is actively reproduced in people's enactment of practices such as taking turns collecting food from farmers for the network. Practices, and consequently the relations they are embedded in, might also be altered intentionally, resulting in a reconfiguration of relations and re-embedding of practices. Re-embedding requires the capacity to alter the web of relations to create the space needed when exploring alternative practices (Horlings et al., 2020). This capacity of a group to intentionally alter relations and practices hinges on the ability to recognize the vulnerabilities and interdependencies of all living beings, which Moriggi et al. (2020) refer to as response-ability. Changes might be minor or marginal, but in the case of major or profound changes, there may be a transformation in the mode of food provisioning (Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2021). This complexity of food provisioning is a living system and profound changes result in systems transformation. The division of power within a supply chain becomes a topic when change is asked for or pursued. Examples of this include when farmers seek a larger or fairer share of rewarding in food chains; or when citizens, particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), re-envision their own role in the food system (Session on Participatory Food Systems Governance at the 2021 Global Food Governance Conference, et al., 2024); or when questions arise regarding strategies to increase sustainability and enhance the resilience of communities or agroecosystems. Achieving change depends on the capacity of a group to alter, or ultimately to transform, the complex web of relations in which food provisioning practices are embedded, and likewise, how these relations are governed. This paper adds to scholarly work on food networks by introducing the relational autonomy framework to identify mechanisms used to alter relations and interdependencies. The framework enables us to understand how interdependencies persist within food provisioning networks, even as independence is pursued from industrial food systems. The concept of relational autonomy was developed by feminist scholars as a critique of the masculine understanding of autonomy, which is often defined by traits such as independence and nondomination (Mackenzie, 2019; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). Relational autonomy posits autonomy as the status and capacities necessary to direct one's life and activities, grounded in rights, oppor-

tunities for self-determination, reflexive competence, authentic value systems, and the authorization of the self or collective as legitimate actors (Mackenzie, 2019). Goris (2020) first used a relational conceptualization of autonomy to understand how youth in Brazil enact relational autonomy at their agroecological farms by working with biodiversity and in their social movements by experimenting with the redistribution of agricultural, domestic, and care work. This relational approach in agrarian and food system studies is crucial to understanding interdependencies and the associated power dynamics in emerging networks. In the following sections, we explore concepts related to emerging food networks.

The dominant structure of food networks in the Netherlands is short food supply chains (SFSCs) (korte keten). A common strategy for improving the market position of the farmer is to reduce the number of intermediaries to few or none to prevent a middleman, for instance a processor, from appropriating a disproportionate share of the margin (Van der Schans & van Wonderen, 2019). This approach to short food supply chain alteration focuses mainly on economic dimensions (Nemes et al., 2023) and not on the territorial, social-material base in which economic practices are re-embedded; no major changes are involved. This narrow approach is different from the original meaning of SFSCs as coined by Renting, Marsden and Bank (2003). They view SFSCs as the process of rural development by farmers and citizens with a shared interest in the quality of food, food traditions, and food provisioning practices. These scholars highlight the role of institutional support and the surrounding networks required to maintain SFSCs, but in the public and institutional uptake the concept has been interpreted by many merely as a new economic model.

The concept of alternative food networks (AFN), however, is closer to the original meaning of SFSCs. Although alternative food networks position themselves as the opposite of chemical, industrialized, and export-led agriculture, the positioning of alternative versus conventional food provisioning can be difficult to reconcile given the diversity and dynamics of food networks identified by Renting et al. (2003). Holloway et al. (2007) have problematized the dualistic reasoning, and call for a recognition of the evolving and nuanced understanding of what is alternative at any given time and place.

While both SFSCs and AFNs indicate aspects of rural development, neither aligns with the relational approach of this paper. The meaning of SFSC has eroded to a value chain approach governed by linear thinking, thereby excluding relevant relations with actors in the wide spectrum of food networks, both human and non-human. Moreover, the way the definition of AFNs is couched in the negative as non-involvement with industrial agriculture does not line up with shifting (both positive and negative) interdependences in food networks. On the other hand, the values-based territorial food networks (VTFNs) concept captures the material and immaterial aspects as well as the relationality of food provisioning networks by pointing at the embeddedness of practices at the territorial level. Territories are determined by the way people relate to the landscape, the resources, and each other, rather than being determined solely by administrative demarcations. Territories therefore change over time as interrelationship shifts occurs, not due to administrative adjustments. Furthermore, the territories are determined by shared values of the consumers, producers, and processors of food products that have organized themselves in a given area (Escobar, 2010, 2015; Van den Berg et al., 2019). VTFNs are defined as networks that unite actors to cooperate at the territorial level to organize food systems on the basis of shared values regarding "social justice and wellbeing, environmental integrity, participatory governance and economic fairnes" (Nemes et al., 2023, p. 3). This concept takes into account the fact that actors who are not part of the supply chain but are part of the food network may interact with the dominant agricultural discourse and practices by organizing themselves around shared values on social and environmental justice. Shared values vis-à-vis food provisioning practices are the starting point for relations in which "the freedom to act is cocreated by all involved" (Goris, 2020, p. 17). The territorial approach allows us to understand the multiple initiatives beyond food provisioning practices that may emerge from the development of food networks.

The concept of VTFNs resonates with the concept of community-based circular food systems, which may put more emphasis circularity and the prevention of greenwashing and social washing (Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development, 2024). The territorial articulation of VTFNs may promote future inclusion of nonchain actors and rights of all living beings in food networks.

While VTFNs can be important vehicles for major, transformative change in food systems (Chiffoleau, 2019; Renting et al., 2003), little is known about the specific ways in which these food networks foster change. Therefore, this article uses the relational autonomy concept to explore how opportunities and capacities to perform (transformative) change are developed or impaired within VTFNs. Relational autonomy highlights interdependencies among all living beings that determine capacities for acting, including relations of care and cooperation. To this end, the next section discusses the understandings of autonomy in critical agrarian studies and introduces the feminist concept of relational autonomy to understand and effectuate change.

Peasant Autonomy, Relative Autonomy

The importance of relations for the performance of autonomy is articulated in critical agrarian studies on peasant autonomy and relative autonomy. Peasant autonomy is based on Marxist traditions that discuss the relation between labor, capital, and the state. It refers to the struggles of peasants to become as independent as possible of the state, specifically of agribusiness capital for inputs. Peasant autonomy is achieved by the peasant mode of production that entails farming without external inputs and working with local peasant knowledge on mimicking ecological processes for food provisioning practices. Resources such as knowledge, labor, and food provisioning are largely in peasant hands. By using nested markets and their own autonomy, peasants can limit the interference of the dominant industrial food system (Van der Ploeg, 2008; Van der Ploeg & Schneider, 2022). According to Van der Ploeg and Schneider (2022), autonomy is achieved by organizing resources to refrain from capital and to allow for agency at the level of the farm, between farms, at the territorial level, and at food markets.

Peasant autonomy is understood as relative autonomy by scholars, as there is always some interference with inputs, credit, and food markets (Rosset & Martínex-Torres, 2012), as well as with the state. Peasant autonomy and indigenous autonomy merge through shared histories and peoples (Rosset & Barbosa, 2021), and this takes place largely through the dispute with the power held by both capital and state, as well as through their collective right to belong to a given territory, to give place to their livelihoods.

A point of critique to the concept of peasant autonomy by Jansen et al. (2022) is that peasant autonomy tends to be presented as normative, because the desire to become autonomous from the "hostile" regime prescribes a particular way of relating to capital and state. Pointing only at struggles for independence to become relatively autonomous frames dependencies as negative, while in fact, people's interdependencies are a necessity: humans have always lived in groups, depending on each other and other living beings for their subsistence.

Coming back to the main theme of this article, the question remains, how do interdependencies shift over time? In a peasant mode of production, peasants become more interdependent on, for instance, working with natural processes and interfarm cooperation over time (Lucas et al., 2019). In terms of cooperating within the family, with other farmers, and with nature, this can be mutually reinforcing but may also impair the autonomy of some. The concept of peasant autonomy does not make explicit this shift of interdependencies, which can end up obscuring, for example, the empowerment that may stem from the territorial, experiential, farmer, and scientific knowledge produced in the ways they work with natural processes. Moreover, cooperation among farmers requires capacities, and it may not be free from oppression from patriarchism. Examining this issue of "one's own relative power within society" (Maughan et al., 2020, p. 296), these three scholars point at the need to reflect upon one's own practices that may impair other people's autonomy, such as structurally disadvantaged people such as women, BIPOC indi-

viduals, and people beyond national borders.

Other critics question "peasants" as an analytical category. Jansen et al. (2022) note that processes of decommodification are not exclusive to peasants but also happen, for instance, in vertical integration. However, this critique ignores the fact that the peasant mode of production refers to a holistic approach to farming with multiple, integrated characteristics that are not limited to their relationship with the market. An important characteristic of the peasant mode of production is the cultural knowledge base that is transferred over generations. After many years of work among social movements representing peasants worldwide, in December 2018, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (Claeys & Edelman, 2019). This document acknowledges that a significant number of people working in rural areas across the globe can be identified as peasants, or small-scale agricultural producers connected to a place and their family household for their livelihood (Cotula, 2022). This defined identity of "peasants," as recognized by global organizations, makes it an identifiable analytical category when scholars choose to use that categorization. However, some may still question if "peasants" is an appropriate analytical category for use in the context of the Netherlands. Historically, small traditional family farmers in the Netherlands have been classified as peasants, but nowadays, new entrants to farming who practice agroecology come closest to this definition, in contrast to the larger group of entrepreneurial farmers in the Netherlands as a whole.

In terms of methodological issues, Jansen et al. (2022) point at inconsistencies in the work of scholars in understanding peasant autonomy as relative. To illustrate, they refer to Van der Ploeg aligning peasant autonomy with the idea of "room for manoeuvre" (2018, p. 39), which is not limited to peasants. Van der Ploeg focuses on a specific kind of "room for manoeuvre": one that is transformative in nature and focuses on peasant autonomy. "Room for manoeuvre" is in his work about becoming relatively autonomous from the dominant industrial food system through a peasant mode of farming in which labour, knowledge, and food provisioning are largely in peasant hands (Garcia Júnior, 1989; Woortmann & Woortmann, 1997).

Relational Autonomy

Actors engaged in VTFNs have established or strengthened relations to practice and discuss their shared values, based on which values they seek to reinforce in the food system. In forming these relations, actors often cocreate the freedom to act differently in terms of food provisioning and the arrangement of the food system at a territorial level (Butler, 2015; Rancière, 2009). The concept of relational autonomy includes this relational dimension of emancipation (Goris, 2020).

Autonomy is often conceptualized from an individualistic point of view (Dove et al., 2017) and commonly understood as the self-governing of independent and self-determining subjects. This notion of autonomy is criticized by feminist scholars for not considering the ever-present interdependency among humans, neglecting relationships of care and cooperation that provide the conditions and capacities to act but that may also impair the autonomy of some (Dove et al., 2017; Lee, 2023; Mackenzie, 2008, 2019).

Agroecological peasants who work with nature, and scholars articulating the practices of agroecological farmers, have also challenged the human-centered notion of autonomy and have pointed out that these farmers cocreate autonomy with all living beings. One major example is how they approach soil life, reducing their dependency on agrochemicals and other inputs from the industrialized agricultural sector (Goris, 2020; van der Ploeg, 2008; Williams, 2008). While this is to the benefit of the soil and plants themselves, this also reduces farmers' dependency on agrochemicals while creating dependencies, such as on the health of the soil.

Diverse scholars note that social movements are an articulation of relational autonomy, as seen through the knowledge production and exchange facilitated by these movement organizations and through the inclusivity measures enacted by and for BIPOC people, women, and youth on farms (Goris, 2020; Paulilo, 2004; Williams, 2008). Social organization based on shared values provides the

social and material base for relational autonomy. The concept of relational autonomy involves negotiating values, norms, positions, knowledge, skills, and material resources in all living being relations within the VTFNs.

Scholarly works on relational autonomy point at the interdependency among all living beings and of humans as socially embedded persons who are shaped by social relationships and their contexts. In general the scientific debate on relational autonomy is about the conditions under which a person's autonomy can flourish while in relations of dependency. To clarify, the scientific debate is not about the conditions under which relational autonomy among multiple persons or everyone in a network can flourish simultaneously. To date, the debates revolve around the conditions for people to develop authentic preferences, such as the ability to make choices that reflect their own motivational structure. As far as the authors of this paper know, the concept of relational autonomy is mostly used at the personal level and as mentioned earlier on only studied by a few at a network level, such as in the contexts of social movements. Using other concepts, Le Velly et al. (2022), Bendfeldt, McGonagle, and Niewolny (2021), and Dunning (2016) have shown how farmers enhance the autonomy of all through cooperation. With the concept of "supply chain management and collaboration," Dunning (2016) shows how farms and a chain grocery store established mutually beneficial relationships. This paper explores whether relational autonomy is mutually created in VTFNs and questions how to achieve an optimum of strengthening autonomy of all living beings engaged in a VTFN without limiting the autonomy of some.

The framework of relational autonomy presented by Mackenzie (2019) is adapted here to understand relational autonomy at a network level. The framework departs from status as conditional for the autonomy of persons; that is. "persons are entitled to exercise self-determining authority over their lives" (Mackenzie, 2019, p. 147). Furthermore, she points out specific competences that are required for autonomy, namely, "the capacity to be self-defining and self-governing" (p. 147). As a result, the relational autonomy framework used here includes three dimensions of autonomy in values-based territorial food networks: determination, authorization, and governance. Figure 1 visualizes these dimensions. This aligns with the work of Lucas, Gasselin, and van der Ploeg (2019), who also point at status, "a certain standing within the co-op," and the capacity of "social skills" (pp. 159–160) needed to engage neighboring farmers in new ways of interfarm cooperation.

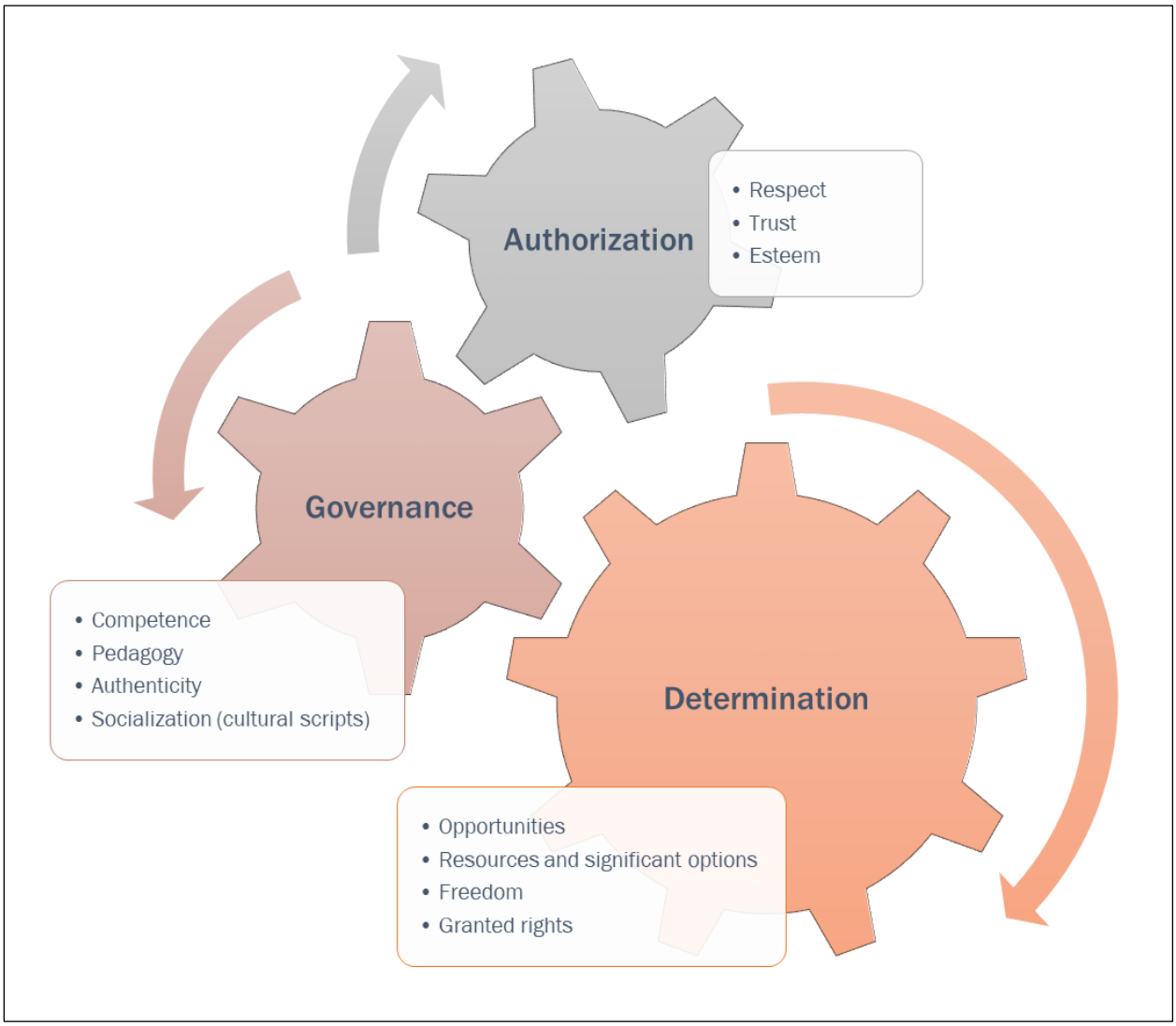
The first dimension, network determination, brings the analysis to "external, structural conditions for autonomy" (Mackenzie, 2019, p. 148). This highlights the relational character of this dimension, as determination is shaped by the opportunities and freedoms as manifested in the socio-material context of the people involved in a food network. Opportunities are created or limited by material and immaterial resources that are available and accessible to the decisionmakers, as these inform the significant options that the decisionmakers can choose from. Gibson-Graham et al. (2016) propose to examine the access, use, benefit, care, responsibility, and ownership of material and nonmaterial resources, including biophysical resources, knowledge, cultural resources, and social resources. Promoting determination entails changing the rules for allocating these resources (*Tijdschrift voor agrarische recht*, 2023), and then indeed allocating them differently (Dekking et al., 2020; Lucas et al., 2019). This also requires immaterial resources to imagine other ways of doing and being (Stock et al., 2015). When speaking of freedom, Mackenzie (2019) emphasizes defining this subcategory in positive terms, and thus refers to freedom as "granted rights by the social environment, in contrast to the negative definition of freedom as non-domination" (p. 148).

The second dimension, network authorization, refers to internal dynamics of evaluation, by which persons regard themselves as "authorized to determine the direction of one's life" (Mackenzie, 2019, p. 149). In other words, it refers to the dynamics that shape the extent to which actors consider themselves as legitimate and capable decisionmakers. It also refers to the capacity to account for one's actions (Mackenzie, 2019, p. 149). This latter subcategory relates to the concept of answerability. The relational character of this dimension is twofold. First, it brings the analysis to the external

social context of recognition that influences a person's sense of self. Second, it brings the analysis to the social construction of settings for answerability. Answerability is understood as the capacity to respond to actions by providing arguments to justify the decision or action (Lee, 2022; Smith, 2015). This answerability intertwines with granted rights, as the process of answerability depends on the creation of opportunities, time, and spaces to allow its occurrence. This implies that answerability is also relationally constituted. Phillips et al. (2015) indicate that decolonizing approaches to cope with oppression can be ways to foster authorization. A decolonizing approach focuses on the critical consciousness of the dominant system and highlighting identities that support collective action based on social and environmental justice. Lodik (2021) refers to "calling out" problematic behavior in public or "calling in" private occasions, as well as intersectionality, cultural appreciation, and exchange as ways to endorse authorization.

The third dimension, network governance, refers to the capacity to "make and enact choices that express or cohere with members identities, commitments, and values" (Mackenzie, 2019, p. 149). Network governance requires authenticity and competence. Authenticity refers to the ownership of the motivational structure by people, and

Figure 1. Relational Autonomy Framework Based on Mackenzie (2019)



the extent to which this reflects members' identities, goals, and values. Competence refers to the skills needed to put the personal value systems into action (Mackenzie, 2019). This competence includes various skills, ranging from emotional regulation, imagination of alternatives, and critical reflection on cultural norms and values. The relational character of this dimension brings the analysis toward the process of socialization, fostering critical examination of external cultural scripts with norms and values, and the way these influence people's value systems and capacity for authenticity. Additionally, it looks at how competences are fostered or diminished through people's pedagogical contexts. Novoa et al. (2012), Cooreman et al. (2021), and Goris (2020) indicate ways to endorse network governance through "counter-scripting," the process of rewriting history, meanings, and norms, or "alternation," the process of changing of roles of who educates or who carries out certain tasks. Klerkx and Begemann (2020) and Feola (2019) note that doing things differently also involves stopping doing certain things (exnovating) and indicate that network governance can be endorsed by building capacity on exnovating and dealing with financial loss due to exnovation. Scholars of agroecology point at governance by working with natural processes (Goris, 2020; de Schutter & UN Human Rights Council, 2010). Furthermore, Escobar (2010) and Aubrée and Maréchal (2008) state that network governance can be fostered by a territorial approach.

Mackenzie's relational autonomy framework (2019) adds "authorization" to the social justice framework as discussed by Maughan et al. (2020), which centers on distributive justice (opportunities) and procedural justice (governance), or, in other words, "not just on what is distributed but for whom and by whom the benefits and burdens of the food system are mobilized" (p. 284). With "authorization" Mackenzie also draws attention to trust, respect, and esteem of those engaged to act and "to make oneself vulnerable to the actions of another" (Dunning, 2016, p. 24) and to be accountable for actions.

This paper aims to understand shifts in interdependencies in VTFNs with Mackenzie's relational autonomy framework (2019). The framework allows us to understand how material and immaterial flows are or are not rearranged in relationships in these food networks, and how relational autonomy is enacted or impaired. In addition to existing studies on relational autonomy, this study aims to explore how relational autonomy is enacted by a group of farmers, citizens, and nonhuman simultaneously, and in what situations relational autonomy is nurtured for some and impaired for the others. Mackenzie (2021) suggests that social equality is a condition for relational autonomy. The paper contributes to the debate with empirical work about how social interventions minimize inequality in agriculture and how food systems like VTFNs change relational autonomy within the network.

Methodology

We used episodic narrative interview as our research method, which entails writing down the narratives of participants in a shared, bounded situation or episode (Mueller, 2019). Bendfeldt et al. (2021) argue that narratives allow for a rich and situated understanding of personal values, hopes, strategies, and experiences of farmers. Through 12 participatory observation and 16 episodic narrative interviews with farmers and citizens engaged in three VTFNs, it becomes evident how relational autonomy shifts or is enacted, nurtured, or impaired for some. The narratives depict three pathways mapped out over the three territories performing differentiated relational autonomy for agroecological transformations. The episodic narrative method allows us to capture how the evolution of a food network is experienced and described by its participants. This approach makes also data validation, in the form of narratives, appealing and accessible to participants. The three distinct food networks studied, Flevofood, De Meent, and Voedselkollektief Utrecht (VOKO), were selected due to their diverse founding memberships, which are representative of the range of food network initiators in the Netherlands. Flevofood is a food network of conventional and organic farmers, De Meent is a network initiated by a religious community and includes marginalized persons, and VOKO is a citizen-initiated urban food network. The three networks will be briefly introduced, fol-

lowed by passages of these narratives in which the members introduce the VTFNs themselves. The narratives written by the authors of this paper were validated by the members of the respective food networks and adapted as indicated by the members. The passage from a narrative on Flevofood is written by a member of that food network.

De Meent

Community farm De Meent on 31 hectares (77 acres) of land in Amstelland was established in 2020 and is a territorial food network based on social and ecological values. The community enables people placed in harsh living conditions by the state to grow their own food and to provide food for shelters and projects such as a social grocer in Amsterdam. The community consist of five part-time employees, about 25 volunteers, chickens, horticulture, and workspaces for diverse crafts and popular education.

De Meent narrative: "As far as you can see, there are meadows, meadow birds, ditches, and further on, the church tower of a small village Nes aan de Amstel. The sun is shining but it feels chilly because of the fresh spring wind. I just arrived at the community farm De Meent in the polders nearby Amsterdam. Other people arrive simultaneously. Some people arrive by car. They have been picked up by car at shelters in Amsterdam; others arrive by bike or on foot from the nearby Dorothy community, part of De Meent. When Blessing is asked to describe herself, she describes herself as someone who is not yet official here, a person without a permanent residence permit and who doesn't have a farm, a so-called landless farmer. She comes to the farm to learn. Sarah, sitting on the other side of here, states that she comes to the farm to volunteer, to talk with people and to grow food that goes to the Wereldhuis [community center] for daily free meals for refugees. Evelien, a paid employee at the farm, explains that one-third of the food produced goes to the Wereldhuis and other shelters, one-third is consumed at the farm or taken home by the workers and volunteers at the farm, and one-third is sold commercially. The people at the farm have become eaters and growers."

The first author composed, validated and adapted the narratives from multiple participants to create this narrative.

Voedselkollektief Utrecht (VOKO)

VOKO was established in 2014 and is a VTFN in Utrecht. It unites 12 farmers and about 90 citizens. It is not defined in terms of territory by its members, but the radius of 35 kilometers (22 miles) around Utrecht city falls within the Utrecht Ridge. Their three core values are **quality, transparency,** and **connection**. With **quality**, they are referring to healthy, fresh, and environmentally friendly food; with **transparency**, they are pointing at the origin, process, and costs of food; and with **connection**, they mean the bond of trust between local farmers and members, as well as between members themselves. Furthermore, the food collective works with participatory governance.

VOKO narrative: "Equipped with crates and a cool box, we walk to her gray Opel Astra, jumping down the high step again. While I put the crates in the back, Charlotte rearranges the car. Putting the parcel shelf somewhere else, she mumbles, 'I should have just taken that out too…' I walk to the passenger side and take a seat. Charlotte sets the navigation and drives away from the street, again without hesitation. We turn left, turn right, then I don't notice anymore. Charlotte talks about VOKO as we make our way through Utrecht. 'Nice that you also joined VOKO. Our goal is to be able to eat sustainable food. And we also want to get that directly from the suppliers. With VOKO we also often try to visit suppliers with the members.'"

The second author composed, validated and adapted the narratives from multiple participants to create this narrative.

Flevofood

Flevofood was established in 2017 and is a VTFN located on new land where administrative demarcations of the province and geographical and sociomaterial space align. Members encompass the entire food system, from farmers to processors to chefs. About 80 farmers are connected to Flevofood. The emphasis is on the values of economic fairness, social justice, and participatory governance. On ecological integrity, organic and conven-

tional farmers partly connect with each other to reduce food waste, increase circularity, and keep food miles as low as possible. The latter makes this an interesting case study to explore whether the VTFN provides and enforces relations that allow conventional farmers to take up more aspects related to ecological integrity.

Flevofood narrative: "We were guests at the organic arable farm of Wouter Klaasse Bos from Dronten on a beautiful soy plot. Together with Jan Groen from Green Organics, Bos gave an inspiring presentation on fresh soy cultivation. It is a new crop in Flevoland, with a high nutritional value from the high vegetable protein content and unsaturated fatty acids. Soy is also an important food element in vegan products. As a legume, it fits well in sustainable cultivation. By breeding a variety in our climate, soy can become a competitor of both organic and conventional grain cultivation. Five growers are united in sales."

This narrative was written by a Flevofood member.

Results

The next section describes the results found on the three dimensions of relational autonomy: determination, authorization and governance.

Determination

In the first result section on the dimension determination the opportunities offered by VTFNs are shown and after that the granted rights are described.

Opportunities

VTFNs offer the opportunity to sell nonstandard products that may not be accommodated by traditional long supply chains due to their strict standards and volume requirements. This variance in supply and adaptability is beneficial for farmers with diverse systems or products, as it allows them to offer seasonal produce as well as vegetables, meats, and dairy products that may vary in size, weight, or flavor. In interviews, farmers have revealed a lack of consistency in their variety of options. For example, in the VOKO food network, there is no agreement on minimum purchasing or any other mechanism to guarantee that participating farmers earn a sustainable income. Similarly, many farmers involved in Flevofood primarily produce cash crops, the majority of which are exported. Even with efforts to diversify, the quantities are often too large to be consumed in the nearby metropolitan area. Flevofood farmers aim to sell their products at major events such as the international flower and garden show Floriade or to government institutions committed to sustainable catering through a Green Deal.

> I just think the system needs to be different. We won't be able to do that with the supermarkets, but if we can arrange that with caterers in larger volumes—I'm not talking about one caterer who wants one crate of carrots; but if there are 30 caterers who all order 30 crates of carrots, then things are going well—but then they shouldn't say, "I want two cucumbers today." (Farmer, Flevofood)

According to the interviewed farmers, government procurement works in only a few cases. It is difficult to get started due to the conditions that government institutions set in tenders (contracts), due to long-term relationships with major caterers, and due to Flevofood's limited negotiating capacity. Participating farmers in VOKO and in Flevofood rely on other markets for most of their produce and indicate that being involved in more than one VTFN is beneficial to them. In addition to using different sales channels, the rules of sale are changed, resulting in less money going to intermediaries: "That will also be 10%, not very much" (Farmer, Flevofood).

For citizens, the networks provide a "significant option" in their food environment by making available foods from the local surroundings. De Meent aligns environmental and social values by producing sustainable food for people with a low or no income and simultaneously moves beyond the charity scheme by providing the significant option of access to land to people like Blessing and Sarah, both of whom talked about the set-up of De Meent that allows them to produce food themselves. Connecting and strengthening relations creates significant options for circularity. To integrate residual flows, De Meent is not certified organic:

> Pure poultry [and swine] farming is a recent invention. In the past it was always mixed. The role of pigs was always to process leftovers, that's how the animal has been bred. Most poultry farmers are nowadays a black box of input and output. Converting high-quality proteins into animal proteins is inefficient. You really shouldn't do that! Give pigs and chickens food losses and waste, and if you no longer have access to that, stop keeping pigs and chickens. We do not have food losses and waste ourselves. These flows come from the baking industry, and are not organic. You should also not give high-quality grains to pigs and chickens. Purely organic food losses and waste flows are almost nonexistent. We are well above the animal welfare bio norm. We are raising roosters, and roosters are normally gassed (because they do not produce eggs), even in organic farming. (Farmer, De Meent)

The principles of circularity and of providing living beings with more dignity unite in the way De Meent farmers raise roosters, namely, in that they do not see roosters as waste, but allow them to live. This "counterscripting" leads to a mutual enhancement of relational autonomy between farmer and rooster: after the roosters mature, their meat provides an extra income stream, and in turn, the roosters live a life of dignity rather than being immediately killed.

The VTFNs also provide options for arranging resources differently. A group of people in the VOKO network pooled together resources to purchase a van for the transportation of the orders, thereby making more feasible the larger orders which came with the growth of the network.

In a few interviews, farmers mention missed options to ensure relational autonomy at a collective level. A fruit grower points out the fact that farmers take the risk if they want to phase out the use of pesticides:

> And if you are in the Flevofood network, there is no other fruit grower in there. I can't really match with fellow fruit growers there—there are only arable farmers there. And if the cultivation fails—last year my harvest failed. Just try to earn that back. Cancer and mildew. Well, then you've lost €50,000. (Fruit grower, Flevofood)

The fruit grower points at a weak spot of many VTFNs, and also of living labs and field labs, where farmers are not asked to participate in a food network, living or field lab on the basis of a shared buyer or retailer. The networks do not provide a discursive space to discuss how to include regenerative measurements in their contracts with the buyer, and subsequently, to ensure a critical mass among farmers of one specific buyer to obtain a contract that includes risk-sharing or an additional price for regenerative measurements. The farmer also notes that a very diverse food network in terms of actors from diverse agricultural sectors, buyers, processing does not provide sufficient peers for in-depth knowledge production and exchange. Another farmer regrets that before ensuring significant options to everyone within the network, options are provided to nonpaying farmers outside Flevofood.

Granted rights

When entering into the network, producers and citizens collectively subject themselves to an obligation relating to the uptake of responsibilities. In this mutual agreement, the assignment of tasks can be rotated or based on preferences. Members are interdependent on the governance of the VTFNs:

> VOKO is a kind of "do-it-yourself" in that regard; I like that charm. There was another member who offered to take over scheduling from the former coordinator. He had written his own program for it. So, you see, everyone can do it in their own way. And, it was a requirement for me, because I hate scheduling." (Member, VOKO)

Farmers are granted the right to choose what product to offer to the networks; there are no preestablished supply agreements. This allows a flexibility that can attune to seasonality, variation in products, and the farmer's capacity. Farmers in the networks view this as positive, as it aligns with a diversified farming system:

> I am very happy ... that VOKO orders from us. … It's really ideal, because we can just indicate what we have, when we have it, and that will be ordered. This kind of thing is really ideal for complex farmers like us, who produce a lot of different things." (Food forest farmer connected to VOKO)

Authorization

In the result section on the dimension authorization the aspects esteem, respect and trust are discussed.

Esteem, respect, trust

The authorization by producers in the network is expressed in the process of price-setting and boundary-setting with regards to the manner of interacting between the members of the network. The farmers who participated in this study either determined the price based on comparison to external price-setting, done by conventional outlets (e.g., supermarkets or processors), or they relied on their own assessment of what the price should be. Regarding the latter, however, there was no clear script according to which this assessment needs to be done. As one farmer explained:

> I ask two euros for this box [of peppers]. I have no idea whether that is a good price. I base the price usually on feeling, I just make up something. I then think about what I would pay for it. (Food forest farmer connected to VOKO)

Determining this price is a skill subjected to levels of esteem and respect on the part of the producers. Thus, price-setting also is an expression of authorization, for it relies on how farmers value themselves, their labor, and their farming system. Socialization plays a role in this, insofar as prices may reflect internalized societal values of farmers.

> We simply ask a farmer how much you want for it, we do not go further in discussion. Ultimately, you have to pay for your entire chain, logistics and so on. Therefore we put about five to ten percent on top of the price. Network board member, Flevofood)

A second manifestation of authorization is observed in the practice of boundary-setting. The capacity for boundary setting is important for farmers to protect themselves from self-exploitation. For example, due to the small volume sold to the network and the variance between orders, farmers sometimes come close to laboring for little compensation. The network also creates and facilitates moments of answerability, enhancing the authorization by members of the network. The connection between farmers and citizens provides the farmer with opportunities for accountability. This happens mainly during excursions that facilitate storytelling regarding the farmer's product and mode of production. During these visits, the farmer can give an in-depth account of personal motivations and decisions. In the excursions, farmers can demonstrate their farm system and answer questions that the citizens might have. This allows them to account for their system and the reason behind decisions. As such, they get the opportunity to present themselves as legitimate decisionmakers. Furthermore, the interactions bring recognition, adding to the authorization by farmers.

Finally, the uptake of responsibilities in the networks enables citizens to learn organizational skills and food literacy. They develop their food literacy through sharing knowledge, thus learning about new foods and new ways of preparing food. Moreover, citizens end up feeling empowered when taking on responsibility. This is illustrated by the account of a member of the VOKO network: "I came from the neurosurgery department, so the coordination [of the partition team] was really peanuts! I was always told 'you can't do that,' but look at me now!" (Member, VOKO).

Similarly, another member of the VOKO network feels empowered to take action to address climate change: "It feels good to do this. That's the beauty of this initiative. After all, it's a way to contribute a little bit; a tiny little contribution, but still a contribution" (Member, VOKO).

Thus, citizens increase their self-esteem through taking on responsibilities, and they can feel empowered by being able to contribute to addressing issues in the food system. As such, the authorization by citizens in the network is

enhanced. Another member of the VOKO network called out responsibilities:

> I said in the meeting, "Guys, that voluntariness, we need to get rid of some of that." Because people are afraid to start doing the coordination functions. And once you are [doing coordination], you might be doing it for a few years. Then all of a sudden, [people say] I quit, and nobody's doing it then. So I suggested, "let's rotate, by lottery; have somebody [take the position] for a year, and then require the old coordinator to mentor them for six months." (Member, VOKO)

Governance

In the result section on the dimension governance the defining values, popular education and authenticity are described.

Defining values

Via participatory observation, it was possible to attend a session of defining values at the food network *De Meent*. This process is described in the validated narrative of De Meent:

> The time for talking is over: the morning ritual starts with all the people present translating a community value into their mother tongue. People laugh about the different sounds, spelling mistakes when Marten writes down the words and the room fills with levity. Everybody is heard and appreciated for their roots. Patience is translated into Huasa: *anuuri*; into Mandinga: *sasato*; into Dutch: *geduld*, and many other languages. Blessing tells us how she named her daughter Patience: "I gave her that name, so I learn how to be patient. Before, I really wanted to get it, I wanted to fight for it! If I don't have patience, in the end I won't get [what I want] and I will be crying. So then I said to myself, "No, I don't want to cry anymore." I want to learn how to calm down when this happens. So that is how I learned to be patient, and then I stopped crying. I am still worried about some things, but you have to relax."

This story reveals Blessing's understanding of the value of "patience," whereby she provided meaning to a community value. In Flevofood, values have not been explicitly discussed among members. One of the people talks about their main goals:

> With our main goals being traveling fewer kilometers, learning from each other, working circularly (working with each other's residual flows), and of course, working together. (Initiator of Flevofood)

These goals indicate values such as peer learning and cooperation. Interviews also reveal other values such the importance of nutritious food and the right to food. Subsequently, the phenomenon of self-selection occurs when new people choose to become members of a VTFN. New participants have their own values system that exists prior to their participation in a food network, and which aligns with the jointly defined values in the food network. The values that underpin the food networks are diverse. The values that unite food networks in this case are the importance given to the consumption of local food (e.g., close to the location of the production site, a short connection to the producer, etc.), and to knowing the who, where, and how of food production (i.e., transparency). Networks differ in the level of importance ascribed to the environmental and social sustainability of the production method. Furthermore, values related to animal welfare and nature restoration are emerging and shifting. Participatory observations and interviews with people at De Meent show that opinions differ with regard to weeds, and that weeds are counterscripted as "natural material" that builds organic matter. Also, with animal welfare being a significant value in this setting, male livestock, such as the roosters, end up gaining more worth.

Popular education

People at De Meent indicate themselves what they want to learn in terms of knowledge (e.g., horticulture) and skills (e.g., routine). Recently they have had workshops on composting, growing mushrooms, woodworking, and observing and taking

care of chickens. To learn to work with routine, they have formulated house rules such as *be on time* (wait 10 minutes just in case, but that should be an exception) and *uphold daily routine* (coffee break at 11:15–11:30, bell at 13:00 to clean up work equipment, bell at 13:15 for lunch, and appoint dishwashers in the morning).

Flevofood works with peer learning among diverse actors in the food system. Farmers educate fellow farmers and others about grain varieties, such as spelt varieties that do not require fertilizer, and about planting soy or forgotten vegetables. In a cooperative workshop with the farmers, students came up with the idea to market the juices of beets and carrots as "pride juice" in honor of gay pride. This widescale collaboration and alternation of roles by people in a VTFN leads to the acquisition of diversified knowledge and skills. Participants become familiar with other ways of working, including nonhierarchical, less regulated working relations, and intersectional thinking:

> … We face a challenge: we work nonhierarchically, but the non-employed do have a different background and situation then we have as employees." (Employee, De Meent)

> In my country, we "use" those ones in farming who cannot manage to work and you can hire them, and next time, I want to [do this] differently. Here you work for yourself, and by working for yourself, you learn more. My dream for the future, I like to continue with farming, I know now how to grow your own plants from seed, and you can do this yourself and sell those seedlings. I like to have my own nursery. If I have a farm, I want to put everything there, pig, goat, cow, you get meat and manure to plant. You can get food, money to go to the hospital and give other people jobs. (Volunteer, De Meent)

Authenticity

The account of the fruit farmer below shows how industrial standards persist in the network. In a participatory observation, the second author recalls that she is packing a crate of apples for the VOKO network and that the producer gave her the instruction to select certain apples based on the look of their skin:

> S1: "If you have bad ones, with spots, you can take them out."
>
> S2: "You guys still select for that?"
>
> S1: "Yes, definitely. You do have to deliver a good product. Keep a good relationship with the customer, right? [These spots] come with time. And you can put the little one back, too."

These accounts of disputes reveal that as far as we have seen in this research, some cultural scripts related to food are hardly addressed within the relations in VTFNs. The behavior to not buy something anymore when it is not up to current standard in terms of quality, size, and weight is not sufficiently reflected upon. As a result, the quality standards of the conventional supermarkets and large retailers are reinforced. In the case of the interviewed fruit grower from Flevofood, the farmer adjusts by meeting quality standards and by combining fruit production with fruit processing. The farmer uses fruit that can't be sold directly to process in to apple juice and applesauce. In this case, the relational autonomy of the VTFN is entangled with relations outside the territorial food network through cultural scripts enforced by supermarkets and large retailers. The fruit grower ensured circularity through a small on-farm processing industry. Another example of the persistence of cultural scripts is "yearlong same produce," enabled by global trade and greenhouses. In VTFNs, non-human agency is expressed by shaping the seasonal variation in the products that are offered. The continuity of VTFN in terms of sufficient supply and diversity depends on farmers cooperating within the territory and with other territories to ensure a stable and diversified supply of food throughout the year. This interdependence of farmers in together providing sufficient diversified supply in the VTFN demonstrates that the relational autonomy is jointly achieved.

Discussion

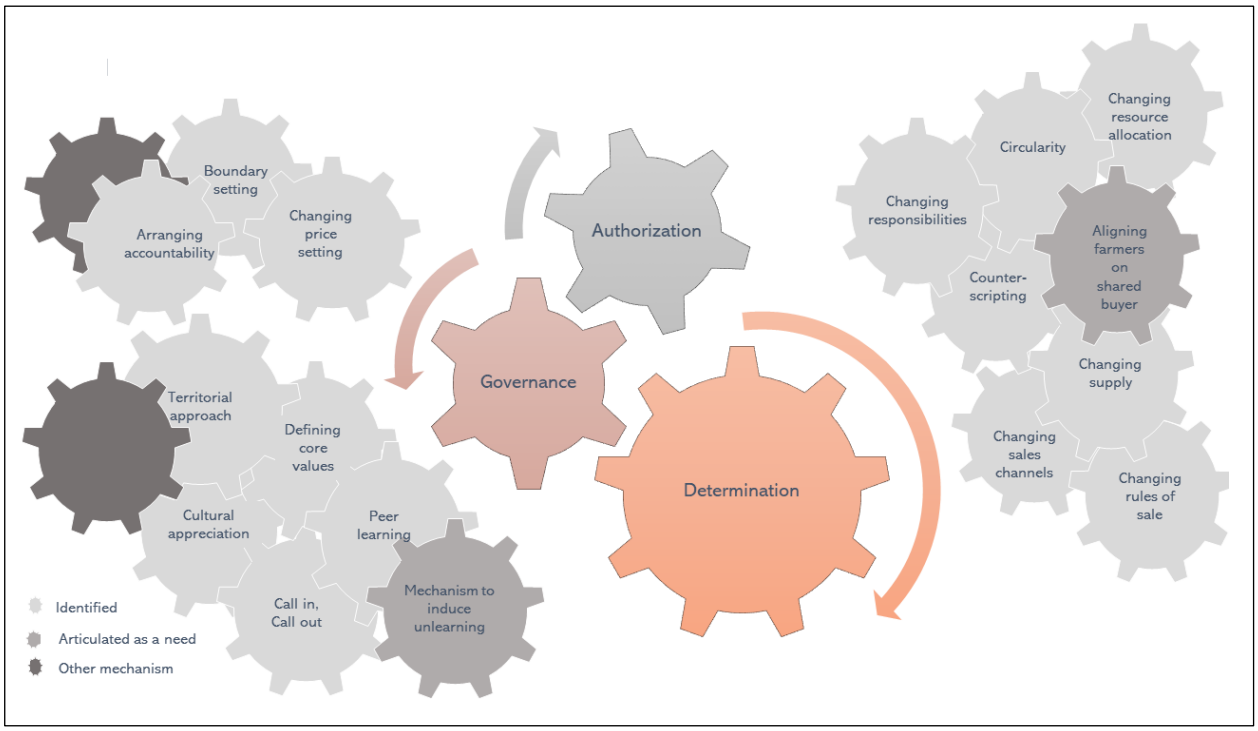
Starting with defining core values such as solidarity, reciprocity, circularity, and taking a territorial

approach, VTFNs employ diverse mechanisms to perform these values and their approach to their practices. These mechanisms provide farmers, more or less, with significant options to shift toward interdependencies with territorial partners. They also underpin natural and circular processes to become less dependent on large, distant, agro-industrial partners and chemical inputs. The extent to which the relations and interdependencies shift substantially differs between the three VTFNs in this study. As Rosset and Martínex-Torres (2012) argue, relative autonomy is thus gained within a new set of interdependencies, and as this article affirms, autonomy is inherently relational. Figure 2 shows the variety of mechanisms, organized according to the dimensions of relational autonomy according to Mackenzie (2019), and enacted to shift interdependencies.

The results show a wide variety of mechanisms employed on the dimension "Determination" across all three VTFNs. De Meent is putting forward major changes in the agricultural and food system by counterscripting food as a public service; rural workers at De Meent are paid by the church for their work in food production and care rather than for the quantities of food produced. And, by providing access to land to people in asylum procedures, they move away from charity and more towards solidarity. At the same time, there is an opportunity to provide people in the asylum procedure with more equal opportunities by creating additional jobs at De Meent or by assisting them in establishing independent businesses based on the farm. Through the latter option, persons in the asylum procedure can become equally involved as rural workers or independent workers on the farm. The citizens organized in VOKO ensure re-embedding in the territory and moderate changes in the agricultural and food system. Farmers and citizens affiliated with VOKO jointly create a significant array of options in terms of food purchasing and selling. The ability to offer seasonal produce provides farmers who operate diversified farming systems with the opportunity to sell their products, resulting in greater diversity in the variety of available food through alignment of the food system with seasonal cycles.

However, freedom in purchasing behavior does not yet guarantee income security for farmers. Farmers engaged in Flevofood and producing bulk

Figure 2. Mindmap of Dynamics of Mechanisms to Shift Interdependencies



food for export have not realized significant options for a large group of farmers all at once. In the case of Flevofood, significant options for farmers consist, on the one hand, of catering to production for big buyers (e.g., public procurement schemes, farmer owned supermarkets with a territorial approach, etc.), and on the other hand, of crop diversification that would direct production toward northwestern Europe as well as a territorial market. To make adjustments such as crop diversification or the stopping of pesticide use, conventional farmers want different contracts with buyers that distribute or compensate for extra risk due to increased interdependency with nature. The latter asks for interfarm cooperation, as Lucas et al. (2019) call it, necessitating alignment and cooperation among farmers who supply to the same buyer. This cooperation enables them to collectively propose to the buyer improved pricing and contract terms for a set of practices that promote regeneration. Flevofood has not yet organized farmers on the basis of a joint buyer, but it does look for inspiration in that direction by visiting farmers who are diversifying, who are experimenting with soy production, and who have united themselves to arrange sales together. EU policy grants rights to agree on price surcharges to achieve sustainability objectives. These are suprastatutory sustainability standards where the agreements made are indispensable for achieving the sustainability goal (Wolberink & Baayen, 2024). Little use is made of this administrative space in the case of the Netherlands. To conclude, the three food networks boost the relational autonomy of both producers and consumers by offering more or less significant options for food system changes. Farmers and rural workers acquire more options to sell or distribute their produce within their territory, and consumers have more options to buy food produced in the territory. However, this does not necessarily lead to better prices, as farmers often lack power in markets without fair regulations and typically are not trained in negotiating skills.

The development of negotiating skills refers to the dimension "governance." The results demonstrate that mechanisms on the dimensions "authorization" and "governance" operate concurrently. In setting prices, the cultural norms (Mackenzie, 2019) of taking things for granted are repeated in food networks. Mackenzie's adapted framework is useful for looking at these issues. The relational autonomy perspective highlights the persistent interdependencies within VTFNS that otherwise tend to be considered independent from the industrial food system. Dependency on the industrial food system persists because in the governance and authorization dimensions the actors reproduce industrial food system rationales related to price-setting, even though the networks provide the opportunity to purchase and sell food in the territory. Alongside Maughan et al.'s (2020) focus on distributive and procedural justice, which examines how access, ownership, and decisionmaking about resources are formally arranged, Mackenzie's framework on relational autonomy also helps visualize whether people have the confidence (dimension: authorization), skills, and imagination (dimension: governance) to propose different price arrangements. Moreover, Wolberink and Baayen (2024) showed that there is administrative space to collectively make price agreements for a set of practices that promote regeneration and that move beyond what is obligated by law.

VTFNs struggle with handling large quantities of food, as seen with conventional food producers in Flevoland. They aim to sell their produce to large buyers like public institutions but have not succeeded so far. Achieving this requires effective policies on public procurement (dimension: governance) and farmer empowerment (dimension: authorization). Campbell (2023) highlights the challenges of setting up value-based institutional food procurement systems, which aim to consider more than just price in their purchasing decisions. Farmers rely on these institutions, which are themselves interconnected and dependent on one another. Aligning with local contexts can be difficult, which can reduce farmers' autonomy in these relationships (Campbell, 2023). Furthermore, a new territorial arrangement with public institutions requires farmers to supply less to old relations or to cut off these relations. Feola (2019) refers to this by the term "unmaking," understood as "a diverse range of interconnected and multilevel processes that deliberatively activated to 'make space' (temporally, spatially, materially, and/or symbolically) for radi-

cal alternatives that are incompatible with dominant modern capitalist configurations" (p. 979). Farmers stated in interviews that this unmaking is difficult because of sustainability schemes with which supermarkets try to attach farmers to one supermarket chain.

Territorial coordination and popular education are mechanisms that enhance the capacities to create relational autonomy within VTFNs. Diverse scholars highlight issues related to these mechanisms but do not connect them to the concept of relational autonomy. Maughan et al. (2020) note that reflexivity, the ability to continuously and critically examine one's own practices, is not a common practice and is not a "fixed and all-or-nothing endeavor" (p. 296). All discussions within the networks expand on what is possible to say, think, and do (Fairclough, 2010). Roodhof (2024) highlights the role of positive emotions in enhancing effectiveness. For instance, participants in a food forest network feel capable, hopeful, proud, and enthusiastic, which can help them handle future challenges. Similar to this study, relational autonomy is fostered through both esteem, trust (dimension: authorization), and reflective competences (dimension: governance).

Jointly defining values is an ongoing, participatory process in De Meent, whereas in the other two VTFNs this has mainly taken place at the start by the initiators. By jointly defining values at De Meent, they deprivilege white values (Session on Participatory Food Systems Governance at the 2021 Global Food Governance Conference et al., 2024). Emerging value creation also takes place around extending the age of male livestock, counter scripting weeds and residual flows for animal feed such as malting barley from beer production instead of using high-quality grains for feed. Value creation around animal welfare and nature restoration resulted in different, circular farming practices (Fairclough, 2010), as well as growers and eaters becoming more interdependent on other living beings and less dependent on inputs such as agrochemicals. The VTFNs in this study do not engage in risk-sharing in the case of failed harvests due to plagues, diseases, or harsh weather circumstances. This implies that the dependence on other living beings is disproportionately higher among farmers.

Roodhof (2024) emphasizes the need for research on power dynamics. The use of the concept "relational autonomy" provides insights into *whether* and *why* the relational autonomy of farmers, citizens, plants, and livestock is mutually promoted by initiatives of the VTFN. The results show that understanding and promoting relational autonomy at the network level for most living beings touches upon issues at the interface of determination, authorization, and governance. Mechanisms that promote mutual autonomy of all living beings become visible when we understand relational autonomy in VTFNs. Mutual autonomy is promoted by mechanisms (depicted in Figure 2) such as cultural appreciation, peer-to-peer learning, alternating roles, counterscripting, and calling in and calling out, among others.

Although Le Velly et al. (2022) did not apply the concept of relational autonomy, their study confirms how collective agency is promoted by diverse mechanisms on the three dimensions of determination, authorization, and governance. They describe how this is achieved by taking rules and values from both conventional and alternative supply chains (authorization). Two French collectives of ranchers and meat distributors reclaimed the determination of supply-chain organization from intermediaries by shifting rights (determination) and transferring knowledge and skill back to farmers and distributors through transparent and collective learning and negotiation with regard to meat quality, prices, and ways of interacting (governance). In one case, counterscripting was applied, which obligated buyers to purchase the entire animal rather than specific parts. However, logistical challenges arose when a buyer failed to uphold this agreement, thereby impacting the collective's autonomy. This underscores the interdependency and dynamic nature of relational autonomy, requiring ongoing attention. The examples in this study show that VTFNs can enhance the relational autonomy of farmers and citizens simultaneously. It reveals the mechanisms employed to shift interdependencies. To date, changes are minor to moderate, but capacities are being created. There is limited attention currently going toward mechanisms, supporting environments, the role of facilitators in unlearning (Van Oers et al., 2023) or unmaking.

The same counts for organizing farmers on the basis of a joint buyer to first create some space for change and include a set of practices that promote regeneration and circularity in their contracts with buyers. The latter can exist well next to multi-actor networks or living labs. These producer organizations can ensure that farmers can participate on an equal footing in VTFNs and living labs, and with more future opportunities to transform or stop "unmake" relations and shift interdependencies to territorial markets and natural processes. This approach aligns with Mackenzie's (2021) suggestion that social equality is a condition for relational autonomy.

Conclusion

The extent to which values-based territorial food networks create significant options for food system changes differs by VTFN and by member, but each provides competences, impulses, and knowledge that allow both human and non-human stakeholders to strengthen their relational autonomy, or at least the future potential for such autonomy. Mackenzie (2019) provides a framework to visualize the different mechanisms, such as alternating roles and counter scripting, that promote the relational autonomy of a network of farmers, citizens, and livestock simultaneously. Reversed, it also shows how relational autonomy of living beings is impaired by the lack of market regulation, well-functioning public procurement, and equal juridical positions of all living beings. The concept of relational autonomy illuminates the emerging and shifting interdependencies at the network level that move beyond the human/nature divide and that reflect the social nature of humanity.

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