



UTRECHT NETHERLANDS

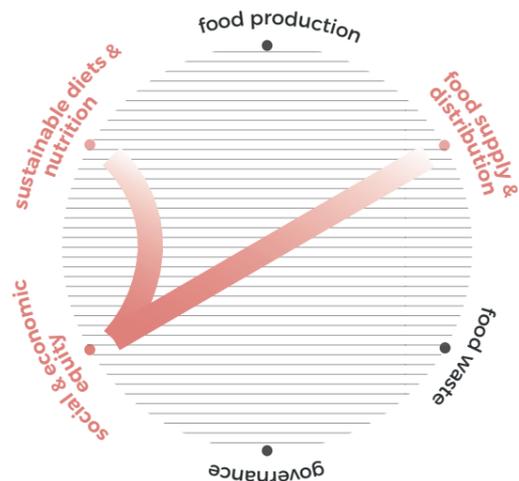
Title of Practice

UTRECHT: FOOD AS A MEANS OF REDUCING INEQUALITIES

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Category

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUITY

Main impacts on other MUFPP categories



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Context

According to the Utrecht Public Health Monitor, published in early 2014, the population of Utrecht experiences good levels of health. Upon closer examination, however, major **health inequalities** can be observed throughout the city, with a concentration in specific neighbourhoods and districts. Particularly in regards to food consumption patterns, this issue requires a concerted action involving not only the Municipality, but also the residents themselves, civil society associations and other local actors. Together with these stakeholders, the City of Utrecht developed a plan to disrupt this trend and prevent health inequalities from increasing, by recognizing the key role played by food and nutrition. In turn, several initiatives promoting healthy food and the reduction of such inequalities, both directly and indirectly, have been supported.

Overview of the food practice

Over the last several years, the city of Utrecht has implemented several activities aimed at increasing the consumption of **sustainable and healthy food** in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These included the creation of educational vegetable gardens and the promotion of urban agriculture. Gardens in particular do not just support local food production, but they also foster **social cohesion** while providing all citizens with green and **pleasant surrounding**. Local restaurants are also encouraged to promote healthy food choices, providing jobs and training places for long-unemployed young people and daytime activities for the elderly and disabled. This approach is complemented by more innovative actions to further explore the link between food and health in the Netherlands, such as a **food bank** initiative created to store food supplies for people in need. The resulting innovations and start-ups are prioritized for Overvecht, a neighbourhood with one of the highest rates of health conditions in Utrecht. Other activities target local production, supporting the consumption of locally-grown food not only at the household level, but also within the hospitality and public sector. The University Medical Centre of Utrecht is at the forefront of this initiative, offering local healthy food to its patients and employees.

Wherever possible, the city encourages sustainable purchasing, sustainable consumption and the prevention of food waste. Examples of the networks behind this movement are such alliances as the National City Network on Urban Agriculture, the Green Deal, efforts to reduce waste at all Academic Medical Centres and the creation of a Food Court on the Uithof campus, along with events such as the Future Food meeting in the Botanical Gardens, public open days and harvest festivals.

Results and lessons learned

The activities supported by the Municipality in **partnership** with a variety of actors such as the civil society, social entrepreneurs, a bank, schools and sport canteens, an insurance company and several other actors achieved significant results. Social restaurants and urban gardens provide **employment** to young residents, raising their incomes and helping them develop skills to **increase** their chances of future employment. At the same time, these places foster the **inclusion** of marginalized actors, providing a meeting point where people of all ages can work together or share a meal. Urban agriculture also reduces stress levels and improves the knowledge of urban gardeners, who become better informed about sustainable food production and consumption. All of these co-benefits contribute indirectly to **diminishing health inequalities across the city**.

This practice highlights the connection between food and health, which is a key element to consider when building a sustainable food system. It is also fundamental to invest in **food as a means of reducing inequalities** in the urban context, which often presents major differences across neighbourhoods.



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