

Bucharest Living Lab : Towards a Local Food Strategy for Bucharest District 6

AESOP4Food Sustainable Food Planning Course, 2024

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Report

(1) The subject/theme

Sector 6 of Bucharest is an administrative unit with diverse quarters like Crângași, Drumul Taberei, Ghencea, Giulești, Militari, and Regie. The sector covers 38 square kilometers, housing a population of 325,759 as of December 2021. Sector 6 aims to become a smart and green city, and recently developed an Integrated urban development program of District 6 of the municipality of Bucharest 2021-2030.

Satellite view of Bucharest District 6



Source : Google Earth

In the frame of the program, strategic priority n°2 is building a high-performance and inclusive social development. Strategic objective' 2.1 is the promotion of the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups and people at risk of poverty. Another strategic objective is the development of educational infrastructure and services. Under the umbrella of these objectives, several food initiatives have already been initiated. Firstly, the construction and equipment of a Food Bank for District 6, targeting vulnerable populations such as elderly, unemployed, disabled people, Roma people, numerous families, single mothers, etc. The second strategic objective, facilitating partnerships to ensure healthy nutrition for children in nurseries, schools, high schools and hospitals, opens a window of opportunity to develop the local food strategy in partnership with these institutions and local producers and retailers.

However, the sector still lacks a local food integrated framework. The theme of this Living Lab is thus to develop a local food strategy of Bucharest District 6, one of the six districts in Bucharest, in the framework of its strategic plans for sustainable urban development.

(2) The aim of the research

Bucharest's District 6 is thus starting a sustainable food strategy aimed at enhancing local production, decreasing environmental impacts, and fortifying community connections. The research conducted by the AESOP team aimed at creating a living lab—a collaborative environment where citizens, researchers, policymakers, and businesses unite to tackle complex challenges within the local food system - to start developing this local food strategy.

Consulting with the Centre for Innovation and Planning of District 6, we aim to identify first steps towards constructing a local food strategy for the district and raise political awareness on the question of food planning in a post-socialist political context that is not yet concerned with this topic, but has much potential considering their strategy and actions towards becoming a green city.

The results include a detailed map of District 6's food ecosystem, with key players and their interaction, as well as a proposal for general objectives aligning with community needs and sustainability ambitions, and a shared vision for District 6's future food system, leading to a strategic plan and scalable pilot projects.

(3) The research questions or the questions for analysis

There were different research objectives and outcomes for local and remote students. Local students were in charge of mapping the local food system and with field work activities, while remote students were given case-study evaluation tasks, in synergy with Bucharest's specific context. Local and remote students worked in synergy during lecture participatory activities and internal meetings, to establish the general objectives for the assignment, and jointly work on a proposal for the local food strategy, looking for potential partners inside and outside the municipality (ie. Capacity building with other cities), developing a communication strategy and a strategy to include vulnerable populations in the participation process.

More specifically, the tasks of the local students include mapping the local food system, establishing the general objectives, developing a vision and creating a strategy.

Remote students will answer following research questions on different themes:

- 1) **Integration:** How can District 6's food strategy integrate with the broader city-region for mutual sustainability benefits?
- 2) **Formation:** What are the necessary steps and key players for establishing an effective local food council at the district level?
- 3) **Objectives:** In a post-socialist capital's context such as District 6, what are the primary goals for a local food strategy?
- 4) **Engagement:** What are the most effective methods for engaging residents in the local food system strategy?

(4) The methods used

The methods used by local students include the analysis of the local urban development strategy, mapping of the local food system, including institutional, private and civil society stakeholders, as well as other initiatives relating to food systems, like festivals. Other methods include case study research of existing food strategies in Milano, Bergamo, Lille. An approach for a future Living Lab for a food strategy of District 6 was designed in a collaborative workshop by students and employees of the Centre for Innovation and Planning. The students also used collaborative goals setting to define the challenges, vision, goals and actions for the food strategy of District 6.

(5) The results, conclusions

Building a local food strategy

The results of this Living Lab include the mapping of local public, private, and civil society actors, the background analysis of similar examples, the co-organisation of a workshop together with the Centre for Innovation and Planning of District 6, planning of a bi-lateral meeting with Bergamo and a draft of the approach for a future Living Lab in order to further develop a food strategy for District 6.

Starting with the analysis of the current urban development program of District 6 we concluded that the strategic priority 2 relating to Efficient and inclusive social development is also of interest for the food system, as it proposes the construction and equipment of a food bank (that is already underway). Another strategic priority is 4.1. Development of educational infrastructure and services, as it specifies the need to facilitate partnerships to ensure healthy nutrition for children in nurseries, schools, high schools and hospitals.

The analysis of the current governance framework at local level, for District 6, allowed the identification of several points of entry for the development of a local food strategy. Among the entry points: collaboration with civil society organisation's working on education, strengthen ownership by the municipality through formal and informal multi-stakeholder consultations, initiatives in collaboration with private sector actors working on enabling healthy diets, lower environmental impacts from food systems, and local sourcing. Finally, awareness on food losses and Waste as well as on already available solutions could be supported through the comprehensive mapping of stakeholders that the case study also performed.

The results of the **stakeholder mapping** point out which actors have to be included in the process of creating a food strategy. Important institutional stakeholders need to be considered, like public administration, educational institutions like schools, preschools and nurseries, and other social services like care homes, food banks and day centres that are provided with food by the local authorities. Another important category of actors are food producers, including ecological producers and local producers from the peri-urban area. In order to develop a sustainable food system, it is necessary to support the production of locally produced food and to offer more healthy meals to beneficiaries of public catering services. Civil society actors like NGOs and neighbourhood communities also need to be taken into consideration, especially NGOs dealing with topics relating to food, like producers' organisations, but also NGOs facilitating community initiatives and participation. District 6 organises 5 or 6 festivals each year which have also been included in the mapping of the local food system, as they offer the possibility of hosting various events for public participation. The mapping of available land and green spaces, as well as abandoned industrial infrastructure is necessary in order to identify potential resources or places for community food growing activities.

The institutions relating to the agri-food sector were included in the mapping process, looking at production, value chain actors, social services actors and consumption. The power map of the institutional stakeholders places the public catering units, the social services agency and markets administrators as having the most interest and influence in the context of creating a food strategy for the district.

Vulnerable populations were identified with data collected from the food bank strategy, and enriched with field data from local students. Sector 6 is estimated to have around 4,000 elderly, 2,000 unemployed, 10,000 disabled people, 1,000 Roma people, 1,500 families with many children, 800 single mothers, 500 children at risk of dropping out of school. In order to successfully unfold the **participatory strategy** with those populations, strategic alliances with local associations must be developed. The following stakeholders were seen as potential partners for the project: 1) **NGOs facilitating public participation:** Plataforma de mediu pentru București, ADIZMB, Fundația Comunitară București, and CERE (Public Participation Resource Centre); 2) **Social services:** Carusel, Social Food, Banca Pentru Alimente, Ajungem Mari; 3) **Producers associations:** Romo, Eco Ruralis, Appaps.org.

After this identification, the following steps were drafted, to develop the participatory food governance in District 6:

1. **Develop a targeted communication strategy:** Focus on online communication strategies, but also use posters, flyer distribution in local markets, school and public education institutions, social services and canteens (September 2024).
2. **Set up a program of meetings with local NGOs** facilitating citizen engagement to involve them in the definition of the consultation (September 2024).
3. **Conduct public consultation on food habits and needs (September - December, 2024) :**
 1. Preliminary Surveys: during workshops and activities, social events, in NGO premises, socio-cultural and social centres, etc.) (September - October 2024)
 2. Establish working groups
 - a. Consumers : women and caregivers / vulnerable children and youth (Ajungem Mari) / elderly / beneficiaries of social aid services and food parcels (Social Food) / excluded vulnerable groups (Carusel).
 - b. Producers : Production surveys to small producers (Romo / Eco Ruralis).
 3. Program of weekly/monthly activities to be deployed (November - December 2024):
 - a. Producers : Community Mapping (objective: understanding production practices, opportunities and barriers)
 - b. Consumers: Card visualisation (objective : understanding consumers needs and priorities)
4. **Public Consultation with consumers and producers :** Monitoring and Evaluation of the Food Strategy: Smiley face / goal prioritisation exercise (could use Mural and previous workshop resources) (March - April 2025).

Case studies

In order to develop a successful strategy for district 6 we also did a **wider context analysis** of different relevant case studies from Europe. The case study research includes the TAST'in FIVES project in Lille, the workshop of the European Network of New Towns workshop on Just and Inclusive Green Transition, the Food Policy in Bergamo, the development of the Dublin food strategy and the process of safeguarding the peri-urban voids in A Coruña.

Lille Taste'n FIVES

Lille's TAST'in FIVES (Transforming Areas with Social Talents: Feed, Include, Value, Educate, Share), revealed itself to be a substantially formative example on how to develop a progressive participatory food initiative in a disadvantaged area having been disconnected from its food related activities.

As part of a larger brownfield regeneration strategy, the project aimed to reverse negative trends of urban poverty in the deprived area of Five Cail. The project lasted from 2017 to 2021, with first the implementation of a temporary food court l'Avant-Goût, a prefigurative space where a wide range of food related activities were tested, and then the opening of the final food court, Chaud Bouillon.

Its objectives were 1) to combat poverty and social exclusion through the (re)introduction of productive activities centred on food, 2) empower local residents and stakeholders and 3) Address malnutrition issues and promote healthy diets.

After analysing participation strategies in Lille, and taking into account Bucharest's idiosyncrasy, three main barriers to develop the participatory governance were identified:

1. The most impacted by the project are sometimes the most marginalised. Thus, accessibility must be ensured through correct timing, covering transport fees, food, childcare, etc...

2. Participatory settings always risk replicating power dynamics, not everyone feels as confident to speak. Fostering inclusive and empowering environments are key to ensure equal participation (good facilitation, separate working groups, preliminary meetings with some groups, etc).
3. In the same way as Cailles in Lille, Sector 6 also presents a complex socio-political context in which to work in. The project might face the reluctance of potential beneficiaries and partners, especially taking into consideration the post-socialist context, and the historical lack of inclusion of food in political agenda.

Despite the similarities between Lille and Bucharest's food strategy examples, Lille's success story is deeply reliant on the investment of the municipality in the project, and on the already existing awareness on the importance of food policy, both between the populations and institutional actors.

Except for hunger alleviation strategies for socially excluded people, food security and sustainability have historically been excluded from local and national political agendas in Romania. Including them in local agendas, and raise interest among local vulnerable communities will be a struggle. However, political momentum, with reelection of PNL's Ciprian Ciucu, opens a window of opportunity to consolidate District 6 Local Food Strategy.

The following lessons came out from this comparison:

1. **Adequate recruitment, clear identification of expectations, suitable communication processes** are key to reach **functional governance** (ie. local NGOs and organisations to include vulnerable populations).
2. Collaboration with higher education and research institutions (ie. research action, design proper monitoring and evaluation strategies for the project .
3. On-going networking, visibility/communication strategies and regular feedback from users and partners.
4. Adapt project to local socio-economic context, to ensure economic and social benefits.
5. Co-constructing with **vulnerable populations** and ensuring **accessibility to the facilities and its activities** and **build social acceptability** (logistics, timing, childcare provision, free activities, creating safe spaces...)

To enhance our assessment and understanding of community involvement and awareness regarding ecological and social transitions, it is essential to incorporate experiences from the Living Lab assignment led by Roxana Triboi in collaboration with the Bucharest District 6 municipality.

New Town Institute Workshop/European Network of New Towns

In March, Bucharest District 6 representatives participated in an engaging workshop organised by the New Towns Institute (NTI) as part of the Network Lab #2 - Just and Inclusive Green Transition event at Grand Paris Sud. This workshop brought together urban planners, policymakers, and community leaders from across Europe to discuss sustainable development and the revitalization of new towns. The event featured visits to innovative projects like the ecodistrict "Les Docks" and the urban farm "Saint Lazare," as well as collaborative workshops on sustainable food systems, energy efficiency, and green urban planning. Represented by Roxana Triboi, the Food Policy initiative gained invaluable insights into best practices and innovative solutions for building sustainable and inclusive urban environments, which will be crucial in their ongoing efforts to enhance local governance and urban sustainability.

City-to-City Exchange with Bergamo for Capacity Building

Currently ongoing is a city-to-city exchange program with Bergamo, designed to build capacity and foster collaboration between the two cities. This initiative, lead by Roxana Triboi as a Food Policy representative, should enable Bucharest District 6 representatives to visit Bergamo in November

2024. During this visit, the team will learn from Bergamo's experiences in establishing a Food Policy Council, integrating local products into public procurement, and organising educational activities focused on sustainable food systems. In return, Bergamo representatives will visit Bucharest in December 2024 to review draft strategies, participate in public consultations, and provide feedback on stakeholder engagement processes. This reciprocal exchange aims to enhance the sustainability and inclusivity of food policies in both cities, leveraging the expertise and experiences of each to drive positive change in urban food governance.

Dublin Food Strategy

Additionally, our team has sought to establish a support and experience exchange with metropolitan food strategy for Dublin as an emerging initiative for a territory complex as Bucharest, drawing valuable insights from their approach to developing a comprehensive food strategy. Shashank Yadav has thoroughly examined Dublin's methodology, highlighting several key initiatives:

- **Food Strategy Development:** Dublin is actively building a food strategy aimed at improving access to healthy and sustainable food. This initiative focuses on creating policies that address food production, consumption, and waste management.
- **Public Consultation:** In January 2022, Dublin conducted a public consultation to gather extensive data on food habits and experiences. This data collection is critical in shaping informed and effective food policies.
- **Eat the Street Festival:** In 2023, Dublin hosted the "Eat the Street" festival, an event designed to raise public awareness and engagement in sustainable food practices. This festival brought together the community, encouraging active participation and learning.
- **Collaborations and EU-funded Projects:** Dublin's efforts are bolstered by collaborations with local stakeholders and participation in EU-funded projects like Cultivate. These partnerships enhance the city's capacity to implement sustainable food practices and foster a community-oriented approach.

A Coruña

The peri-urban spaces of our cities are spaces of conflict. Coveted spaces for their proximity to the central city and their possibilities to be transformed into residential expansion areas. Their real estate value based on their building capital gains defines them in orthodox local planning instruments so that the majority of these unique spaces of agrarian origin and with great potential for the development of peri-urban agriculture, have disappeared. Those that have survived to this day are invaluable spaces for balancing the urban metabolism, constituting authentic spaces for decongestion of the dense built fabric. The soils of agricultural origin in the surroundings of the city are unique fertile soils with territorial heritage values that require their safeguarding.

- It is important to consider planning at the level of the region or metropolitan area, that is, beyond the limits of the urban centre itself, including towns, semi-urban areas and peri-urban and rural areas adjacent to the city (RUAF, 2013).
- Establish links between those who produce food and consumer groups or other sales channels (RUAF, 2011).
- Creation of local value chains in collaboration with groups of producers.

Anyway, **before any consideration and application of food policies in the city, the availability of peri-urban agricultural land even undeveloped must be guaranteed:**

- Importance of integrating rigorous participation processes that incorporate a diversity of actors
- Use planning tools to modify local management plans based on criteria to safeguard peri-urban fertile soils not occupied by urbanisation.
- Promote intrinsic heritage and environmental values and intangible values such as: The symbolic values; Relational values.

As part of the Living Lab some **actions** have already been taken in order to continue the development of the food strategy. One of the main actions was the participation in a workshop

organised by the Centre for Innovation and Planning on the green infrastructure development plan of the district, where we included a track on the food strategy. This event was useful for starting the discussion about addressing food systems planning. The conclusions of the collaborative goals setting and visioning of this workshop have been incorporated into our proposal.

Other related events we participated in during this Living Lab was a workshop organised by a consortium of NGOs advocating for the implementation of community composting stations in all districts of Bucharest. The task of this workshop was to determine an appropriate process for implementing such composting stations, together with different stakeholders: inhabitants of the district, NGO members and representatives of the business sector.

Another complementary event was the Urboteca Fellowship participatory diagnostic for Masca Theatre as a community hub. The participatory process aimed to establish the needs of local stakeholders from different interest groups (community, public administration, business, research and environmental NGOs) in relation to such a community hub and one of the main ideas that came up was a community garden as a place for building a sense of community and educating people and children about environmental and food issues.

As a **proposal for the structure of the Living Lab** we included academic partnerships with the universities of urban planning, agronomy and political sciences in Bucharest, along with NGOs focusing on food security as well as producers' associations and neighbourhood associations. Private sector representatives as well as local authorities should also be directly engaging from the start in co-generating projects as well as broader systemic coordination to increase coherence of supply chains for healthy diets.

One of the main partners is the local municipality, including the Centre for Innovation and Planning as coordinator of the Living Lab, and the public markets and public canteens as partners in the process.

We proposed a timeline for the food strategy in District 6, for a year-long Living Lab, starting in September-October 2024 with an initial assessment (including a cost-benefit analysis and broader budgeting for, at least, the first 24 months), continuing with stakeholder engagement biannually, the development of a Strategy that will also go through a public consultation before finalisation and approval. The first 12 months should be concluded through a detailed planning of the implementation and establishments of a monitoring system. The entire process should also have an ongoing evaluation mechanism that can identify critical risks and evaluate / propose alternative paths for reaching the overall objective of launching the Bucharest District 6 Food Systems for Healthy Diets Strategy.

For communicating with the local population and other stakeholders we proposed a **communication campaign** including social media channels, public events and interactive online mapping.

- Through the examination of other food policies the importance of right communications has been established, although to address different age groups of the society, different channels of communications have to be established.
- The school going kids need workshops and seminars in schools and also establishment of practical food labs in the school or a common area where multiple schools can interact can be established to disperse knowledge to the young minds, which they can start learning from a young age and grow up with practical and theoretical knowledge of the food system.
- The teenagers and young adults are more engaged on social media platforms and city events which can be used to spread awareness of the ongoing programs and workshops related to foodscapes in the nearby area, and also the work done by the food councils which will help raise awareness in about the local foodscapes.
- The old people are sometimes not very well versed with the new digital approach hence the print media and placards can be used to raise awareness about the programs and the ongoing work and they can also be asked to share their knowledge as they usually have knowledge of indigenous and cultural food systems which can be passed on to the young generations.
- To bring all these people together, workshops and events in the city area can be done including multiple actors and stakeholders which will help bring people together and share experiences and exchange knowledge among different sections of the community and also increase the opportunities of collaboration and community driven participatory initiatives.

We devised a multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary consultation concept for the launch of the Living Lab as a two days event with a focus on knowledge exchange and a workshop to facilitate capacity development on food systems thinking.

(6) Short evaluation of the process.

Ioana: I appreciate working in a Living Lab setting, knowing students with different backgrounds, exchanging knowledge and applying what we have learnt on a concrete project that will continue after the finalisation of the course.

Camelia: Excellent lectures and great conversations on how to work on the strategy for District 6. Informative to know the other groups work too.

Raluca: being involved with AESOP4FOOD has greatly enriched my knowledge and experience. The courses provided valuable technical guidance, well organised, while participating in the Living Lab pushed me to contribute to a very specific and practical project: the food strategy for District 6. Despite the short time, I believe that, together with the project, we succeeded in planting a significant seed for District 6 to prioritise food for all its citizens. I am grateful for all the interactions and for discovering wonderful people passionate and engaged in ensuring food security for everyone in the future, grateful to the organisers for putting together and delivering such a great combination of theoretical with practical training.

Maria: Being able to share similar experiences in different contexts has been really enriching. The living lab of district 6 in Bucharest has been very well organised and has achieved very good results in such a diverse international context.

Carmen: Bucharest Sector 6 living lab is at its early stages, and will undoubtedly need further assessment and strategic reconfigurations as the process moves on. The participation strategy has been developed as a tentative guideline that will be enriched with field data, inputs from local NGOs and social services, and adapted to better match Sector 6 idiosyncrasy.

Concerning the course and the work settings, the lectures were enriching to develop the work, and working in living labs settings really allowed us to apply what we learned in a concrete setting. Working in a local/remote students basis was particularly enriching, as we could combine our theoretical desk research with the findings on the ground. However, it also presented some challenges that were reflected in the final deliverable, such as the lack of time to develop more in-depth, place-based research for remote students, and the challenge to make time to work together, due to our busy schedules.

Shashank: AESOP4FOOD is a really nice course to learn about how to get involved in the foodscapes, the lectures are very insightful on how to start forming policies, and also give opportunities to learn about active initiatives in other parts of the world which can later be combined in new food policies. Also, the living labs provide opportunities to meet other people curious about foodscapes and knowledge sharing, which is also good for networking and future collaboration. Overall, the course is nicely designed to learn and apply the knowledge during the duration of the course.