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DRAFT FOODSHIFT CITIZEN EMPOWERMENT SCHEME

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Abstract (for public dissemination only)	This document outlines the methodologies and actions that local governments, research institutions, local food initiatives and citizens can take to facilitate the empowerment of citizens in a city-region: a Citizen Empowerment Scheme.

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Citizen Empowerment Scheme

What is a Citizen Empowerment Scheme?

Transforming our food system to address urgent challenges such as unhealthy diets, malnutrition and undernutrition, insufficient reduction of GHG emissions & a widening urban-rural gap, is necessary. Citizens play a crucial role in this transformation, to name a few: their increasing demand for healthy and more plant-based food, engaging in food related NGOs, setting up food sector SMEs and grassroots organizations, influencing the food system in their city-region by involving them in local food strategies, etc.


In the FoodSHIFT2030 project, all city-region partners have engaged themselves to engage citizens, including vulnerable groups, in order for them to make informed decisions on sustainable food or take an active role as co-innovator and decision-maker in the food system. This document outlines the methodologies and actions that local governments, research institutions, local food initiatives and citizens can take to facilitate the empowerment of citizens in a city-region: a **Citizen Empowerment Scheme**.

What is citizen engagement or participation?

Citizen engagement or participation stems back to the participation ladder of Arnstein (1969) on public participation. It is about getting local people involved in the decision-making process of a local government. Citizen participation is the basis for a thriving democracy: when people get involved in and support political decisions, they begin to feel responsible for what goes on around them. There are different levels of citizen participation, ranging from low level influence to high level influence: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating & empowering.

While citizen participation is crucial in the establishment of collective decision-making in (food) policy, we also need to take into account the role of citizens in food system innovations. Both are actively linked. Food system innovations often have links with local inhabitants and can therefore spread their vision to a larger group of citizens. Only within a regional or local framework that supports food system innovation via supportive policies, subsidies, legislative space, knowledge and capacity-building, food innovators can optimally stimulate citizens to take action within the food system.

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Different levels of citizen participation, translated to the food system perspective

We now translate these specific levels of participation to the food system.

Informing: local government informs citizens with transparent, up-to date information. This can be related to upcoming decisions affecting the food system, announcement of local events or sharing of ongoing insights and innovations from many food system related activities in the city-region. At this level, the public is not actively involved in decision-making and decision-makers are not influenced by the public. Higher levels of citizen engagement is thus desirable but it can be a first step towards raising awareness on (1) existing innovations and trajectories within the local food system or (2) relevant policies or programs to which citizens can participate.

Consulting: asking local people for quick or detailed feedback about their views and ideas about governmental decisions or plans via, for example, polls or surveys. Consulting can also be used to get an insight about what drives specific citizen target groups, some examples: how do children value the quality of children meals in restaurants, what are the views and ideas on food system topics of people in a specific neighborhood, are people willing and interested to actively participate in a local food strategy. In this way, the process of consulting can serve as a built-up step towards other levels of citizen engagement.

Involvement: when local people are involved this means that there is some form of active involvement of citizens within the activities of a local government, NGO or company and citizens. Involvement can be related to decision making (e.g. citizen input in a food governance program), to idea generation (e.g. local action, identification of key places), volunteer work or crowdfunding. It concerns a two-way flow of communication (government & citizens) and the active input and actions from citizens.

Empowering: empowerment refers to supporting citizens with knowledge and vision building, and/or financial resources in order for them to actively take up a role in the local food system. Residents can allocate funds to their favorite ideas or propose their own projects to be operationalised by the city-region, such as participatory budgeting, community proposals, setting up a political body in which citizens can autonomously give input in policy making (e.g. citizen council). This is the highest level of citizen engagement and highly valuable but isn't always realistic for a city-region.

Empowering can also be issued within local bottom-up civic organizations, for instance by engaging local residents with a local food system or community activity related to the food system such as a food Hub, food cooperative or food commons. Local residents can be involved to play an active role as volunteer, co-investor, spokesperson, etc.

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Role of digital platforms in improving a city-regions' initiatives for citizen engagement

Many cities have launched a digital platform where local residents are informed about and (sometimes) can participate in the political decisions made by a city-region. Such a platform makes it possible to engage and give a voice to many residents of a city, since often residents want to participate in public decision-making but are largely unfamiliar with the ways of how to do this. A digital platform can overcome this barrier.

The platform 'Citizen Lab' is an example of a digital community engagement platform for local governments. Currently, over 400 local governments (spread over 18 countries) use this platform to involve local residents into governance. As such, more than 750.000 citizens are actively involved in shaping their local communities. According to their statistics, their partner governments have seen an 12 % increase in resident engagements (compared to no digital platform) - also from underheard groups. It also is beneficial for the governments since it decreases time spent on analysis and reporting (the platform has that built in) and they engage residents more often across more issues (source: website + personal information Citizen Lab). There are also other platforms, built by a municipality himself. To name a few examples: Berlin has the 'mein Berlin' platform (mein.berlin.de — meinBerlin), Barcelona has the platform 'Barcelona Sostenible' (bcnsostenible.cat).

However, a digital platform also involves challenges;

- The platform has to be known among the local residents of a city-region. This highlights the importance of the involvement of the municipality of a city since they have the resources and capacities (e.g. money, networks, media channels) to 'promote' or to make citizens aware about its existence and its functionalities.
- There is also the phenomena of a participation gap, where a person's education and other social traits are very strong predictors of who participates. So there will always be a group of citizens that which are hard to reach, especially in the case of limited access to internet and technology.

To overcome this, a city should develop a well-thought citizen participation plan and could also designate a participation officer.

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Examples of citizen engagement activities in the FALs

We now describe three cases on citizen engagement of partner cities of the FoodSHIFT2030 project.

Ostend

The city of Ostend has put the theme 'food' on top of their political agenda. They have recently launched a food strategy named 'Oostende Oogst' which takes up relevant themes such as short supply chain, food waste, social inclusivity, establishment of a food council & improving food literacy. They also have a food- and agricultural park 'Gardens of Stene' for citizens and visitors of Ostend, which brings people closer to locally grown food (fruit, vegetables, meat) and provides outdoor space for recreation and education (e.g. a consumer supported agriculture (CSA), cooking workshops, social inclusive food events). To reach their food-goals, the gardens of Stene receive support from the city and actively collaborate with different local food innovators of Ostend.

The city of Ostend covers different levels of engaging citizens for the operationalisation of their food strategy and activities in the agricultural park. This is today mainly done via the digital platform 'ons.oostende.be' ([Burgerparticipatieplatform van Stad Oostende | CitizenLab](#)) but also via other online & offline channels;

Food- and agricultural park 'Gardens of Stene'

- They organized four city-dialogues (on inspiration, discussion, discussing plans & presenting plans) during the planning phase until the actual establishment of the agricultural park. Citizens could provide their ideas and views and discuss different options of the facilities and the design of the park. Residents, users, farmers & owners of the agricultural park were invited (**level of information & involvement**).
- They informed the citizens about the establishment of the agricultural park via a festival, via the kick-off event of the FoodSHIFT project and via different communication channels (social media, website, press releases). They also developed 4 infomercials on the park for the target audiences: schools, visitors, surrounding residents & actual users of the park. This was distributed via social media and the hospitality organization 'Tourism Ostend' (**level of informing**).
- Currently, the park has a community supported agriculture (CSA) (type of farming where members pay an annual fee in return for fresh organic vegetables all year). The members are actively involved in the farmer activities on a voluntary basis and can give input on which type of vegetables to be grown and participate in all kind of cooking activities (**level of consulting and involvement**).

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Fig. Four city-dialogues



Fig. Bio-picking garden

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The food strategy 'Oostende Oogst'

For the launching of the food strategy, the city has sent a seed bag (to grow vegetables) accompanied with information on the food strategy to all residents of Ostend. They also communicated via social media (website & facebook), local newspapers and several press moments (**level informing**). In addition to this process of informing a two-step approach was taken with the goal to engage citizens more actively within the food strategy.

- In a first step, a citizen survey was developed to question the inhabitants of Ostend about the theme of food. The survey questioned their knowledge and general impression on the agricultural park, their awareness of the food strategy and whether they want to be actively involved in the food strategy. The goal was to first identify those citizens with a special interest in food-related issues (cooking, growing, sharing) in order to later on involve them more actively in collective sustainability action. The survey was launched via their online platform 'ons.oostende.be' but also followed up through personal outreaching work (e.g. on the farmers' market in Ostend). The aim of the latter was to also reach citizens who are not aware of the online platform. The results of the survey were communicated via the online platform and the city's website (**level of informing, consulting and involvement**).
- In a second step, those citizens that had indicated to be interested in being actively involved in the food strategy were invited to a workshop which was built up in the following way:
 - A presentation of the FoodSHIFT project and feedback of the survey results
 - A 'Q an A session' with two concrete citizen initiatives (questions like 'How do you engage other citizens?', 'What do you expect from the city?', 'How do you ensure the long term existence of the citizen initiative?'); both initiatives were linked to the ongoing participatory budget 'Wijkprikkel' (see below)
 - A presentation of three concrete organizations active in the Food system, who focus on and solicit citizens.
 - Two parallel brainstorm sessions (one on setting up concrete actions, one on food policy).



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The event was also announced on the online platform, so all who wanted could participate. The goal of this event was to inform the local residents on the existing projects and food initiatives (civic initiatives, social non-profit organizations) linked to the food strategy, with a request of citizen participation. Dialogue tables were organized to harvest ideas and actions linked to the food strategy, but also to help local residents in launching their own food initiative **(level of informing, collaboration and empowerment)**.

Another project in Ostend, called 'Wijkprikkel', can be linked to the food strategy. 'Wijkprikkel' is a participatory budget project of Ostend. Local residents of Ostend can propose their own projects and allocate fundings to the different projects via the online platform. Wijkprikkel covers all themes and does not particularly focus on food and can range from setting up a music festival in the neighborhood to renovating a local park. Within the project proposals there were however spontaneously some food related topics. This allowed the coordinator of the Ostend food strategy to actively make a connection with these initiatives and link them to the ongoing food system innovations. **(level of empowerment)**.

Challenges

Some specific challenges could be identified in relation to the various processes of citizen engagement in Ostend:

- Getting citizens to the platform; low awareness and knowledge of the platform.
- Increase level of participation (always the same voices) - what about the 'unusual suspects'.
- What about vulnerable groups who do not have access to such platforms?
 - Fieldwork: not many responses in the field + extra work
- Despite many communication activities, food strategy and agricultural park is not widely known.
- Target audience: difficult to align
- Citizen engagement efforts often depend on political party and legislation.

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Barcelona


The main focus of the Fab lab Barcelona (Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia) is the development of the [Food Tech 3.0 programme](#) to find solutions for local production in future cities. More specifically, the development and piloting of **open source food technology** and affiliated processes that can facilitate the management, monitoring, social function, and efficiency of food production, elaboration, consumption, and recycling in cities. In this Food Tech 3.0 programme, they collaborate with and support different local food tech innovators. The main requirement for this support is that each of the food tech innovations engages with local communities and that these communities become drivers in their innovations (tech that is community based). The Barcelona case is an example of how citizens can be engaged in an abstract or unknown concept to the public, which nevertheless harbors the potential for food system innovation.


Because of the complicated concept of food technology and the Food Tech 3.0 approach, Fab lab Barcelona has set themselves clearly defined goals regarding the level of citizen engagement. The first phase of the project was mainly **informing citizens: familiarizing citizens with the concept**. They introduced citizens to and let them explore with their approach to food technology and their definition of food technology for FoodTech 3.0. This via different series of informative talks (online and in person events - over 900 viewers participated in the collection of moments):


- “Shifting Food: the Food Tech we need now,” a get-together for 50 disruptors in the Food Tech community
- The **Food Tech 3.0 online launch**
- FoodSHIFT 2030’s “**Urban & Peri-Urban Agriculture**” webinar
- The “**Community Women & Recipes for Change**” talk in the Empowering Women series by the Social Gastronomy Movement
- London on Around the World: Barcelona, a talk introducing how Fab Lab Barcelona approaches food tech and examples
- Festa de Alimentació Sostenible, the annual fair during Barcelona’s patron saint holidays, in which citizens met examples of food technology and shared their opinions of it
- FoodTure, annual food design conference in which several innovators exhibited their projects




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When informing citizens, they encountered different challenges in keeping citizens onboard and gained valuable insights along the process;


- Lack of awareness on the topic of food technology: what it means, what it can look like, and how they might (or already) engage with it and how it can be used as a resource towards a food system transition. Therefore, it was necessary to give in depth explanations of what we mean by food technology and provide existing and potential examples of what it could look like so that the public can imagine it. This is often a slow process and requires reiteration. What's traditionally associated with food technology is technology that's produced by large companies and technology that is used to mine data from citizens.
- The existing technology literacy gap created a general barrier to understanding. Audiences might not be so interested in building the technology themselves, but rather in the food production process.
- For users that are struggling to obtain healthy and safe food, the term and image of food technology comes across as a luxury tool that is not applicable to them. For these groups, it's essential to show how food tech can be a tool to obtain and make food for themselves, promoting food sovereignty.

For the last phase of the project, they are focused on introducing food tech to new communities through practical applications. This will be done via **informing, involving and empowering citizens**;


- Writing an online Gitbook about Food Tech 3.0 and the approach to food from Fab Lab
- Barcelona in order to share learnings from our incubation program, discuss the relevance of food technology as a tool for food citizenship and provide examples of food technology within the Fab Labs network. The Gitbook is designed for tech makers to understand how they can engage with new concepts and communities and for individuals and communities that are interested in food technology. The Gitbook will be disseminated to the other FoodSHIFT partners, throughout the Fab Lab and their larger network to engage new communities of both makers and citizens.
- At least 3 community workshops in which 3 different types of food technologies are introduced to a community, and participants are trained in its use. Each of the workshops will be directed to a specific community group, for example: rooftop garden users/managers, civic center initiatives involved with food and teachers. They will use the train-the-trainer approach so that these trainers can share knowledge with their own communities on how to use the selected technology. The workshops will be documented and shared in the Gitbook.
- Continued exchanges with their following city-regions: sharing the workshops, traveling abroad to train them in conducting the workshops and using the food tech.
- Using the Food Tech 3.0 discord to foster ongoing conversation between tech makers and communities.

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Wroclaw


In the FoodSHIFT2030 project, the municipality of Wroclaw, WUELS (Wrocław university for environmental and life sciences) and the Foundation for Sustainable Development (NGO) collaborate together on two main themes: Community Gardens and a citizen-driven food system. In general, their goal related to citizen engagement is to:

- 1) Empower citizens to run community and school gardens with the help of the Foundation for Sustainable Development.
- 2) To translate the research of WUELS, on the current state of the food system, to the local citizens to increase their knowledge and awareness of their impact on the food system.


In the first phase of the project, the city of Wroclaw mainly focused on the operationalisation of **community gardens**: The Municipality of Wrocław established three school gardens within the FoodSHIFT2030 project and eight more with help of municipal funding. The city prepared a formal procedure whereby citizens can co-decide in choosing the plot and offer support in establishing community gardens on the city's grounds (**level consulting and involvement**). In addition, workshops and training were organized by the Foundation for Sustainable Development (NGO) to engage citizens and equip them with knowledge and skills to run community and school gardens (**level of empowerment**). A series of online (during COVID) and offline meetings with future gardeners interested in creating community gardens and other Polish cities' representatives experienced in establishing community gardens, were organized. About 80 people participated (**level of informing**).

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For the last phase of the project, Wroclaw city is focused on supporting **citizen driven food systems**. This means that they:


- Want to increase knowledge among local citizens about the current state of the food system and to raise awareness of the impact of their food choices on the current food system. To do so, they organized three open picnics for citizens with all kinds of activities and food talks, to promote short supply chains and local producers. They will also use their digital citizen platform to display an interactive dashboard with the results of their scientific research on the state of the current food system. Citizens can in that way be informed and use the data in an interactive way. For example, they will be able to calculate how much land is needed to grow local crops. They will also display a digital map that displays where the food sold in Wroclaw comes from and is produced (**level of informing**).
- Want to gain insights into the views and opinions of local residents about the food system in their city. In Wroclaw, many local food markets are organized but they are not successful. The city therefore wants to run a survey among citizens (via, among other, the digital citizen platform) to investigate why they do not go to the local food markets. They also collaborate with food market managers to get insights into the food-needs of the citizens, as well as more information on the type of products being sold by the market-exhibitors (**level of consultation**).


They encountered several barriers and gained valuable learning lessons while supporting citizen driven food systems;


- On governance level, there was a lack of cooperation between different departments of the municipality and in understanding who is working on specific aspects of the food system in the city administration. This has been resolved by employing a person responsible for the establishment of a food strategy (food strategy is not launched yet). This person organized interdepartmental meetings and provided an overview of which department is doing what related to the topic of food. This alignment on views related to food within the municipality is very important because the municipality also supports local food innovators. When the municipality is internally in disagreement, they cannot support the local innovators and therefore the local innovators do not feel empowered to change. The local innovators often have a large constituency of citizens. They are thus the change makers towards more sustainable food systems and awareness raisers for citizens.
- Despite the efforts they are doing as a city, there remains low recognition and awareness of the impact of the current food system on the environment in Wroclaw among citizens. An important lesson here is the need for coordinated actions of citizens and local authorities supported by the knowledge delivered by researchers to improve the food system in Wrocław. In the future they will use the citizen platform to increase the general awareness, via a variety of manners. The platform will be used to promote events and short supply chains, be linked to articles, output from the FoodSHIFT 2030 project and be used to promote the food strategy.

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Blueprint towards citizen empowerment in a city-region

Main aspects to be considered & tips for the engagement of citizens in public decision & to empower citizens to change the food system;

1 – Always inform citizens first

There are four different levels of engaging citizens in a city region. It is, however, highly important to **always start with the lowest level: informing**. Very often, the knowledge and awareness among inhabitants of a city region related to food activities and initiatives is low, or nonexistent. When there is no knowledge or awareness, no way you can optimally engage citizens in public decision making. Especially when it concerns difficult or abstract topics, such as food tech, to avoid biases or misunderstanding (example: food tech is sometimes seen as a luxury good). Also, when people do not know their city has a food strategy or policy, they will not be able to relate their own actions to this larger framework (see further)


2 – Vision alignment within municipality


Make sure that **the departments within a municipality have the same vision on the topic of food**. A **system-thinking exercise can be very useful** to do so. It is the responsibility of a municipality to support food initiatives within their city-region. When there is an internal conflict within a municipality, these food innovators and their innovations cannot receive full support. Food innovators are usually supported by and collaborate with a large group of citizens. Food innovators are thus an important vehicle to engage with a group of citizens and therefore support of the municipality is important.

3 - Citizens to ensure a vivid food strategy


When a city launches a food strategy, they should engage citizens to ensure their goals are reached. Often cities use food strategies as an internal brand to communicate with other cities. **To avoid food strategies to become a dead letter, merely an internal brand, it is wise to engage citizens**. A three step approach can be useful to do so. First, inform citizens that a city has a food strategy and what it entails (what is a food strategy, what are the goals, where do we want to be in a few years). Second, consult citizens' interest (e.g. via large scale survey) on the topic of food to find active citizens (citizens willing to participate in a food strategy) not yet activated (no awareness or knowledge yet). Third, brainstorm with the group of active citizens on actions linked to the goals of a food strategy or how they can join the already existing food initiatives. By activating citizens that are interested in food, no effort is wasted to those not interested at all - it can on the contrary help to specify the right target group.

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4- Reach the not so usual suspects


Often, when a city-region or a food initiative wants to engage citizens, only the usual suspects or citizens familiar with these forms of participatory processes participate. **How do you reach citizens that you usually do not reach, or give a voice to more residents of a city (including the vulnerable)?** This remains a million dollar question in many of the discussions concerning participatory processes. There are a variety of ways that can help you with this:

- Adapt communication and language to your target audience(s). To define your target audience(s), organize a workshop within your organization or municipality. In literature, you can identify a variety of ways to define your audience(s). You start by segmenting the market in homogeneous groups (groups of citizens that have equal characteristics and needs). This segmentation can be based upon 1) demographical criteria (e.g. age, sex, culture), 2) geographical criteria (e.g. neighbourhood, climate), 3) socio-economical criteria (e.g. SES, education), psychological criteria (e.g. Lifestyle - difficult to access, often only via market research companies) or behavioral criteria (also difficult to access). Next, choose the target audience(s) you want to reach and define how you will reach them and what language you will use. For example, if your target group is vulnerable people, choose non-scientific, easy to comprehend language and offline communication (e.g. fieldworkers; see below). Once you have defined your target groups, always start with informing them on the topic, before activating them in further engagement.
- When communicating and working on citizen participation it is important to take into account the rationale of food citizenship when approaching citizens in communicative and participative efforts. This means:
 - The importance of communicating the wordings and phrases that represent the underlying idea of food citizenship such as ‘active citizen’, ‘contributing to the food system’, ‘co-deciding food related issues’. This also means going astray from alternative more passive framings and understandings such as ‘consumer’, ‘end-user’, ‘client’, etc.
 - Showing and connecting citizens with existing successful citizens and citizen collectives or societal organisation which welcome volunteering in the food system, to make citizens understand that they are not alone.
 - Emphasizing what can be lost by not engaging actively as a citizen; change to participate in decisions, to meet new people, to learn for future career opportunities, etc.
 - Offering a set of clear-cut possibilities - e.g. in terms of a call of a local food strategy - for citizens to engage with. This can be both thematic (e.g. Food poverty, Food loss, Collective gardening) but also in terms of practices and organisations (an existing initiative on food poverty, food loss, collective gardening).


Tip: in scientific literature you find many (evidence-based) tips on how to frame your message to a type of audience.

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- To reach vulnerable groups, do not use social media. Use fieldworkers/initiatives (e.g. streetworkers, social food initiatives), who have daily contact with vulnerable groups to inform them on citizen participation projects.
- Accept that not all citizens want to be involved - put your effort into those who want to be engaged.
- Make and keep contact with local media (newspapers, TV, radio). When they find a topic interesting, they can make a TV report, a podcast or an article. This reaches a larger audience, making it easier for citizens to participate in a project.


5 - Develop a train the trainer approach for community empowerment


Research institutes can develop a **'train the trainer' approach** in which food related initiatives are inspired **with expertise and approaches from experts in the field of community empowerment**. Research institutes can play a facilitative role in setting up a program where local food related initiatives learn how to reach out to their own local communities and neighborhoods. The FAL Barcelona has worked out such an approach which will be shared within the FOODSHIFT 2030 project.


6 - Role of different actors to stimulate citizen driven food systems


What thrives citizen driven food systems? For one, it can be municipalities engaging themselves in EU projects. **Projects such as FoodSHIFT2030 are important to anchor food as a theme in a city-region** (regardless of the legislative party). Such projects can be a kick start toward developing citizen driven food strategies and food policies and be continued after the project. Means for local citizen participation should be embedded in each project. Second, the role of universities and research organizations to support cities in citizen engagement. Collaboration between different actors (municipality, food initiatives, research) is important to establish citizen driven food systems.

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Link to the FoodSFHIFT Transition Toolkit


As a multi-actor interface supporting stakeholders such as food innovators, practitioners, researchers, policy makers and citizens in their efforts around food system transition, the **Transition Toolkit** is designed to integrate the FoodSHIFT2030 Impact Pathway 'Citizen Empowerment' as one of its dynamic components by offering search functions that revolve around different dimension of food system innovation.


For 'Citizen Empowerment' (CM) this means that users should be able to better understand which type of and which aspects of innovations are likely to support citizens, especially how innovation can contribute to the different phases of CM which are information-consultation-involvement-empowerment, indicating a progressive line towards higher impacts. In this way, tools such as mobile apps can be evaluated regarding their capacity to reach out and engage. Equally, map-based tools such as the Metropolitan Foodscape Planner which includes co-creation capacities would qualify for the level of involvement, while a platform such as CitizenLab is covering the full scope up to empowerment. Other innovations such as CSAs and Coops are even much more direct by offering practical opportunities for co-designing the food system.

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