Alternative Food Networks, Social Capital, and Public Policy in Mexico City

Ayari Genevieve Pasquier Merino [1], **Gerardo Torres Salcido** [2,*], **David Sébastien Monachon** [3] **and Jessica Geraldine Villatoro Hernández** [4]

1 Interdisciplinary Research Center in Sciences and Humanities, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City 04510, Mexico
2 Research Center on Latin America and the Caribbean, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City 04510, Mexico
3 Coordination for Sustainability Department, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City 04510, Mexico
4 Sustainable Regional Development, El Colegio de Veracruz, Xalapa 91000, Mexico
* Correspondence: tsalcido@unam.mx; Tel.: +52-55-5623-0211

Abstract: Social initiatives that seek to promote socially fairer and environmentally more sustainable food production and distribution schemes have multiplied in the last two decades. Several studies have analysed their impacts and showed high contextual variability, making visible some of their contradictions. This research is interested in Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) as spaces of political mobilisation that aim to modify the predominant food systems. The analysis focuses on the role played by social capital in the capacities and strategies of AFNs to influence the design of public policies. The research was carried out in Mexico City as part of a wither participatory action research project. It is based on participant observation and discussion groups with representatives of citizen collectives involved in agroecological food distribution. The results show that the forms of social and cultural capital are key factors in understanding the interest and capacities of AFNs to strengthen collective action. The study also identifies the importance of the initiatives' managers as facilitators of interactions between AFNs and other entities, such as universities and civil society organisations, which can ease the influence of social initiatives in the design of public programmes.

Keywords: Alternative Food Networks; food distribution; urban food policies; food sustainability; Mexico City

1. Introduction

Contemporary food systems face major challenges and are unleashing a growing social discontent due to the problems they generate in terms of equity, public health, and sustainability. In this context, there have been an increasing number of initiatives that seek to promote production, distribution, and consumption practices that minimise ecological impacts, improving access to healthy foods and equitable relationships in marketing chains. This has given rise to the development of schemes such as "Short Food Supply Chains" (SFSCs) and "Alternative Food Networks" (AFNs). The distinction between both concepts has provoked a debate among scholars for two decades. The search for quality embedded in local contexts has generated alternative networks of distribution [1]. Renting, Marsden, and Banks [2] consider that the concept of an AFN deserves further theoretical work supported by empirical evidence that can be found in SFSCs. These forms of distribution differ between global and local chains that seek to bring producers and consumers closer by joining their expectations. Namely, fair prices for producers, more information on the origin and quality of products, a reduction in negative externalities on the environment, and the possibility to actively participate in the co-construction of the food system for consumers.

However, as they evolved, they became alternative chains to conventional channels, but not to the industrial model as originally envisaged. The SFSCs have adopted a certain tendency towards the loss of a sense of the ecological, ethical, and political principles that gave them their origin because the actors of the corporate system have captured the values of "local", "ecological", and the principles of shortening through logistics to impose a purely economic interest. Nonetheless, in practice there are many hybrid forms, resulting in a great diversity [3] of AFNs [4] related to the context where they operate, their links with production and marketing systems, their organisational projects, the values they promote, and their degree of consolidation. This variability makes it difficult to characterise the forms of social capital present in the AFN and specify their economic, social, and environmental effects, as well as their degree of impact on public policies.

AFNs date back a few decades, but their number has multiplied in the last 20 years. First in Western Europe, the United States, and Canada; and more recently in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean; and then in some Asian countries, including China. Thus, despite being initiatives that operate on a local scale, their definition is mediated by their belonging to a broader phenomenon, with global overtones, which serves as a reference and promotes exchanges of national and international experiences.

Perhaps the best known of these alternative networks are farmers' markets, but other forms also include solidarity stores, cooperative supermarkets, producers' stores, consumer communities, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farming arrangements and subscription-based food basket distribution lists.

Although these initiatives have been identified as relevant to increase food sustainability [5,6], a growing number of scholars have documented their limitations [7], mainly for remaining, despite their rapid growth, as a marginal phenomenon in global food production and distribution [8], often proving to be exclusionary in economic [9–11] and ethnic [12,13] terms. However, other researchers have characterised AFNs as spaces of activism [14,15], resistance, solidarity, and autonomy [16] with socio-political significance [17,18]. Thus, AFNs propose to cope with various challenges of the contemporary food systems through organisation and communality.

The relationships between AFN and their socio-political impact have been analysed by different studies. These coincide with the existence of high contextual variability and have shown a tension between the critical stance of grassroots initiatives and their aspirations to change political regimes. They also show an interest in AFNs in strengthening their relations with policymakers. Such tension generates great variability, mediated to a large extent by the type of policies implemented in local spheres [19]. Despite the conditions that facilitate or hinder the emergence of AFNs, the importance of social capital and the support of governmental and non-governmental actors have been highlighted [20]. Usuga and co-authors have emphasised the importance of policies that recognise the innovation and importance of proposals coming from civil society. Consequently, they highlight the need to develop cooperation mechanisms between governmental and social agents [21].

The alternative approach based on the recovery of values and the embeddedness of food and social movements into the territory is a suitable approach to overcome the limited visions of short chains conceived as new marketing strategies. However, the study of the reconstruction and mobilisation of social capital in AFN and their capacity to influence public agenda is a gap in the current literature. In this regard, our research aims to demonstrate the linkages between social capital and social innovation [22–25] generated around the attainment of pragmatic goals, through which the actors involved put into practice a set of political ideals [26].

Although the number of texts on social capital is vast, for this research we adopt an operational definition based on Woolcock's proposals [27] consisting in the construction of social ties of trust, solidarity, and reciprocity inside the community, linking with other communities and building synergies with public institutions through formal or informal norms. Cultural capital refers to a reinforcement of the cohesion of social ties through shared values, common beliefs, and identities embedded in local spaces at these

three levels. We consider whether this author succeeds in synthesising a long discussion on the dimensions of embeddedness of governments and society and the autonomy of social ties first proposed by Evans [28]. For Woolcock, the recognition of these dimensions between civil society and decision-makers necessarily leads to processes of synergy and autonomy between the civil and governmental spheres with a view to the social and institutional coordination for development, which he understands as the opposite of rent-seeking groups and rogue states. The combination of categories gives rise to a review of linkages beyond individual profit, i.e., social capital and the integration of intercommunity ties. Thus, Woolcock's proposal integrates three forms of social capital: first, those delimited within a group or community (bonding); second, there are the relationships that establish links between various initiatives that have common objectives (linking); and the third type is that which aims to expand their circles of trust by linking with politics (bridging). The degree to which these synergies can be established is what determines the impact of civic initiatives and their materialisation on the agenda and policy design.

This research aims to provide a better understanding of how social innovation processes are activated and how civic organisation and advocacy take place in the agenda and design of public policies in the large cities of the Latin America Region on the basis of a case study carried out in Mexico City. This city represents a paradigmatic case of megacities in countries with medium-sized economies characterised by large populations, disorderly urban expansion and growing inequality, which are common conditions in several cities in Latin America and other regions of the global south. These conditions represent the greatest obstacles to socio-ecological transition [29]. In this context, it is particularly relevant to make visible the efforts of a growing number of social initiatives to build alternatives to the hegemonic model, to understand their functioning, and to account for their scope, needs, and potential.

For this general purpose, the research aims to investigate the role of different types of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking) in enabling AFNs to become spaces of political action and influence public policy design. Although this is a qualitative study, some assumptions in the form of a hypothesis could be enunciated. It is important to say that they have been developed from previous research [30,31]. In this sense, it is proposed that:

- The development of AFNs in Mexico City has depended on pre-existing relationships between key actors (managers, agroecological, or transition producers and consumers);
- The most successful initiatives are those that develop expansive social capital, which suggests a verification of Woolcock's forms of social capital: cohesion within the initiative (bonding); solidarity with other initiatives (bridging) and advocacy in public policies and programs (synergy or linking);
- The concentration of different types of social capital in the figure of the managers is an element that characterises those AFNs. These provide strengths and weaknesses to the initiatives because of the concentration of information and links centralised in a few individuals or groups.

The results of the research demonstrate the potential of these networks to influence public policies, as they are a privileged space to make visible and better understand the dynamics through which civil society mobilises to generate alternatives to the institutional and commercial practices of global food systems, identifying the accumulated social capital of some managers as a key factor in this process. A better understanding of the dynamics with which AFNs operate and the determining factors for their configuration as a collective actor linked with policymakers are relevant to identify areas of interest to AFNs.

In addition to this introduction, Section 2 of this article deals with the materials and methods, and Section 3 presents the results; the following paragraph addresses the discussion on the mobilisation of social capital in AFNs. Finally, in Section 5, the article discusses the most important conclusions of the research.

2. Materials and Methods

This research was developed within the framework of a larger collective project, developed between 2019 and 2022, with the objective of identifying initiatives that contribute to food sustainability in Mexico City (Supplementary Materials). The aim was to understand the dynamics by which they operate and the challenges they face in order to contribute to its consolidation.

The research takes up the proposal of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. The characteristics of this type of research ensure the ability to co-create knowledge and solutions to problems posed by the community [32]. According to the PAR approach, the work of the researchers is carried out with the people to produce solutions [33]. In this sense, the research design consisted of a dialogic procedure in which the researchers contributed to the strengthening of the AFNs through facilitating meetings and training and elaboration of didactic materials, as well. The linkage and dialogues with the actors of the initiatives and the research team were enabled by relationships previously established with the actors of the food networks and the links of some of the authors as collaborators in the organisation of some AFNs.

The development of the research is based on various qualitative techniques. One of the central research techniques was participant observation, sustained throughout the field visits made over 2 years in the production and distribution spaces of 25 AFNs, which allowed us to know the actors involved and the dynamics of exchange and work. The websites and social networks of the AFN involved in the project were reviewed to obtain general information about the initiatives and to compile regulations, documents, and other materials generated by the initiatives (Appendix A). This information was systematised in a table describing the general profiles of the documented initiatives.

In all cases, an open call was made through social media and other channels frequently used by AFNs to promote their events. The following stages were defined through collective discussions held with managers or representatives of the AFNs interested in participating in the project. The discussions developed on the factors that enhance or hinder the formation of social capital and its transformation into political advocacy initiatives. The meetings were conducted as follows:

1. Two meetings were held virtually in the last week of September and the first week of October 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Representatives of 17 AFNs participated. The topics proposed for discussion were the success factors of their initiatives, the obstacles faced in distribution, their relationships with the municipalities and the government of Mexico City, and, finally, the alliances, innovations, and proposals generated to improve their commercial and distribution activities to address the Pandemic.

2. In April 2022, a national AFN Meeting was held in Mexico City. This was jointly organised by networks from different states of the Mexican Republic, the University Coordination for Sustainability of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (COUS-UNAM), the team of researchers, and the National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO), an inter-secretariat entity allied to the project. The objectives of this meeting were to strengthen the linkage of AFNs initiatives at the national level and to exchange knowledge, experiences, and tools to reinforce their activities. Another objective was to build a common agenda to consolidate a national network with an incidence in public policies.

3. In August 2022, an in-person meeting was held, with the participation of representatives of 12 initiatives. The discussion included different topics: the politics positions of alternative networks in relation to the Mexican State, the obstacles and/or benefits provided by governmental actions, the public policy orientations desired by these collectivities, and, finally, the factors of success or weaknesses of the AFNs in terms of territorial linkages and the formation of social capital.

To systematise the information obtained at the meetings, only meetings held online were recorded, reports were written for each of the events. Following PAR principles, these minutes were shared and discussed with the participants. Slips of paper were also used where the participants drew diagrams with the contents of the discussions. A photographic record was also made of all the events organised. The analysis of these materials was developed through the construction of inductive categories based both on the questions defined in the design of these activities and the stories, opinions, and perceptions shared by the participants in the meetings.

This extensive work of analysis and intervention was complemented with an exhaustive search of the bibliography in order to learn about the findings and proposals of previous research in other contexts. The search and organisation of the bibliographic material was accomplished through an analysis of a database built using the "Dimensions" platform, complemented with bibliographic materials identified in previous research, which made it possible to integrate a general corpus of just over 700 publications that focus on SFSCs and AFNs. Their analysis was carried out based on the construction of analytical categories defined from the titles and abstracts of the publications. This analysis focused on identifying publications that addressed the performance of social capital in AFNs and SFSCs, as well as their linkage with public policies.

Throughout the project, exchanges were established 25 collectives (Mercado de productores Capital Verde, Red de Consumo Solidario del Ecomún, Centro de Abasto Mawi, Tianguis Mezcalero, Tianguis Orgánico Bosque de Agua CDMX, Cooltiva, Cooperativa Despensa Solidaria, Red de Alimentación Autónoma Itacate, Tiendita del Campo, Cooperativa de Consumo La Imposible, Feria Multitrueke Mixhuca, Foro Tianguis Alternativo Ecológico, Tienda Orgánica, Mercado Alternativo de Tlalpan, Pixca Campesina, Amilli, Chinampas en Movimiento, Colectivo Ahuejote, Ecoquilitl, Grupo de Productores y Consumidores Urbanos Asociados de la Ciudad de México (Insekto Libre), Mercado Alternativo de Tepepan, Nuestro Huerto, Olintlalli, Red de Consumo Solidario Tianquiskilitl, Red de Pequeños Productores). The number of AFNs represented in the different activities varied, as it depended in each case on the response to the calls for proposals. Notwithstanding, the discussion focuses on 7 cases selected through the following criteria: to express socio-environmental demands, to organise education and cultural activities, to have interest and participation in activities aimed at building links with other initiatives, and to promote political mobilisation. This selection is not intended to be representative. The initiatives included in the analysis are presented as an example that allows us to discuss the dimensions identified throughout the research as relevant to understanding the interest and capabilities of AFNs to participate in second-level organisations and to mobilise collectively with the intention of influencing the design of public policies, as well as the relationship between these processes and the different types of social capital considered in the study. Figure 1 describes research techniques and activities carried out throughout the research is included below. The figure is complemented by Table 1, which summarises the conditions of rigour and quality of the data [Table 1]. It is important to consider the coherent sequence of the research phases, its credibility, and the transferability of the results. Regarding the succession of the research phases, the results were confronted with the literature, the dialogue among the research team, and the inductive construction of categories. The conditions of transferability and their relevance for the actors in the local context were confronted in the focus groups.
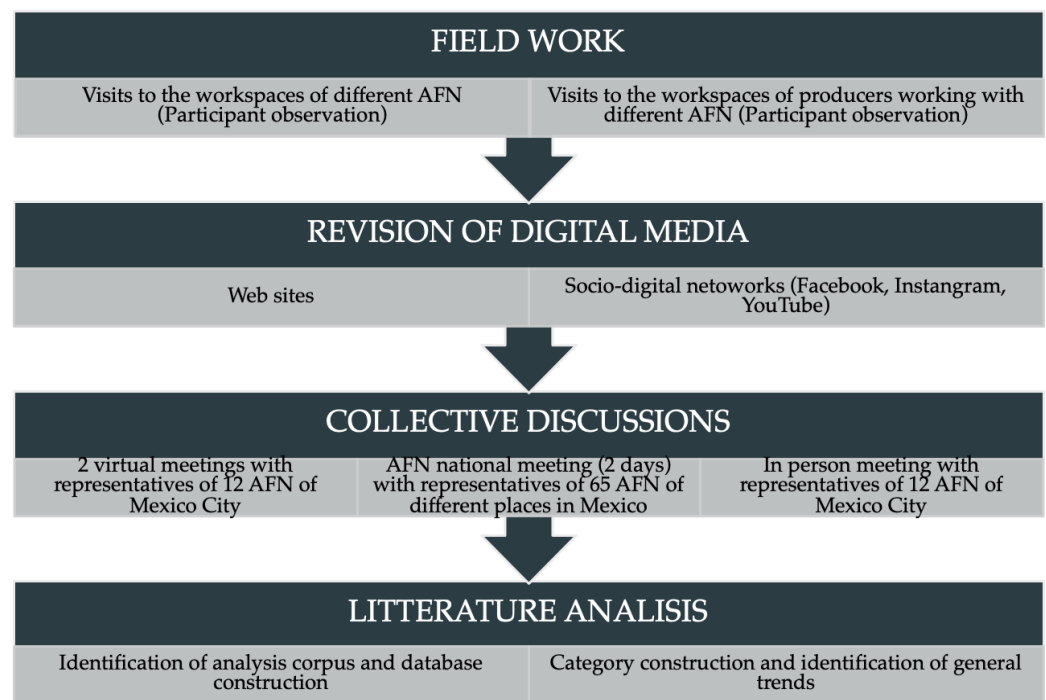
Figure 1. Techniques and activities carried out throughout the research.

Table 1. Research quality and rigour conditions.

Criteria	Design	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Dependability	The design of workshops was based on key questions and minute writing shared with stakeholders.	The fieldwork lasted more than 2 years and a variety of actors participated in the meetings.	The analysis was based on dialogue among research team members and shared with stakeholders.
Credibility	The research design was based on a literature review and discussions with stakeholders.	Combination of sources and the dialogic character of the research.	Construction of inductive categories based on literature review, participant observation, and dialogue with social actors.
Transferability	The arguments discussed may be relevant to urban contexts where AFN articulation processes are incipient, mainly in mega-cities.	The data collected are particular to the case studies analysed, possibly relevant to other urban contexts of widespread social inequality.	The analysis has particular relevance for the local context, and in particular to strengthen the scope of the phenomenon under study.

Own elaboration based on Michel-Villarreal [34].

3. Results

The presentation of the results obtained throughout the research is organised into four sections. The first one describes the general results of the literature review on the role of social capital on SFSCs and AFNs, and the second one contextually situates the case study, describing the general characteristics of food distribution in Mexico City. The third identifies the different types of AFNs according to the importance given in discursive and operational terms to political mobilisation. The fourth and last section discusses how different types and dimensions of social capital operate in the strategies implemented by some AFNs to influence food policy.

3.1. Social Capital in the Literature on SFSC and AFN

The literature review described below includes just over 700 publications selected for analysing SFSCs and AFNs. One of the most evident trends observed is the attention paid by the publications on the subject of distribution strategies based on case studies. The countries with the largest number of studies are Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Brazil, Spain, France, Australia, Germany, Hungary, and Poland. Among the most frequent topics, the analysis of the contributions of these initiatives to sustainability and the behaviours of the consumers and producers involved stand out. Those publications with a more theoretical orientation generally discuss the "alternative" character of these initiatives [2,35–39] and raise various challenges to the use of the concepts of "organic" [40,41] and "local" [42–47]. Other themes have emerged in recent years, among these are the use of technological tools, the adaptations of these initiatives to the pandemic by COVID-19, and the description of some of the paradoxes of these initiatives. It should be noted that the vast majority of the texts identified were developed in countries of the Global North; among the works carried out in the South, slightly more than half were developed in Latin America, with outstanding production in terms of the number of studies carried out in Brazil.

This literature review is focused on two related areas: the relationships between SFSCs/AFNs, public policy and activism, and the presence of issues related to social capital, with the goal of identifying studies that link these two variables which are summarized in the Figure 2 below.
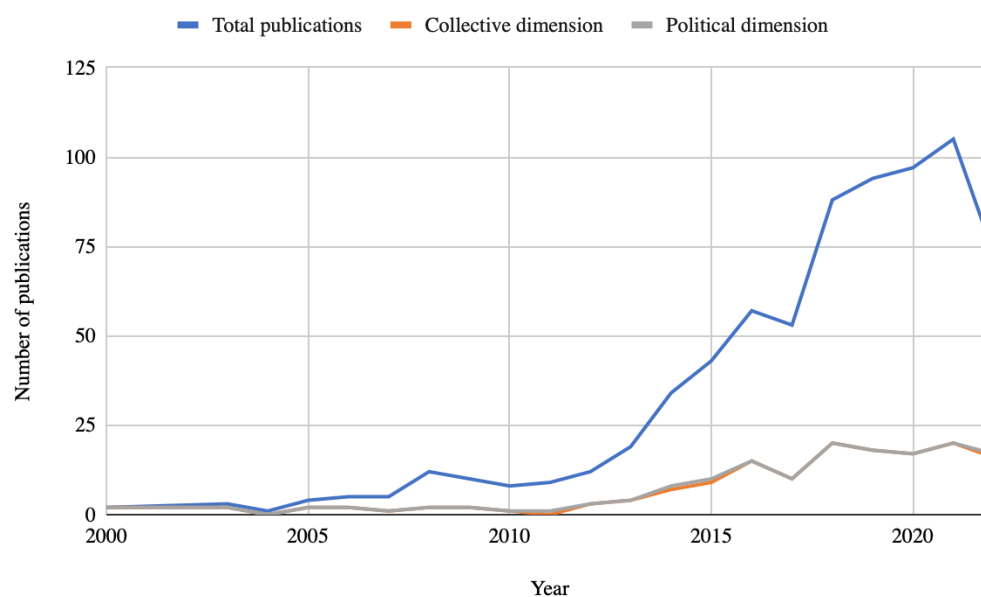
Figure 2. Evolution of research on the political and collective dimensions. Source: Own elaboration based on analysis corpus.

The relationship between SFSCs/AFNs and public policies is not a common theme in the SFSC or AFN literature. The papers that deal with this topic identify AFNs/SFSCs as dynamisers of rural development in Western Europe [2,48,49], China [50], and, more recently, in Eastern Europe [11,51,52] or as drivers of territorial development [53,54]. Some publications document the support by local authorities for this type of initiative [55,56] and analyse public policy instruments aimed at fostering SFSCs/AFNs, both at the European level [57–59] and in Latin America [21,60–62] and Sub-Saharan Africa [63]. Other papers analyse the effects of different public policies [19] and legal instruments linked to the development of SFSCs/AFNs [64–67], the regulation of their operations, especially in sanitary terms [68], and the difficulties they face in complying with existing regulations [69]. Another trend observed was the identification of relevant information for the design of public policies favourable to SFSCs/AFNs based on the characterization of spaces,

actors and/or processes of these initiatives [42,70–76], sometimes focused on biodiversity conservation [77,78].

Several works were identified for researching more critical perspectives that link social practices related to SFSCs/AFNs and the political positions and perspectives of the actors. This framework speaks, for example, of "politicised consumption" to characterise the motivations of consumers participating in these distribution schemes [8,79,80] and characterises SFSCs/AFNs as "concrete expressions of food democracy" in cities [4,81] and rural sectors [82], where knowledge about food systems [26] and more sustainable practices are promoted among a diversity of actors, including consumers and officials. Other issues addressed are the spaces for negotiating rules of economic exchange [83], the articulation of social and commercial commitments from the term "Social business" [84], the processes of advocacy and collective action at different levels [85], as well as the linking of these strategies with social movements [23,86] and their transformative potential [87,88].

The term social capital, as such, is not frequent in the literature on SFSCs and AFNs, although many of the phenomena analysed are closely related to this concept. In the process of documentary analysis, a first approach to the topic was made by seeking to identify those studies that study different "collective dimensions" and have been associated with social capital, including social relations at different levels, organisational processes, social participation and collective action, the generation of trusting relationships, and the construction of norms [89]. It is surprising that papers explicitly focused on the analysis of these issues represent slightly less than 10% of the SFSC and AFN publications identified. More specific topics include the analysis of the organisational forms of SFSCs/AFNs [22,25,59,90–92] and the coordination forms between different collectives [93] and linkages with public officials [56,94]. Another frequently addressed topic is trust, identified as a factor mediating consumption practices. Virtually all the studies produced in this framework highlight the importance of direct interaction in the generation and maintenance of trust relationships [15,39,95,96], some of them analyse the incidence of the collective definition of standards [97], certification and labelling [15,39], as well as the fluid nature of trust [98]. Papers analysing the construction of norms and agreements were also identified, mainly within collectives [4,83,99–101] but also on a regional scale [102]. Another relatively common theme is a rootedness in social and territorial terms [49,103–105] and the formation of territorial "clusters", identified as a facilitating factor for SFSCs/AFNs [50,106,107], although it is also posited that there may be situations of competition between them [12].

Returning to the distinction proposed of the different types of relationships [27], it should be noted that in the publications identified that study the collective dynamics of AFNs/SFSCs, the analysis of internal relationships within these collectives has been favoured, and these studies represent almost two-thirds of the publications identified in this area, while relationships between groups are relatively more important than those with public policy actors.

3.2. Alternative Food Networks in Mexico City

AFNs in Mexico City acquire significance when viewed in relation to the city's modern and conventional food supply channels. It is impossible to speak of a single food distribution system. We could point out at least three presents in the country's capital: the first is the modern system, the second is the so-called conventional system, and the third is the alternative system. Each of these systems has its own characteristics and is not exempt from establishing strong ties between the modern and conventional systems due to the mutual dependency relationships established between the Central de Abastos de la Ciudad de México (CEDA) and the supermarkets for the supply of fruits, vegetables, and fresh produce. There are also links, although weaker, between AFNs and other forms of conventional commercialization, as some of the participants in these networks pragmatically go to commercialization channels other than alternative markets or establish relationships with restaurants, chefs, and other actors in the food system.

The category of 'modern system' has been used in the literature documenting changes in urban food distribution to refer to the formation of a corporate food system [108] based on the mechanisation of agriculture and its conjunction with technological packages, dependent on the intensive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, with vertical governance dictated from the distribution centres, true "dry" ports on the outskirts of the city from which the main supermarket chains and convenience stores linked to corporate brands, such as OXXO stores, Seven Eleven, and others. The second system, or the "conventional" system, is based on an extensive network of collection and intermediation of fresh food and groceries that extends from the city to the states neighbouring the capital and to practically all the regions of the country and even abroad, which are commercialised in the CEDA and in the Central de Pescados y Mariscos La Nueva Viga (La Nueva Viga Fish and Seafood Central). The CEDA is the nodal point of supply to the city, which is to say, the nodal point of supply of food distribution to the more than 300 public markets and more than one thousand "tianguis" (street markets) routes existing in the city [109]. Alongside these food distribution channels, there are the commercial concentrations and street food sales that arise from the direct sale of fresh and processed products that originate in informal establishments and activities which are very difficult to quantify.

On the other hand, there is the AFN model. Due to their novelty, there are no reliable statistical sources to know what percentage of the demand they meet. The emergence of the first AFNs in Mexico dates back to the late 1990s, since then their number has increased steadily. Currently, it is estimated that there are around 150 locations in different cities in the country and around 60 in Mexico City. All of them are articulated around food distribution. The government of Mexico City has implemented some public policies that seek to promote good practices, for example, by training small producers in agroecological techniques or by organising fairs to promote the consumption of locally produced food. In general terms, however, it can be said that food sustainability is not part of the local government's priorities, and both the design and the results of the policies implemented so far have been partial. In this context, AFNs emerged as social initiatives that promote schemes for the production, distribution, and consumption of healthy food from various forms of solidarity economy, responding to the growing concern of some sectors of the population. Some of these initiatives have benefited from existing public policies, or their gaps, while others have developed in spite of existing public policies or even in opposition to them. At the same time, they are initiatives that often operate outside official regulations, for example, in terms of taxation, safety standards for the preparation of food for sale, or product traceability.

It should be noted that some AFNs have a more economic profile, while others have political demands and are currently seeking to articulate a second-level organisation (or "network of networks") that will allow them to be identified as a relevant actor in the sector and gain negotiating power to influence the definition of public policies. On the other hand, it should also be noted that, although these initiatives are currently experiencing a "boom" moment, they represent a marginal phenomenon in the reality of food distribution in Mexico City, so it can be argued that their visibility responds largely to their links with social movements, civil society organisations, some sectors of academia, and local government agencies, rather than to their impact in environmental, social, or economic terms.

In recent years, there has been some public support for the implementation of productive agroforestry systems, agrosilvopastoral systems, and chinampas (Pre-Hispanic cultivation system that made it possible to produce in a lake area by gaining land above water. They are still cultivated by the inhabitants of the districts of Xochimilco and Tlahuac in the south of Mexico City), beekeeping, extensive agriculture, small-scale agriculture, and ecological forest restoration; the implementation of a "green seal" whose purpose is to "promote, guide and encourage agroecological production in the conservation land of Mexico City". They are also organised with some frequency producers' fairs within the framework of cultural and recreational activities, where beyond being oriented to the

consumption and distribution of food, the aim is to valorize and make visible the work of producers in Mexico City.

However, despite the existence of public policies such as support programs for urban gardens and gastronomic fairs and exhibitions—for example, the Atepetl Program and the Barter Market promoted by the Mexico City Ministry of the Environment, or the Urban Orchards Program of the Iztapalapa municipal government—these incentives are mainly aimed at acquiring inputs and materials for production.

3.3. Elements That Characterise the AFNs as Spaces for Political Mobilisation

According to the discussions held in the National AFNs Meeting, "these initiatives facilitate the distribution and supply of local, healthy, agroecological, artisanal, and/or traditional products produced by families, collectives, or cooperatives. On the other hand, they try to facilitate the access of these products to the population, encouraging actions and reflections on responsible consumption, environmental care, and the solidarity economy. [. . .] they are "alternative" because they do not follow the capitalist logic of corporate marketing channels in which profit is the most important thing". All of them seek to make visible the work of producers in promoting agroecology and the importance of the environmental services provided by the ecosystems where food is grown, and some of them include among their objectives the reactivation of traditional crops and forms of production of social, cultural, and environmental importance, such as the chinampas -in the case of Xochimilco. The defence of the territory and food sovereignty are also important elements that characterise these initiatives within their activities and discourses, where the dignity of work as well as participatory and informed consumption are considered as axes of struggle in opposition to the capitalist paradigm.

Notwithstanding, beyond the recognition of a common ideal, there is a great variety of AFNs in Mexico City; their differences have to do with their organisational schemes, but also with their philosophical orientations and some operational aspects, which are summarised in Figure 3 below which shows 4 dimensions were identified as common characteristics of those AFNs that invest time and resources in strengthening their relationships with other AFNs, increasing their possibilities of linking with public policy; identified as "bridging" and "linking" social capital by Woolcock [46]:

- Socio-environmental demands. They emphasise the need to solve problems such as environmental pollution, deterioration of ecosystems, labour exploitation, health problems associated with the consumption of ultra-processed food, and unsustainable consumption, among others. To this end, operative proposals are developed in connection with producers and other actors to solve environmental, socio-economic, and health problems. These include public denunciation in connection with academic support and other civil society organisations in the defence of human rights.

- Education and cultural activities. They are interested in promoting values such as responsible consumption, participation, health care, the dignity of work, and environmental care. The strategies employed differ according to human and economic resources as well as the social capital that allows them to access different media and communication spaces. These activities are developed based on actions of environmental education, food and health education, and education on socio-economic issues. Initiatives can make use of printed materials and socio-digital networks as well as the organisation of workshops, fairs, academic publications, and access to journalistic media (radio, tv., etc.).

- Building links with other initiatives. The interest and investment of time and other resources in building links with other AFNs also stands out, since it allows them to exchange experiences, strategies, and relationships among their members as well as to consolidate, in some cases, common purchases to achieve greater economies of scale for the benefit of their members and consumers. The construction and strengthening of these links are promoted through the creation of spaces for dialogue and training open to other initiatives, linkage meetings with other AFNs at

the regional/national/international level, as well as participation in activities with academia and the governmental sector.

-   Political mobilisation. We identified as political mobilisation the capacity or interest that the AFNs have to influence the construction of alternative economic and social models; in addition, some members of AFNs have individual advocacy capacity, including participation of their members in institutional spaces, normative as representatives of civil society, and members of AFN with positions in governmental and/or academic entities, for example, through mobilisation from the academic sphere in support of initiatives in spaces of debate with public administrations.

Elements of differentiation highlighted in the identification of activist-oriented initiatives
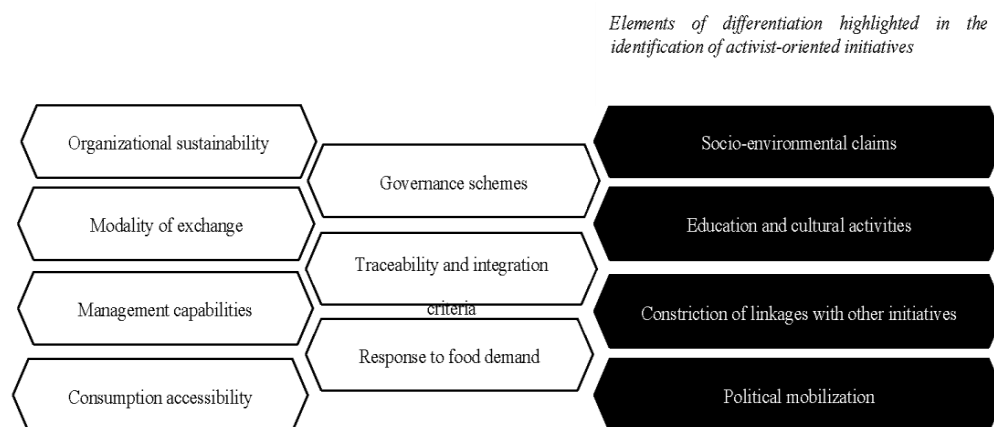
Figure 3. Elements of differentiation between analysed AFN. Source: Personal elaboration.

This diversity of operational and political strategies illustrates the great diversity of existing Alternative Food Networks. However, it is important to note that certain orientations may be contextual for some, others build hybrid or multiple strategies to fulfil their purpose, while others integrate, for example, mobilisation and participation in various political spaces as a leitmotiv of their activities, which, as we have seen, is closely linked to the organisational scheme, economic capacities, knowledge, and interest of their members.

3.4. The Configuration of Social Capital: Case Studies

This section presents the results of the analysis of the seven organisations selected as examples: Mercado de Productores Capital Verde; Colectivo Zacahuitzco; Cooperativa Despensa Solidaria; Cooperativa de Consumo La Imposible; Mercado Alternativo de Tlalpan; Colectivo Ahuejote and Grupo Ecoquilitl. These cases are not representative of the AFNs in Mexico City, as previously mentioned, but were selected for their manifest interest in strengthening relations among them, and articulating themselves as a collective actor vis-à-vis policymakers. There are other similarities, including managers who have the capacity to mobilise bridging and linking social capital. They are distinguished by their trajectories, operational schemes, and other aspects developed below.

-   Capital Verde (Green Capital)

The "Capital Verde Farmers' Market" takes place every Sunday in the north of the city, unlike most of the initiatives whose area of influence and zone of operation are in the southern part of the city and closer to the agricultural production region. This initiative, which today has 37 productive projects, emerged with the initial support of an FAO short-circuit promotion program in connection with the "Secretariat of Rural Development and Equity for Communities" of Mexico City. It began operations in 2017 in the Alvaro Obregón district in the south of the city but failed to keep up with the change of mayor, which forced it to relocate to the zone of Azcapotzalco. The market is coordinated by two people who, in addition to operational activities, manage political relations with the city government and other actors, as well as liaison with other AFNs. These two people receive economic support for their work based on the fees paid by each producer per market day. One

of the coordinators, who was one of the founders of the initiative, is a consultant for FAO, and another founder is an academic at UNAM; although he does not participate so much in the coordination today, he continues to support the project from the university and participates in public policy discussions as a consultant or representative of civil society. Recently, with the advocacy support of the Non-governmental organisation (NGO) Greenpeace, the coordinators opened a new market in the Aragón Forest park, located northeast of the city. This initiative has had regulations approved since its foundation and currently governs its operation. The assemblies held with the market's exhibitors focus on operational discussions with the producers on the same day the market is held. The coordinators make field visits prior to the integration of producers. The Capital Verde Farmers' Market maintains close relations with other AFNs in the city for the exchange of experiences, strategic discussions, and political advocacy. By regulation, the producers themselves participate in the initiative's efforts to sensitise consumers and other exhibitors on environmental education issues and are required to provide workshops to others. Some of the products distributed in this space have organic certification and others, although they do not have certification processes, receive accompaniment and technical support from other civil society organisations.

- Zacahuitzco

The Zacahuitzco Collective was born in 2015, under the impulse of an activist who was until then an advisor in the Chamber of Deputies and decided to buy premises in the Benito Juárez district to transform it into a space for the collection and distribution of the future consumer collective. The initiative is currently linked to approximately 40 productive projects but also includes industrial organic products in its offer. The store took the name of Mawí. Thus, the owner of the store in the first place, her partner, and some consumers equipped and furnished the Mawí Store. Some members obtained financing from the Mexico City government, which made it possible to increase the equipment and obtain resources for its operation. Although from the beginning decisions were formally made under a cooperative assembly model, many decisions are made by the initial promoter of the project and a very small group of consumers who run the store. These people distribute the operational functions and receive economic support for hours of attention, which in general covers part of the purchase of their own pantry at the end of the workday. The store is open 3 or 4 days a week, depending on the availability of its members. This small management group is also responsible for managing the store's suppliers, who are either producers or consumers of the initiative or other cooperatives, which facilitate distribution and delivery to the Mawi Store. Each one is in charge of tracking orders and payments to suppliers, who, for most of them, leave their products on consignment and are paid after the sale of these products. Depending on the category of food, the store applies a differentiated fee (in relation to the type of storage required: refrigerated or non-refrigerated shelving, freezing) to cover its operation and the payment of economic support to its members. The collective's activities are centred on the management of the store, which generally relegates educational activities; however, some external members try to promote some training and awareness-raising activities, although they are not directly included in the collective's planning. Several of its active members have relations with the governmental decision-making spheres, particularly the National Congress, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, as well as universities and research centres.

The external group dedicates a lot of time to occupying these advocacy spaces on behalf of the collective. It is relevant to point out that the same call transmitted by the owner of the premises that originated the creation of the collective was addressed, among other people, to the promoters of the Human Right to Adequate Food Law (HRAF) that was being discussed in the House of Representatives by an alliance of civil society organisations, who were interested in access to healthy food, in support of small-scale producers and defenders of agroecology, although with little experience in the operation of a collective. The regulations of the Zacahuitzco collective take up the same principles advocated in the

HRAF Law. Recently, members of this same collective fostered dialogues and the drafting of the "Proposal to support short networks of small food production, transformation, commercialization and consumption" in 2018, a document with recommendations for public policy orientations presented to the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development (SADER) and the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), with the participation of various AFN at the national level.

- Despensa Solidaria (Solidarity Food Basket Cooperative)

The Despensa Solidaria Cooperative was created by three young people in 2016, in the south of the city, and today they have a store in the Coyoacán district in the heart of a housing unit. They organised themselves as a cooperative with the intention of consolidating a network of distribution and consumption of local, agroecological, and solidarity products, as well as providing services, under the principles of a solidarity economy. The cooperative, which integrates 40 productive initiatives, is the main source of income for this founding group, and also involves paid members for specific tasks, as well as volunteers. The organisation has an assembly and work commissions for the distribution of tasks. They prepare the orders that are picked up by their consumers directly at the store or organise weekly home deliveries, but they also have access to "solidarity corners", which are the solidarity spaces of other initiatives where the products collected at the cooperative level are sold. The margins applied on the products distributed by the initiative allowed them to rent the premises where they carry out their operations and generate income to cover the group's operation. They have been able to obtain some support from the local government for the consolidation of their initiative. They are often involved in dialogues with other cooperatives and AFNs but do not have direct contact with institutions that create public policies, concentrating their efforts on internal activities or in relation to other AFNs. However, they carry out a variety of activities of direct impact on the population in their area of influence, among others, with the inhabitants of the unit where their premises are located, with whom they carry out exchanges of services and knowledge, workshops with the children, etc. Without being a unique capacity of this group, its members have acquired skills to be part of the team of facilitators of the National Network of AFNs, in addition to making available to other initiatives of AFNs, other technical skills, such as the design of communication materials. The Solidarity Pantry Cooperative also carries out monitoring visits to the producers related to its network.

- La Imposible (The Imposible)

The consumer cooperative La Imposible was founded in 2015 under the impulse of young students and professionals and currently integrates 30 productive initiatives within it. They are located in the Cuauhtémoc district, also in the centre-south of the city, where they occupy a space in a community house lent by the owners to various organisations. The initiative presents itself as a network of producers and consumers that seeks to transform the dominant economic relations and strengthen social movements such as cooperatives, agroecology, feminism, and the search for the disappeared, among others. However, the lack of effectiveness in bringing together and achieving collective decision-making led to the reorganisation of the cooperative by commissions that deal with specific issues related to the organisation and work synergistically, which does not prevent strategic decisions from being made through the consensus of the entire management team. This initiative has the particularity of having created a mathematical formula to provide remuneration to its members according to the work performed, which generally covers the monthly allowance for the most active members of the organisation. This remuneration is ensured by the surcharges paid voluntarily by consumers when placing their orders; they can choose from 15 to 25% of the total value of their order. The cooperative has internal operating rules and regulations and makes public an annual report at its anniversary events. The initiative has a committee specifically responsible for relations with producers and, among other things, for carrying out monitoring visits. In previous years it received funding from Mexico City's Secretary of Rural Development, which allowed them to invest in

equipment for the cooperative's operation. The Cooperative La Imposible has among its objectives to support and accompany the multiplication and consolidation of other alternative experiences; to this end, they organise and collaborate to realize workshops on various topics, and their most important initiative is their "Annual Workshop for the organisation of Alternative Food Networks", which concretizes this desire to replicate their experiences with new groups. Since the emergence of digital tools with COVID-19, they have made use of this workshop as a space for exchanging experience to disseminate the model of other consolidated organisations. The initiative is also part of the AFN of the City of the most involved in activities of interaction with other groups of the movement.

- Mercado Alternativo de Tlalpan (Alternative Market of Tlalpan: MAT)

The Alternative Market of Tlalpan was founded in 2013 under the impulse of three young professionals who negotiated, at the time, the installation of a farmers' market in an area of the Autonomous University of Mexico in the centre of the Tlalpan district as well as in the Tlalpan forest park in the same district. The project currently has 45 productive initiatives and recently gave way to the creation of a new market in the ecological park in the district of Xochimilco. During the pandemic, the Market also integrated a home delivery system, which is still in operation today and which prompted the creation of a specific web platform to improve the management of orders. These initiatives are presented by their coordinators as the "three legs" of the same initiative, but each one has its own operating modalities and space. The access to some of the spaces they occupy has been facilitated by family relations of one of the members of the management team. The fees paid by the producers per day of the market and the payments from the consumers that they receive at home allow them to cover the income of this coordinating team (that today integrated 3 other members in addition to a team for the preparation of the home orders) and also to generate a fund for the operation of the different markets. The Alternative Market of Tlalpan also managed several years of support from the Tlalpan district and the organisation of a peasant school that allowed them to generate learning interaction between the initiative's producer families and other districts of the city, as well as to generate training and communication materials. As a Market, it regularly organises educational and cultural activities within the Market space or outside, in particular with field visits open to the consumer community and specific activities with producers. The Market has rules of procedure and meetings are held for the operational management of the market days, but there is no assembly structure where strategic decisions are made with the integration of exhibitors in the market; these are decisions made by the coordinating committee. The members of the coordinating committee also have interpersonal and professional relationships with actors in the political and academic spheres, which facilitates access to public policy discussions on food at the local and national levels and influence in these spaces. They were part of the group promoting the "Proposal to support small-scale food production, transformation, commercialization and consumption networks"; from Mexico City and is closely linked to the initiatives presented above regarding various initiatives for the exchange of experiences in operational matters, visibility through the social movement of the AFN and common communication activities. It also carries out its own annual field visits with the producer families involved in the Market.

- Ahuejote

The Ahuejote Collective is a civil association and is the only initiative of this group that has a legal figure, groups for productive projects, and began its activities in 2017 with the intention of promoting and reactivating chinampas agriculture in the lake area of the municipality of Xochimilco as a source of sustainable food for the population of the city. Thus, they operate directly with a more entrepreneurial approach through the implementation of transdisciplinary projects for the development and strengthening of capacities for chinampas producers in production, marketing and logistics, and community organisation. The consumer network with which they work, located mainly in the centre of the city, is part of the initiative to market Chinampero products, with which they move

some of the products in their network. Specifically, they provide technical support to the chinampas and help with the logistical organisation of home deliveries, but they also finance their activities by managing other projects in their area of influence. They received international support to start their project and support for young entrepreneurs, which enabled them to launch the initiative. In addition to the organisation's capacity as facilitators and rural promoters through its technical staff and founder, its president joined an inter-institutional program specialising in Food Sovereignty and strategic local advocacy management promoted by the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACyT), that promotes agro-ecological production. The Ahuejote Collective participates in the visibility and political advocacy efforts of the National Network of AFN through the participation of its president in the network's driving group.

- Ecoquilitl

The Ecoquilitl group, created in 2017, differs from previous initiatives because it is made up exclusively of producers from the municipality of Xochimilco. The creation of this group was the result of the accompaniment provided by the civil association Redes A.C., which supported the organisation of the group, the accompaniment and capacity building in agroecological production, until the consolidation of a group of 5 families of producers and food processors and the implementation of a marketing mechanism with home delivery and use of a web platform for taking orders. The collective is financed by the sale of products from each of the producers to the network of consumers; however, home deliveries represent only a part of the group's income, which still receives support from the organisation Redes A.C. for taking orders, while the producers organise the preparation of the orders. In fact, some producers sell in other marketing spaces in the city, such as the Capital Verde Producers' Market, where the vegetables produced by the group's leader are sold. The producers and their families promote more environmentally friendly production practices with their neighbours and build a network of mutual and neighbourly support with other local productive initiatives, with the intention of disseminating their agroecological production practices and reaching other markets through the union between producers. Thus, Ecoquilitl can be considered as a neighbourhood alliance of producers that receives external support from a civil association as well as from UNAM staff who receive their vegetable packages at the university and promote their activities and products, with the organisation of field visits open to the community. Their participation in other sales spaces has been made possible by the interpersonal relationships built with members of these entities that facilitated their access and relationship with other actors. Although their connection with the spaces for discussion of federal and broader public policies in Mexico City is limited, they mobilise at a more local level, to influence productive practices in their community, and their knowledge of local issues complements the discussions carried out by other actors of Alternative Food Networks and universities around the construction of more sustainable food policies, and with whom there is an open channel of dialogue. Table 2 summarised the general characteristics of the AFNs studied above. Table 3 aboard the social capital dimensions in the AFNs.

Table 3 complements the information on the different types of social capital in the case studies.

These seven initiatives are privileged examples that look at the dynamics of political mobilisation among AFNs in the food sector. They are all interrelated with each other, based on different institutional actors, academics, and other linking agents present in the same networks, which favours, on the one hand, exchanges and circulation of knowledge and significant information to obtain greater visibility. On the other hand, for the collective construction of projects for the mutual consolidation of AFNs, as well as for advocacy on food policy agents, the cases show that, beyond the social capital built internally in one of the collectives, there are cooperative links that translate into extra-community linkage actions with other collectives and networks; there are synergies to achieve the common objective of building a more sustainable food system, strengthened by the connection with other actors with access to spaces for political advocacy and support of initia-

tives, to establish a common front promoting agroecology, solidarity economies, and the right to food.

Table 2. General characteristics of AFNs included in the study.

AFN	Operating Scheme	Starting Year	Number of Linked Producers	Remuneration of Managers	Operational Decision-Making	Strategic Decision-Making
Capital verde	Producers' market	2017	37	Monetary	Assembly	Managers
Zacahuitzco/Mawí	Consumer Collective/Store	2015	40	Monetary (generally spent in the AFN)	Organising core	Organising core
Despensa Solidaria	Consumer cooperative	2016	40	Monetary	Assembly/committees	Assembly
La Imposible	Consumer cooperative	2015	30	Monetary (generally spent in the AFN)	Assembly/committees	Managers
MAT	Producers' market	2013	45	Monetary	Managers	Managers
Ahuejote	Legally registered Civil association	2017	4	Monetary	Assembly	Assembly
Ecoquilitl	Producers' collective	2017	5	Monetary	Producers collective with ONG support	Producers Assembly

Source: Personal elaboration.

Table 3. Dimensions of social capital in AFNs analysed.

	Bonding	Bridging	Linking
Capital verde	The coordinating committee) who coordinate market activities apply the regulations, operation, communication, and training activities internal to the AFN.	Participation in the AFN and the PGS project of the CDMX. Linking UNAM students with the project and other initiatives of AFN and urban gardens.	Participation and liaison with other civil society organisations for dialogue and advocacy with local government actors and International Organization Representation in México.
Zacahuitzco	Consumer cooperative with management group/cooperative members/volunteers that manage store space open to the general public.	Participation in the driving group of the National Network of AFN and representation of the AFN in discussion forums with public authorities.	Members of the collective who are present and active in governmental spaces, National Congress, and involved in advocacy actions on public policies. Articulation with a link to the national network of AFNs with incidence in university entities (UNAM). Linkage with other civil society organisations.

Table 3. *Cont.*

	Bonding	Bridging	Linking
Despensa Solidaria	Management group with collaborators supporting the operation	Participation in the AFN network of Mexico City, in AFN National Network and involvement in the PGS project, articulator of several AFN in the city. Links with other cooperatives. Facilitators of organisational and training processes among AFN.	Collaboration with UNAM in projects related to sustainable food.
La Imposible	Management group of 16 people organised in work commissions with economic support based on their involvement in the cooperative's activities.	Participation in the driving group of the National AFN Network and in the PGS project and the CDMX AFN Network. Promotion and accompaniment of AFN replication processes.	Presence at UNAM of members as graduate students and collaboration in UNAM'sustainable food projects.
MAT	3 market spaces, each with its own team of coordinators who apply a common set of rules and ensure the operation.	Advice and accompaniment to AFN. Participation in the PGS project of CDMX and in the driving group of the National AFN Network as well as the Network of AFN of CDMX. Collaboration with UNAM in capacity building projects for AFN.	Members of the management team integrated in spaces for discussion and advocacy on public policies, presence in positions in government entities Interpersonal linkage with influential actors in public authorities and universities. Advice to local and federal government entities on local trade and food policies.
Ahuejote	Organisation with an associative legal figure facilitating productive and commercial projects.	Incubator of productive projects in CDMX. Recent integration of the driving group of the National AFN Network of RAA. Process facilitator and technical advisor with producers, linkage with other productive/distribution initiatives in CDMX. Collaboration with UNAM in capacity building projects for AFN.	Liaison and project management with international and national funders. Liaison with the federal program Agile Feet. Liaison with international movements (Slow food). Collaboration with UNAM in projects related to sustainable food.
Ecoquilitl	Collective of agro ecologically oriented producers.	Linkage with different AFN distribution spaces. Links at the local level with universities and other AFN facilitated by the civil association Redes A.C., which was an initial liaison and advisor, as well as other AFN with which they distribute their products.	

Source: Personal elaboration.

4. Discussion

In general terms, three profiles are usually distinguished within the AFN: producers, managers, and consumers, although in practice some individuals may occupy several roles simultaneously. These profiles are distinguished by their functions but often also belong to different socioeconomic sectors, which introduce inequality within these groups, a characteristic possibly more relevant in Latin America than in other contexts. The different functions and socioeconomic inequality among the actors involved in the AFNs also

translate into the relevance of these initiatives in the lives of the actors: while the producers are immersed in the activities on a daily basis, which represent a fundamental element in their family livelihoods, for the managers it is a link that derives from a political positioning, which can be relevant in terms of building collective identities and participation in a political project. These initiatives generally do not generate enough income to be able to financially compensate the managers for the time they invest, so they are forced to seek income from other activities, limiting the scope of their actions. This situation reflects a tension that has been discussed in other works [110,111], between commercial dynamics, operational needs, and the solidarity ideals of local agri-food systems that seek to improve the accessibility of these foods to a larger portion of the population. On the other hand, it was observed that when political mobilisation is prioritised, there is a risk that operational activities receive less attention, which can lead to the decline of the initiative itself. Consumers, on the other hand, generally have a conscious and empathetic relationship, essential in economic terms for the AFNs but often circumstantial.

The figure of managers is often little studied because most research has focused on producer-consumer relations or on the alternative character of networks [107,112]. However, they play a central role not only in the internal functioning of the initiatives but also as agents of territorial development. They are the dynamizers of networks on which the governance mechanisms rely to a large extent, and they perform control, supervision, and planning as well. The strengthening of social and cultural capital and how this is obtained depends on their work and capabilities. Table 3, presented below, shows the different contributions made possible by the actions of managers from their organisation.

At the same time, the key role of managers can lead to contradictions linked to their producers, academics, or activists, the accumulation of relationships and the centralization of information. These contradictions represent a risk for social capital because the concentration of relationships and information could cause asymmetries and inequalities that affect the commercialization of the most vulnerable and trust in the organisation.

The Table 3 shows the diversity in the size of the coordination groups. This impacts their forms of governance, which can range from a small group of decision-makers to steering committees or general assemblies as a way of controlling possible inequalities. The size of the coordinating groups depends on the consolidation of the networks, the number of members as well as their relationship with other organisations and governmental actors.

It is worth highlighting that these actors act as enablers in building bridging and linking social capital. Among them firstly are the managers who share characteristics that facilitate their participation in the construction of social capital. The first one is their experience in coordinating operational activities. The second is the knowledge they have of other initiatives and the linkages with the managers of other networks. The third is their capacity to mobilise, which derives from their activism.

Furthermore, there are other network facilitators, who play an important role in strengthening the processes of articulation between initiatives (bridging), their access to spaces for visibility and advocacy with government entities, as well as supporting the actions and orientations taken by these groups, articulated (linking) by the effort to construct the National Network of AFN. These actors may be active members of other civil society organisations, universities, or both, and in some cases even governmental actors. In all cases, these are actors are close with the initiatives and, more broadly, they know the structural and socio-environmental difficulties characteristic of the territories.

Finally, in the strengthening processes between initiatives (linking) and those of linking to unleash the agenda and design of policies and programs, the actors that stand out are NGOs, participants in public policy coalitions, international institutions (e.g., FAO), or academic organisations, such as universities and representatives of the media. All these actors encourage and consolidate the demands of the AFN.

The relationships between the networks with external actors (linking social capital) have been based on different strategies. The Green CapitalFarmers" Market was created under the impulse and support of consultants from UN agencies, such as FAO, in con-

junction with the city's rural development secretariat. This same market is part of the initiatives that allied with Greenpeace to open a new commercialization space. The Tlalpan Alternative Market had interpersonal links with its coordinators, which facilitated the relationship with local and national political actors. In addition, the management team has members who have held or hold positions in public administration, particularly in the city's environmental secretariat, or federal Secretaries, as well as having links with political parties. In the case of the Zacahuitzco Collective, the most relevant aspect is its links with Congress, with advisory members of deputies, workers of the same institution, and those who accompany processes such as those linked to the constitutional amendment to Article 4 that guarantees the Right to Food, a product of a large public policy coalition such as the national campaign "Without Corn, there is no country", in which some AFN are currently participating. Likewise, the participation of different civil society organisations in the "Alliance for Food Health" stands out, as they are also directly linked to parliamentary commissions and the university students involved. Finally, it is also important to point out journalists who support access to dissemination spaces in the press.

To summarize: the case studies addressed show the capacities of the actors to build bonds of trust and cooperation to achieve common objectives based on the pragmatic disposition to build alliances and influence the enactment of laws, policies, programs, and actions aimed at favouring organic, agroecological, or transitional production as part of more sustainable and healthy food policies. From our experiences with the discussion groups, managers can play a very important role in constraining or expanding the dimensions of social capital, but this is also related to the specific characteristics of each network, as seen above. The achievement of objectives depends on a strategy of strengthening the social and cultural capital of its members, resembling a vision close to this concept in the work of Bourdieu [113] in relation to cohesion and cooperation, as well as in the constitution of broad public policy coalitions.

5. Conclusions

The results of the research have addressed two categories on which this article is based: political incidence and social capital. The initial hypothesis about the influence of social capital on the agenda and design of local public policy has been positively demonstrated by the synergy between initiative managers, representatives in local government, and Federal Public Administration. Another hypothesis that has been positively demonstrated is the central role of managers in the construction of social capital aiming to promote the design of institutional arrangements led by social actors [89], generating an institutional context that facilitates compliance with the rules.

However, there are some constraints that tend to decrease social capital:

- The fieldwork conducted in the project demonstrates that, despite the involvement of multiple actors in AFNs, the participation and burdens are not equally shared.
- This finding is consistent with the recent literature [114,115] that has pointed out the centralisation of activities in managers and the fatigue to which they are exposed. All of this can lead to lethargy and affect transparency processes, resulting in the "tragedy of the AFNs" [115].
- Although all AFNs identify with political ideals linked to sovereignty and recognise among their objectives the goal of changing food systems, only some of them operate as spaces of activism. The interest, capacity, and investment in articulating a second-level organisation that could facilitate exchanges between them and links with public bodies depend to a large extent on the social capital of their managers.
- These circumstances do not allow managers to operate the initiatives they intend to make visible. The possibility and efforts to generate second-level associations that can represent AFNs in decision-making bodies and defend their interests at the same time as having a legal status is crucial and would give them greater weight and the possibility of receiving support from external organisations with legal status to formalise collaborations through project management, addressed to reinforce digital

networks, cooperative associations, and shared infrastructure such as cooperative hubs [116].

- Finally, we think relevant topics for future research should include a detailed analysis of producer and consumer participation in AFN governance, producer and consumer knowledge and representativeness in second-tier AFN organisations, and policymakers' views of AFN organisational and mobilisation efforts.

Supplementary Materials: In the following link it is possible to consult the web page of the project in the framework of which this article was developed https://sdi.unam.mx/alisus/ (accessed on 30 November 2022).

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data analyzed are not available on any online platform. Data obtained from official information sites are duly referenced in the text.

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Appendix A. Alternative Food Networks Websites

https://www.facebook.com/RedEcomun
https://www.facebook.com/mawiok1/about/?ref=page_internal
https://www.facebook.com/tianguismezcalero
https://www.facebook.com/tianguisorganicodf,
https://www.facebook.com/cooltivamx/videos_by,
https://www.facebook.com/CanastaBas
https://raaitacate.wordpress.com/
https://kehuelga.net/IMG/pdf/raai.pdf
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https://www.facebook.com/ComunidadMultitruekeMixiuhca
https://www.facebook.com/TianguisForoAlternativo
https://www.facebook.com/organica.stamarialaribera/about

https://www.facebook.com/MercadoAlternativoDeTlalpan
https://www.facebook.com/laordena.pixcacampesina/about
https://www.facebook.com/chinampa.amilli/?ref=page_internal
https://www.facebook.com/Chinampasenmovimiento/about
https://www.facebook.com/colectivoahuejotemx,
https://www.facebook.com/Eco-Quilitl-Productores-Agroecol%C3%B3gicos-de-Xochimilco-151041345635943
https://www.facebook.com/tianguisalternativotepepan
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