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THE (DE-)POLITICIZED MOTIVATIONS OF FOOD CHARITY VOLUNTEERS IN GHENT AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE RIGHT TO FOOD

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Foreword

This thesis was written for my Master's degree in Rural Development with a specialization in the *Society* track at Ghent University, Belgium, and Institut Agro Rennes-Angers, France. The subject of this thesis is related to food poverty, food support, and the right to food. These are very fascinating concepts that I have become familiar with through my involvement in this project. Including ethnographic field work in studying this topic meant confronting myself with a wealth of sensory data: users posture and how they dispersed themselves at distribution points, head low and limiting conversations, forced smiles or closed faces when interacting with volunteers, and how fellow volunteers would use discrete signs or facial expressions to enroll me in an assumed shared perception of users.

However, despite joining different volunteer groups throughout this project, by virtue of my Afro-Caribbean ethnicity, my status as a foreigner, my social class, and the language barrier, my positionality was rather that of an outsider. In the volunteer groups that I have joined as part of this study, I have often been the only black and/or foreign person. I found myself fearing judgment for being “undeserving” when coordinators or fellow volunteers would offer me to take some food home. Moreover, I felt guilty for taking food that other people needed more than me. Though on numerous occasions, I could not bring myself to eat the food that I had received either because it was expired or unattractive in other ways. To me, this was a statement of a certain class privilege that I held. I had a choice.

It was important in conducting this research to apply on myself the tool of reflexivity and to analyze how my positionality could influence my observations and interpretations. Both the strength and the biggest challenge of qualitative and ethnographic research are their largely interpretative aspects. How do you fairly “interpret” a participant’s quote? Is there a possibility of seeing things that are not there? But as it is true when discussing photography, it is also the case in any situation that people interpret messages differently. Though interpreting as a researcher requires questioning personal opinions and identities and systematically adopting a theoretical lens to make sense of the data.

From the beginning of this research, I was told that food assistance in Ghent was a dynamic field, therefore, to make sure that this study would not be a master thesis floating around in the air, but would be useful to individuals working in the sector and policymakers. I dare hope that this goal has been accomplished. Writing this document, I am aware that several of the volunteers and coordinators that I have gotten to know throughout this project have requested to read the output. I feel, at once, great pride that this work will have a life beyond the simple submission of an academic assignment and immense responsibility to fairly portray my learnings from this project and the complexity of the people that I have met.

The objective of this thesis work is not to disparage the food support organizations or volunteers represented in it but rather to encourage self-questioning and reflection. Some readers will be disturbed by this work because it may interfere with their perception of themselves, their beliefs, and their motivations, especially if they have worked at or volunteered at food banks. Talks about race may trigger defensiveness and claims that “I’m not a racist” which I have heard more than once during this project. I have also witnessed firsthand how difficult it can be to move beyond the malaise and to welcome reflexivity. But having difficult conversations is a necessary step to advance the politicization process.

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This endeavor would not have been possible without the impulse of the Stadsacademie, which started the trajectory on food democracy that this project belonged to. Through them, I have come into contact with students researching on food support in Ghent from different perspectives, which enriched my own understanding of the field. This platform has also served as a meeting point for us to interact with relevant stakeholders giving me my first experience of participatory research and a desire to pursue in this direction for the foreseeable future.

Special thanks to Ghent University, my main learning hub for the last two years, for its financial support for the realization of the photo-exhibition and for providing an enriching environment where I could grow intellectually. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all my professors at Ghent University, Institut Agro-Rennes Angers and the Slovak University of Agriculture. I have no doubt that the learnings that you have infused in me throughout this programme have endowed me with the needed tools to successfully undertake this project.

I would be remiss in not expressing my deepest appreciation and thanks to all the volunteers, coordinators, social workers and other actors involved in the food support sector in Ghent. You have welcomed me, a young, foreign, non-Dutch speaking researcher with open arms and believed in my project. Thank you to the volunteers and their organizations for agreeing to participate and for making of the Photovoice project a reality. Thank you for the laughs, the warmth and the learning that we did together. More than anything, this project has been profoundly human. I am forever indebted to all of you.

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I need to acknowledge my infallible support system: my sisters, Jessica and Berlange, and the rest of my incredibly supportive family, my wonderful friends, Grace, Love-Lyne, Daniel, Cristopher, Jhon Kély, Apollo and all the others I have met within and outside of the IMRD Programme. Lastly, I am at a loss for words to express just how thankful I am to the one I turned to with all of my worries during the surprisingly long months that this project lasted. Thank you, Kika, for the emotional support, for enduring my moments of self-doubt, my panic attacks and for always lifting up my spirits and reminding me that I am capable. I never cease to thank God for all of his blessings and for having you all in my life.

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List of abbreviations

APPG	All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty
BIRB	Belgian Intervention and Refund Bureau
CESCR	Committee on economic, social and cultural rights.
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FEAD	Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
KRAS	Kring Rond mensen in Armoede in de Stad
OCMW	Openbaar centrum voor maatschappelijk welzijn
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
ORID	Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional
PCSW	Public Centres for Social Welfare
SHOWED	See, Happening, Our, Why, Exist, Do
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Abstract

The increasing presence of food banks in the charity landscape has been a familiar pattern across the developed world. As food banking is growing in importance, it is more and more integrated into existing welfare arrangements to supplement states' efforts to challenge food insecurity, causing widespread fear of a depoliticization of the issue of food poverty. In Ghent (Flanders), over a dozen organizations are specialized in food assistance**.** Food support in Ghent relies largely on the work of volunteers who have a very diverse range of motivations, more or less politicized, to join organizations that themselves articulate varying discourses. Using a multimethod approach, this study investigated the motivations of volunteers and the dominant discourses within the sector. Furthermore, a photography project encouraged volunteers to be reflexive about their work and to exchange perspectives with volunteers from other organizations. It was found that volunteers mostly express self-oriented or charity-based motivations for entering the sector but for some of them, their experiences with people in poverty helped them to develop a more politicized view of food poverty. Moreover, the data revealed that there is a plurality of discourses within the food support macro-sphere in Ghent and within individual organizations. Finally, participation in the photography project has led to new reflections and learnings for volunteers, supporting the politicization process. Thus, organizations are encouraged to create environments that are more conducive to reflexivity and deliberations for volunteers as it is crucial to mobilize them in the fight for the right to food.

Keywords: food banks, charity economy, volunteering, politicization, right to food

Chapter I: Introduction

Problem statement

Food poverty is defined as "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or uncertainty that one will be able to do so" (Dowler et al., 2001, p. 12; Dowler & O'Connor, 2012, p. 45, based on the definition of hunger by Radimer et al., 1990, p. 1546). This ability to continuously access food also involves not having to resort to emergency food sources (American Dietetic Association, 2010). Many have argued that food waste or surplus should be repurposed and used to feed the hungry instead of ending up in landfills. But this deceptively straightforward solution does not provide an answer to a very important question, which is "Why should such citizens not be able to shop for food like everyone else?" (Dowler et al., 2001, p. 119).

Among the organizations providing emergency food support, food banks are the most recognizable type. Food banks are generally operated by members of civil society such as charity organizations, community groups, and churches. Often, the products available at food banks are donations from shoppers, supermarkets, restaurants, schools, churches, and other institutions (Caplan, 2017). Therefore, food banks are considered food charity responses to food poverty (Silvasti & Riches, 2014). As such, diverse issues and criticisms are associated with them. First of all, the unreliability of supply in some food banks and the unavailability of fresh products are common concerns (Caplan, 2017). Moreover, most food banks adopt a referral system wherein users are signposted by a health or social care professional, or another aid agency (Downing et al., 2014). It entails that users often have to prove their entitlement to a food parcel. And because they are receiving a "gift", they are expected not to voice preferences and to express gratitude when interacting with volunteers (Caplan, 2017). Thus, food bank users have reported feeling shame when accessing these emergency food services, particularly when doing so for the first time (Van der Horst et al., 2014).

Despite the criticisms, the increasing presence of food banks in the charity landscape has been a familiar pattern across the developed world (Lambie-Mumford & Silvasti, 2020). As food banking is growing in importance, it is more and more integrated into existing welfare arrangements to supplement states' efforts to challenge food insecurity (Kessl et al., 2020). This institutionalization or corporatization causes widespread fear of a depoliticization of the issue of food poverty (Caraher & Furey, 2018; Vandekinderen, 2021).

In contrast to food charity, the concept of the right to food reasserts food poverty as a political issue. It is defined as "an entitlement to be free from hunger, which derives from the assertion that the society has enough resources, both economic and institutional, to ensure that everyone is adequately nourished" (Drèze, 2004, p. 1726). The respect, protection, and fulfillment of this right is the responsibility of the State. Nonetheless, there is room for citizens' action, particularly when this right cannot be translated into specific prerogatives. In these cases, democratic politics represent an avenue for aware citizens to act towards or express their claims to this right (Drèze, 2004).

For numerous authors, food support cannot fit within the human rights framework and is, on the contrary, undermining efforts to politicize the issue of food poverty (Caraher & Furey, 2018). In that same perspective, volunteering at food banks is perceived as an action that requires little engagement and distracts from real activism (Muehlebach, 2012). However, most

of the critics aimed at food banks in the literature originated from research on large food banks working according to a referral system (Williams et al., 2016). But there is an increasing diversity of approaches to food banking, of which some actively prioritize the respect of human dignity, at times by offering users a real “shopping” experience, for example, in social supermarkets (Downing et al., 2014).

Moreover, researchers have found that food banks providers, and particularly volunteers, are, to some degree aware of the limitations of their actions and the necessity for more transformational actions but this awareness can be easily superseded by the daily obligations of meeting the immediate needs of users (Williams et al., 2016). Thus, volunteers can be encouraged to be reflexive about their work so that their tacit knowledge and understanding can blossom into new possibilities for action (Healy, 1999). Furthermore, even when such awareness is not initially present, it is argued that volunteers’ involvement in the food banking system can help to develop their political sensibilities (Williams et al., 2016). As asserted by Welsh and MacRae (1998), “Food, like no other commodity, allows for a political reawakening, as it touches our lives in so many ways” (p. 241). Indeed, volunteers’ awareness of the deeper roots of the growing demand for emergency food support can rise through their interactions with users while engagement in deliberations with other volunteers can further broaden their perspective (Williams et al., 2016). In that context, food banks can be considered micro-public spheres where people with diverse identities, motivations, and backgrounds get opportunities to discuss public issues and develop discourses and counter-discourses that can become part of the broader societal debate (McCallum, 2011).

However, Schön (1987) hypothesized that all organizational contexts may not be equally suitable for critical reflection to happen. Besides, the various organizations within the food system landscape may promote different understandings of food poverty issues leading to different influences on volunteers’ problematization of these issues. Furthermore, volunteers themselves may have a very diverse range of motivations, more or less politicized, to join any of these organizations. Therefore, engaging the more depoliticized volunteers in accomplishing actions aiming at supporting the achievement of the right to food for all may be one of the greatest challenges that food bank coordinators have to face.

There have been only scarce attempts to date to bring the micro-public spheres formed by these organizations into collision to see how the multiple discourses may interact and how meanings are negotiated. The present research aims to accomplish that by bringing volunteers from various food support organizations together to discuss pictures taken by volunteers themselves. One of its main objectives is to investigate whether and how volunteers’ political sensibilities are influenced by opportunities for critical reflection and deliberations where multiple voices are represented. In line with this objective, autophotography and photo-elicitation methods will be used to help volunteers take a step back from their work and reflect on the experience afterward during semi-directed in-depth interviews and focus groups.

The question addressed throughout this research is whether food banks and the charity economy to which they belong only serve to depoliticize the right to food by offering a surface-level solution or whether it can be a fertile ground for the emergence of politicized individuals and ideas, enriched with tangible experience, capable of shaping a new right based approach to food poverty.

Thesis Structure

This Master's thesis is structured along the following lines. First of all, a literature review is presented encompassing notions of food security, food poverty, and the right to food. Moreover, it addresses the concept of politicization within the charity economy. Subsequently, the theoretical framework guiding this research and leading to the research questions, hypotheses, and objectives is described. The next section introduces the methodology adopted within this study and the analytical framework used to discuss the findings, followed by the processes of data analysis and the results, discussion, and finally conclusion and perspectives.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Food security

The concept of food security emerged in the 1970s. Traditionally, it focused on food availability and most efforts towards addressing food insecurity involved the increase of agricultural production (Clapp et al., 2022; Foster & Leathers, 1999; Mechlem, 2004). In the decade that followed, the work of Amartya Sen on famine brought to light the issue of accessibility (Mechlem, 2004). He demonstrated that individuals' access to food varied within a country and even within the same household (Mechlem, 2004). Soon, fluctuations in production and food prices added the question of stability to the broad understanding of food security. Later on, concerns about food quality and nutritional value were also raised and it was shown that even when food was sufficient, it might be lacking the micro-nutrients and vitamins needed to keep people, especially young children, healthy. Furthermore, many children, particularly in developing countries, were impeded from effective food utilization and reaching nutritional security by their lack of access to clean water and sanitation. At this point, most definitions of food security became set around four elements: availability, access, stability, and utilization (Clapp et al., 2022).

Currently, the prevailing definition of food security is the one adopted at the World Food Summit in 1996. According to this definition, food security is achieved "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". All four previously mentioned elements are addressed in this definition, which is rather extensive. Nonetheless, there have been numerous propositions to challenge or extend it. Even so, it remains compatible with later conceptualizations of food security (Clapp et al., 2022; Ecker & Bresinger, 2012; Riely et al., 1999).

Among them, the Five A's of food security framework (Chappell, 2018) encompasses five notions: availability, accessibility, adequacy, appropriateness or acceptability, and agency. "Accessibility" here is both in the sense of the affordability of an adequate diet as well as in terms of physical access, uncompromised by war, disability, or other physical vulnerabilities. Both "availability" and "access" should be guaranteed at all times. In this context, "adequacy" does not only encompass the nutritional aspect but also the environmental sustainability at the production stage. As for "acceptability", it means that the food should be culturally acceptable, produced, and procured in ways that maintain people's "dignity, self-respect or basic human rights" (Chapell, 2018, p. 69). Lastly, the notion of agency is linked to empowerment as it

emphasizes individuals' power to define and secure their rights regarding food security and the enabling policies to encourage that.

Food poverty

In its current understanding, food security is often compared with a similar but not identical concept, referred to as food poverty. The latter does not currently have a standard definition (Maslen et al., 2013). For the Food Standards Agency of the UK (2014), it is the incapacity "of individuals and households to obtain an adequate and nutritious diet, often because they cannot afford healthy food or there is a lack of shops in their area that are easy to reach". This definition includes the elements of access (physical and economic) and adequacy that are present in the Five A framework of food security (Chapell, 2018). It appears clearly that food poverty is closely linked to food insecurity although it is perhaps more limited in its scope. This first definition does not tell us much about the acceptability and the consequences of food poverty. In contrast, O'Connor et al. (2016) propose this view: "food poverty is the insufficient economic access to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet". In this latter conception, food poverty is used interchangeably with food insecurity (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012; Radimer et al., 1990).

Lack of economic access is central to the notion of food poverty. Other defining elements are unemployment, debt, and reliance on social welfare (All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty [APPG], 2014). Additionally, a deficit of knowledge and a lack of skills or equipment allowing the preparation of healthy foods can also lead to food poverty (Coe, 2013). Food poverty makes it more likely for people to turn towards "cheap" foods that are high in calorie content but are unable to meet their nutritional needs (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012). Another perspective emphasizes the role of food as a social marker and therefore the impacts of food poverty on health, culture, and social participation (Friel & Conlon, 2004). Unemployment, insufficient income, debt, and lack or loss of subsidies can all cause or contribute to the inability of satisfying basic needs and to the necessity of emergency food aid. But while this food support is intended to be temporary, it often becomes part of vulnerable individuals' long-term resources (Holmes et al., 2018).

One important consideration, according to O'Connor et al (2016), is that "food insecurity can exist without food poverty as a contributing influence however food poverty cannot exist without food insecurity" (p. 4). Moreover, as a concept, food poverty is seen as more impactful than food insecurity, particularly in developed countries. The term food poverty is favored "because it does not infer a food safety nuance in the same way that 'food insecurity' perhaps does", it is more emotive and implies "a political sense of urgency as well as a focus on the causes as opposed to the symptoms" (Caraher & Furey, 2018, p. 6). Moreover, to these authors, reflections on ways to discuss and address food poverty must be framed through the lens of the right to food.

The right to food

Definition and evolution of the concept

According to the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food:

> The right to food is the right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access—either directly or by means of financial purchases— to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensure a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear (Ziegler, 2008, p.1);

A rather political concept, the right to food is an approach grounded in a human rights perspective that is slowly reentering the public debate and posing an alternative to food security as a societal aspiration. In the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 12 (1999), the right to food is presented in the following terms: "The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman, and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement" (para.6). The right to food has been used as a powerful tool shaping international trade debates by proponents of the food sovereignty movement, of which the most recognizable figure is La Via Campesina, an organization regrouping peasants, small and medium size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants, and agricultural workers from over 81 countries. Within this political movement, the concept of the right to food has been greatly transformed and redefined. In his 1965's introduction to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s annual flagship publication (FAO, 1965), B. R. Sen stated:

> Man's right to food has come to be universally recognized as one of his fundamental rights. Agriculture has gained in status in the economy of developing countries. Food surpluses have become available for the relief of malnutrition and for assisting the economic growth of food-deficient nations. … I earnestly hope that in this next phase of FAO's history more and more attention will be given to the human factor in economic and social progress…" (p. 4)

Although as the then leader of the FAO (1965-1967), Sen endeavored to realize the right to food by implementing specific guidelines for states to follow, it is rather the perspective that food surplus should be used to curtail malnutrition in poorer countries that has remained dominant (Fakhri, 2019). This perspective was championed by the US federal government which benefited largely from exporting subsidized surplus grain to Third World countries, making them dependent on cheap imports from the US while also destabilizing their local markets (Fakhri, 2019). However, within the food sovereignty movement, emphasis was put on the fact that simply feeding people ought not to be the sole focus of food policies. It was argued that rather the notion of control should be highlighted through a critical rethinking of how power was distributed in the existing production and consumption systems. The core argument when it came to the right to food then became that "people's access to and control over adequate food is a political necessity and not a matter of charity or a method of exerting cruel pressure" (Fakhri, 2019, p 36-37). This argumentation represented a key instance in which the food sovereignty movement disentangled the concept of the right to food with that of food security wherein agribusinesses were seen as the main beneficiaries. Nonetheless, still in 1996, in the World Food Summit Plan of Action, the right to food was referred to as a means of achieving food security (Mechlem, 2004). In later years, however, and to a large extent, thanks to the

expansion of La Via Campesina and its institutional interventions, notably through the FAO (Fakhri, 2019), the right to food has gradually imposed itself as a goal worth pursuing on its own.

Right to food versus food security

Although it has only regained popularity with the increased focus on individual aspects of food security and the increasing popularity of the food sovereignty movement (Fakhri, 2019 Mechlem, 2004), the right to food predates the concept of food security. Nonetheless, the two concepts display many similarities as well as differences. To Mechlem (2004), one key similarity between them is a certain disregard for food safety concerns, seen as less worthy of attention than other common elements such as availability, accessibility, or cultural acceptability. He also argues that they rely on different justifications as food security can be presented as an economically valuable pursuit at the national level, for instance, while as it belongs to an already agreed upon understanding of human rights, the right to food can only be rooted in the idea of human dignity and primarily considered at the individual level (Mechlem, 2004). Moreover, it can be said that as a legal concept firmly established within treaties and customary international law, the normative content of the right to food is less ambiguous and more enforceable as compared with food security which often remains a mere policy concept (Alston & Helmich, 1998; Mechlem, 2004).

It can be argued that the right to food is complementary to the concept of food security as the disparities between the two have partly disintegrated over time with more focus being paid to the individual in the understanding of food security. But another, not necessarily contradictory perspective is, however, that the right to food goes beyond the simple achievement of food security as it requires establishing accountability mechanisms, careful targeting of the most vulnerable individuals, and iterative evaluation of the programs implemented (De Schutter, 2010). To Mechlem (2004), “It is the right to food that fully acknowledges the individual’s dignity, his or her role as a subject, agent of change and as a rights-holder” (p. 645). The question of human dignity is indeed central to a right-to-food approach. It entails that even when they are food secure, people’s right to food can be violated if the food is procured in conditions that they see as humiliating such as picking up garbage or, for some, accepting charity (Mechlem, 2004). Ultimately, what must be recognized is that “there is a difference between promoting one or other policy to improve food security, and acknowledging that individuals have a right to food” (Mechlem, 2004, p. 648).

Legal foundations of the right to food

The right to food, figures, partially or fully within numerous binding and non-binding instruments. In 1948, the right to food was officially recognized as a fundamental human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) where it is stated that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing…” (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). It was further recognized in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966 (Fakhri, 2019; OHCHR, 1966). Apart from reaffirming the previously cited introduction in the UDHR, Article 11 enumerates precise mechanisms to achieve the right to adequate food or freedom from hunger. These include making technical, scientific, and

nutritional knowledge widely accessible for better production, conservation, and distribution of food, supporting agrarian reforms, and fairer international trade agreements. Besides, in the first paragraph of the Rome Declaration of 1996, states "reaffirm the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger". Then, in 2004, 187 FAO member states, adopted *The Voluntary Guidelines for the Progressive Realisation of the Right to Food in the Context of National Food Security*. Increasingly, it is being acknowledged within national constitutions and case law (Mechlem, 2004). The right to food is not explicitly enshrined in the constitution of Belgium but is considered to be indirectly ensured through the fulfillment of broader human rights. However, Belgium signed the ICESCR in 1983 (Belgium Disability Forum, n.d.).

The ICESCR of 1966 is considered the main reference when discussing the right to food. In General Comment No. 12 on the Right to Adequate Food, adopted by the Committee on economic, social and cultural rights (CESCR) (1999), the monitoring body of the ICESCR, in May 1999, the right to food is seen as implying "the availability of food in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, free from adverse substances, and acceptable within a given culture [and] the accessibility of such food in ways that are sustainable and do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights. In this context, "Availability" means having access to food through effective distribution, processing, and market systems or being able to feed oneself directly from productive land or other natural resources. As for "Dietary needs", it supposes that the entire diet must include a variety of nutrients for physical and mental growth, development, and maintenance as well as physical activity in line with human physiological needs at all life cycle stages, suitable to their gender and occupation. A food safety component is inferred from the sequence "Free from adverse substances" which establishes standards and a variety of protective measures to avoid contaminating foodstuffs at various points throughout the food chain through adulteration, poor environmental hygiene, or improper handling. "Cultural acceptability" entails taking into consideration, to the greatest extent feasible, perceived non-nutrient-based values associated with food and food consumption, as well as educated consumer concerns about the nature of accessible food sources. The term "accessibility" refers to both economic and physical accessibility. Economic accessibility signifies that the financial expenditures involved with acquiring food for an adequate diet by the individual or the family should be at a level that does not jeopardize or compromise the attainment and fulfillment of other basic needs. In the physical sense, vulnerable people such as newborns and young children, the elderly, and the infirm should not be excluded from enjoying access to adequate food. The term "Sustainable Access" refers to the requirement that food be available for both present and future generations.

The ICESCR also provides detailed guidelines on how member states should work to realize the right to adequate food. According to these, the primary requirement imposed on States is to actively and urgently, and while mobilizing the maximum of resources available to them, take measures leading towards the complete achievement of the rights to adequate living, which includes the right to food (Article 2 Paragraph 1). These include the elaboration of inclusive right-to-food strategies and policies at the national level, the abolition of existing laws that are contrary to this objective, and the implementation of appropriate legislation. Acceptable measures to realize the right to adequate food may include administrative, financial, educational, and social measures. Through these measures, the right to food can be realized

progressively towards a complete achievement (Article 2 Paragraph 1). Moreover, States are held responsible for ensuring that the minimum essential levels of each of the rights defined in the ICESCR are satisfied, even in times of resource constraints, such as in the case of an economic recession, for the most vulnerable members of society.

The right to food within a human rights framework

The FAO's Freedom From Hunger Campaign of 1963 saw the publication of a manifesto asserting boldly that ''Freedom from hunger is man's first fundamental right''. "Human rights begin with breakfast" is a famous quote from the former president of Senegal, Léopord Sedar Senghor. Although it has dropped in popularity over time, the idea that certain rights such as the right to food or the right to clean water are somehow predominant over more luxurious concerns such as political participation, freedom of expression, or privacy remains alive and shared by people from all kinds of background (Clapham, 2007; Howard, 1983). This is known as the "full belly thesis" (Clapham, 2007). Given its intersectional nature, the right to food holds a rather special status, notably within the ICESCR (Fakhri, 2019).

Nowadays, however, it is more mainstream to consider that human rights are equal and mutually reinforcing (Clapham, 2007). For instance, freedom of expression and association can guarantee public participation in decisions that may impact the right to food. Also concerning so-called second-generation rights (social, economic, and cultural rights), which include, for instance, the right to education, health care, and to housing, the notion of complementarity also stands. Economic, social, and cultural rights, to which the right to food belongs, are defined as "subsistence rights" based on "the idea that social, economic, and political structures should tangibly support populations and individuals in providing for themselves" (p. 1207) by providing them with reasonable opportunities to do so (Chilton & Rose, 2009).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1948. The ensemble formed by this declaration and its associated treaties and legal covenants set a human rights framework, which concerned States can adopt to address societal and developmental challenges. At the core of human rights-based approaches to policy are notions of entitlement, participation, and empowerment (Rideout et al., 2007). The notion of entitlement is tightly linked to that of government accountability. The latter entails that the government constantly monitors the state of the realization of human rights within society and takes action when these rights are being infringed upon or not fulfilled. Moreover, in cases where human rights are violated, accountability supposes that there exist recourses, either judicial or quasi-judicial for the affected individuals (Chilton & Rose, 2009; Mechlem, 2004). When it comes to the idea of participation, Chilton and Rose (2009) postulate that "a human rights approach is predicated on the idea that people have the right and the duty to participate in civic life, including the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programs" (p. 1205). Therefore, it is necessary that people from all backgrounds in society receive timely and clear information to form their own opinion and that they are granted legitimate channels to express their views and to be heard by decision-makers. Transparency in the communication is also seen as essential to foster public participation. A human rights framework acknowledges that certain populations are more vulnerable to food insecurity than others due to socioeconomic factors or historical discrimination (Chilton & Rose, 2009). Lastly, it involves empowering the

most vulnerable people, through first identifying the causes of their vulnerability and finding structural solutions to improve their situations.

Within the human rights framework, three States' obligations are agreed upon: to respect, protect, and fulfill. Thus, States must not inhibit the enjoyment of these rights through harmful policies for instance. Moreover, they are required to provide protection, which may entail preventing powerful individuals, groups, or institutions from interfering with the enjoyment of these rights (Mechlem, 2004). The protection obligation encompasses three requirements: to regulate, supervise and monitor, and to investigate. Lastly, under the facilitation requirement, it is the legal responsibility of the state to take steps toward fulfilling these rights, primarily by creating an enabling environment for their enjoyment. Two other requirements pertaining to the fulfillment obligation are to promote human rights by making sure that right holders are correctly informed about their rights and the existing mechanisms to have them recognized, and to directly provide when individuals are in the impossibility of accessing the means to enjoy these rights on their own (Mechlem, 2004).

In the context of the right to food, this would mean that States must first respect the right to food, notably by steering away from land dispossession that could deprive certain groups of the possibility to control what they eat (Clapham, 2007). The respect obligation also requires proper planning by the State to meet the needs of the population, notably through the facilitation of equitable and sustainable food systems (Clapham, 2007). Moreover, the State, through appropriate regulations, must protect this right from the assaults of individuals, groups, or corporations that disempower marginalized groups and must also establish enforceable food safety measures under the supervision and monitoring requirement of its obligation to provide protection. Furthermore, protecting the right to food or any other human right may also require investigating any alleged violation and ensuring that whenever such a violation is proven true, there exist mechanisms to guarantee that the perpetrators are sanctioned and that the affected parties can obtain reparation, compensation, and protection from future infringements. Lastly, the State must ensure that people can provide food for themselves, through the elimination of poverty and discrimination, the provision of employment, or the implementation of land reforms (Chilton & Rose, 2009; Clapham, 2007).

Resistance to the concept of the right to food often stems from the belief that the State should provide free food to everyone (Chilton & Rose, 2009; Clapham, 2007). However, only in specific cases may the State deliver food assistance in the form of food safety nets and food interventions, such as to meet the immediate needs of most vulnerable individuals and groups, for example, disaster victims, unemployed, sick, old, or disabled people, widow, or anyone whose livelihood is disrupted by circumstances beyond his/her control (Chilton & Rose, 2009; Clapham, 2007). Nonetheless, the provision of food assistance, which can be at odds with human dignity, is often the sole focus of states, at the expense of more extensive efforts to target poverty and discrimination (Chilton & Rose, 2009). The depoliticization of the right to food by the State is rendered easier by the existence of a powerful and growing charity economy in which food support is one of the key tenants.

Although the right to food has been defined and holds legal ground, it can, nonetheless, be an arduous task to derive enforceable prerogatives and liabilities from these accepted understandings beyond the realm of democratic politics (Drèze, 2004). One primary explanation for that is inherent to the normative content of the right to food if Article 2

Paragraph 1 of the ICESCR is taken as a reference. There, it is indicated that States are encouraged to endeavor progressively toward the realization of the right to food. While full realization is the goal, it is acknowledged that it is likely to be a lengthy process, in certain cases, because States may lack the necessary resources (Article 2 Paragraph 1). Regardless of the case, as for many other human rights, it is helpful that civil society as well as national and international organizations act as watchdogs, gathering signals and making sure that the efforts towards the achievement of a human right are not superseded by other priorities. Because, although the right to food as any human rights exist beyond states and state sovereignty, it only comes alive through the claims made by people, either as advocates or as individuals facing one form or another of right infringement, and under specific circumstances (Stern & Strauss, 2014). The human rights of individuals everywhere may have been pledged in international law but the systems in place to make good on such promises and commitments are appallingly inadequate (Stern & Strauss, 2014). The realization of universal human rights occurs in particular nations with institutions that have implemented mechanisms to guarantee the protection of rights or through particular transnational networks of civil society actors keeping states accountable (Ignatieff, 2001; Simmons, 2009; Stern & Strauss, 2014).

However, in some cases, enforcing the right to food cannot be solely the responsibility of the State but also requires the involvement of other institutions and individuals. For example, as illustrated by Drèze (2004), if one who holds the belief that food is a human right were to encounter a starving person on the street, would it make sense to simply walk away arguing that it is the State's responsibility? Besides, there may be instances where the right to food is not or hardly justiciable. It is unlikely, for instance, that a single individual would take the government to court or that a little girl who would have limited access to food in her household due to gender discrimination would decide to file a lawsuit against her parents (Drèze, 2004). Thus, there arises a necessity to promote the right to food, not only to hold the state accountable for keeping up with its promises but also as a means to change " public perceptions of who is entitled to what" (Drèze, 2004, p. 1727); in other words, to make hunger socially unacceptable. This is effective both to encourage civil society's actions and also given that in a democracy, citizens, through democratic politics have a great influence on political will, which is often seen as the missing link for the realization of human rights objectives.

The charity economy and the welfare state

According to Schöneville (2018), the term "charity economy" refers to a "distribution system of elementary goods" (p. 4) encompassing at once food banks, soup kitchens, charity shops for clothes, and social groceries. Arguing that the charity economy is both a marker of an alteration of welfare (state) systems and a representation of change in our civilizations' social structures. "Fighting hunger has become a national pastime," wrote Poppendieck (1999, p. 44) acknowledging similar developments in the United States. Nowadays, food support is a significant industry that is supported by a complex network of governmental, private, for-profit, and nonprofit relationships. In order to supply, distribute, or prepare food for the poor and food insecure, this network brings together private, public, corporate, and community actors. According to Fisher (2017), there is a self-perpetuating hunger industrial complex as a result of the dysfunctional interactions between the government and non-governmental organizations.

These often volunteer-based organizations which rely on financial and in-kind donations have become an unavoidable feature of present welfare (state) arrangement as manifested by the referral system in which food bank users are reoriented towards food charity by job centers or other state-run agencies (Schöneville, 2018). This entails a growing deresponsibilization of the state which delegates its responsibilities towards people in poverty to voluntary organizations. The author refers to these organizations as part of an alternative economy because they are, unknowingly or not, embedded in the capitalistic market. Indeed, they have essentially cut the waste disposal costs of supermarket chains which can moreover use their donations to these organizations within their marketing strategy and as a means to pay lower taxes. Moreover, they constitute a secondary economy in which people in poverty are forced to participate, having lost their status as consumers in the normal economy. This secondary economy is based on gifts, surplus, or leftover goods (Schöneville, 2018).

The failures of food banks

Food banks are an example of the types of emergency food aid that have been largely supported by numerous states around the developed world. Riches (1986) define food banks as "centralized warehouses or clearing houses registered as non-profit organizations for the purpose of collecting, storing and distributing surplus food (donated/shared), free of charge either directly to hungry people or to front line social agencies which provide supplementary food and meals" (p. 16).

The fact that food donated to food banks is often goods that are close to expiry, or that have failed to meet the market's quality standards in some ways leads to a perception of this food as "leftover food for leftover people". Researchers also suggested that food banks support the framing of poverty as the consequence of individual choices rather than as a lack of social justice (Caraher & Furey, 2018). Food bank users are often required to prove "real" need and the very functioning of some food banks, using a referral system to decide which people to serve, implies a dichotomy of "deserving" versus "undeserving" poor that food banks volunteers have been found to also hold as a belief (Caplan, 2017). Besides, food banks users are expected to show courtesy and gratitude and to have no exigency given that they are being granted a favor, which fuels feelings of shame (Andriessen et al., 2022; Garthwaite, 2016; Silvasti & Riches, 2014; Schöneville, 2018; van der Horst, 2014). Furthermore, food banks are said to suffer from the seven deadly "ins" described by Poppendieck (1999), namely insufficiency, inappropriateness, nutritional inadequacy, instability, inaccessibility, inefficiency, and indignity. Caraher and Furey (2018) suggest adding inequity to this list.

For some, however, food banks can be perceived as a necessary evil or rather a solution in the meantime (Cloke et al., 2017). Interviews with volunteers often reveal an awareness of the limitations of food banks as a solution to food insecurity, but also a feeling that it is still worthwhile to feed as many people as possible even if the lines are growing (Williams et al., 2016). The question raised by those sharing this perspective is: even though food banks are not the perfect solution where can the hungry share of the population find food while longer-term solutions are being investigated? (Cloke et al., 2017)

However, the simultaneous increase in the number of food banks and the breadth of food poverty is, to some researchers, ample evidence of the inadequacy of food banks to solve food injustice (Riches, 2002). For these reasons, some scholars have advocated for closing food

banks (Poppendieck, 1999). Numerous researchers argue that food banks give the illusion that food poverty can be solved by charity and thus, deresponsibilize the state from having to guarantee the right to food for each individual, essentially depoliticizing the food poverty issue (Caraher & Furey, 2018; May et al., 2020; Poppendieck, 1999; Riches, 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that food banks take away the "sense of urgency" for policymakers to develop long-term solutions to address the structural roots of poverty. Thus, a potentially better question is: are food banks part of the problem or at least preventing the (development of) solutions?

Apart from failing to respond to the different dimensions of the right to food, the institutionalization of food banks may constitute an outright violation of their commitment to the right to food by states, according to the principles of the ICESCR. As indicated by Holmes at al (2018), although food banks are intended to be emergency forms of support, they often tend to become permanent for people in poverty while their mission is neither to prevent nor to tackle poverty, but rather to alleviate its most difficult aspects. What does this mean in regard to the state's responsibility to "actively and urgently", and using all available resources, take steps toward the full realization of the right to a decent standard of living, including the right to food (Article 2 Paragraph 1)? Is it not likely that the state may be demotivated to take these steps if it seems that the problem is already being addressed? Moreover, how to understand that substantial resources are diverted from that necessary and urgent effort towards supporting a system that may be actively hurting the right to food? Lastly, is it not the state and not charitable organizations that hold the responsibility to guarantee people's right to food?

This discussion suggests that food charities cannot fit into the framework of the right to food. Their institutionalization is therefore a worrisome development and raises numerous questions (Riches & Tarasuk, 2014). In the modern hybridized system, the welfare state refers people in need to the charity economy where food banks are located. Citizens are therefore sent by the government which has the responsibility of enforcing their right to food, to places where they are told that they have no entitlement because they are being helped out of charity by volunteers who "are not paid for that". This may create a sense of confusion and powerlessness. Moreover, when users experience shame or prejudice within these charitable structures, it can be felt as though the state itself is indirectly prejudiced against them (Schöneville, 2018). In any case, if the right to food involves the possibility of obtaining food in a dignified manner, does it entail that users should demand remediation recourses from the state for the micro-aggressions that they face within food banks, which can be seen as violations of their right?

To conclude, it can be said that there is some value to the argument that food banks, to some extent, represent obstacles to the realization of the right to food. But could they also be ambiguous spaces carrying the seed for a deeper transformation of our societies, as argued by Cloke et al (2017)? If yes, under what conditions?

Politicizing charity: volunteering and activism

"Volunteerism is the intentional engagement in helping for the benefit of others; it can be long term or flare up in moments of crisis, but it does not necessarily entail intentions to bring about change" (Kende et al., 2017, p. 261). Through this definition, volunteerism is opposed to activism or engagement in political protest which tends to be motivated by a desire to achieve change, the perception of a violation of one's moral principles, and identification with the unjustly treated group (Kende et al., 2017). Volunteerism is further defined as a striving

to maintain social cohesion through the provision of services with no intention of disrupting the social structure (Penner, 2004; Wright & Lubensky, 2013). Common motivations expressed by people for engaging in volunteering include learning new skills, finding meaning and personal growth, and helping people in their in-group or in disadvantaged out-groups (Batson et al., 1995; Omoto & Snyder, 1990; Russell, 2011; Snyder & Omoto, 2008; Wilson, 2000).

In the case of volunteering by privileged groups helping underprivileged others, while the acknowledgment of shared characteristics may be beneficial to create a sense of sympathy or empathy, it can also lead to a dismissal of power dynamics, patterns of neoliberal stigma, and a diminution of the will to engage in actions with the potential of disrupting the status quo (Kende et al., 2017; Powers & Ellison, 1995; Wright & Lubensky, 2013).

The term neoliberal stigma is specifically used by de Souza (2019) to refer to a "particular kind of Western and American narrative that focuses on individualism, hard work, and personal responsibility as defining attributes of human dignity and citizenship" (p. 17). Stigma arises when people fail to rise to these standards but understandings of stigma cannot be separated from considerations of power and domination (Link & Phelan, 2014). Power imbalances are inherent to cross-group helping as helpers are naturally endowed with more resources, can make decisions about who is deserving of their help and under which conditions, reassert their own relative group identity and image, and maintain their moral advantage (Hopkins et al., 2007; Van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the delivery of services by volunteers could potentially give the impression that a social problem is being solved, hence taking away the sense of urgency that some social issues should take on. Thus, the attitude and approach of the volunteer group are primordial.

As explained by Thomas and McGarty (2017), not all forms of generosity aim at maintaining the status quo or at bringing relief to disadvantaged groups. Contrary to this benevolent generosity also referred to as paternalistic help, charity services, or, more broadly, dependency-oriented forms of help, a more activist type is directly targeted at questioning and challenging the structural conditions that are at the roots of the disadvantage. While the tendency in the literature is to confront volunteering and activism and to characterize them as two diametrically opposed forms of civic engagement (Snyder & Omoto, 2008; Wright & Lubensky, 2013), the possibility of overlap must be acknowledged (Kende et al., 2017).

Thus, even though volunteering is sometimes seen as a passive activity that detracts from actual activism, (Muehlebach, 2012), Henriksen and Svedberg (2010) argue that the divide may not be as stark as suggested. Therefore it can be asked: can the will for social change exist even inside charity services? Can volunteers be mobilized to engage in politicized actions?

The relevance of these questions in the context of this research lies in the fact that, as suggested by Drèze (2004) as well as Caraher and Furey (2018), the achievement of the right to food may be dependent on the politicized actions of members of the civil society working actively to transform social norms and hold governments accountable, for instance, in cases where the State is found lacking regarding its obligations towards the right to food. And as argued by Kende et al (2017), "social movements are just as dependent on mobilizing allies for political actions as they are on mobilizing volunteers" (p. 265) and more precisely, "those who not only provide services but also critically reflect on the structural aspects of disadvantage" (p.265). The importance of volunteers in the fight for the right to food is rendered more crucial by the fact that a powerful volunteer-based charity economy centered on the provision of food

support, has emerged and expanded in numerous developed countries, and is at constant risk of getting institutionalized by the State (Poppendieck, 1999; Silvasti & Riches, 2014).

Food banks as political and politicized spaces

That food banks are political spaces can be inferred, first of all, from the fact that food itself is political. The mobilization of food in social and political protest predates our century and is a practice that remains powerful in today's world, from the food riots of the 18th century and those following the crises of 2007-2008 to being weaponized in unconventional forms of climate protests recently. Food may be used to forge new identities and opportunities for action. Food has also transformed into an artifact that questions the premises of neoliberalism (Guthman, 2008) and its promises to enhance human well-being through the unleashing of the power of individual entrepreneurial liberties in a context characterized by near-complete deregulation (Harvey, 2005). Rampant hunger within developed neoliberal societies is often presented as the most disturbing sign of the failure of neoliberalism (Jarosz, 2011).

Food can be considered "a multilayered symbol", a tool for both inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, food can be, alternately, a symbol of equality, closeness, or solidarity, just as it can help to preserve interactions based on hierarchy, distance, or segmentation (Appadurai, 1981). Food can also be used as a tool for political domination as argued in the fight for seed sovereignty (Kloppenburg, 2014). The exclusionary potential of food is also notable in the distinction made by Bourdieu (1990) between "the taste of necessity" and "the taste of luxury/freedom". As explained by de Souza (2019), poor people and wealthy people do not talk about food in the same manner, nor do they have the same preferences and habits. Thus, food can be seen as a powerful social marker (Dougherty et al., 2016).

The links between social identity structures of class, race, and gender in modern society are becoming more and more connected to specific gastronomic practices (de Souza, 2019; Shugart, 2014). One key feature of food poverty is the propensity that it creates for poor people to resort to the most caloric, cheap, and filling food with potentially dire health consequences (Dinour et al., 2007; Drewnowski & Darmon, 2005; Guthman, 2011). They are also faced with limited choices as compared to people in wealthier economic classes. And at no other time are the choices of people in poverty more restricted than when they have to resort to food support.

Given the underlying political subtexts associated with food, it is unlikely that any place dealing with food could be truly apolitical. Yet, food banks have often been considered as such, as neutral charitable spaces. A more interesting perspective is to rather see them as interfaces where ingrained ideas entwined with politics, religion, and race combine in a web of potent political narratives (de Souza, 2019). Food banks are not mere places for food collection and distribution. They are also political spaces. The term "political", in this context, does not refer to dimensions of political engagement such as voting or party identification but rather to the confrontation of entrenched ways of seeing and comprehending the world, and specifically, of different "views about the problem of hunger and food insecurity, its causes and solutions, and perceptions about who the hungry are" (de Souza, 2019, p. 20).

Every actor involved in the interactions occurring within the food bank, be it a donor, a salaried coordinator, a volunteer, or a user, has their own set of beliefs, identities, and subjectivities, which define their attitude and behavior. These in turn may support or contradict the perspectives and visions of the food distribution organizations themselves (de Souza, 2019).

As explained by de Souza (2019), "in these charitable enclaves, kindness and care coincide with racism, paternalism, and systems of poverty governance, as well as resistance to these systems" (p. 20). There, political ideologies, whether they are acknowledged or not, cohabit with moral and religious values shaping ideas and actions. But only when these subtextual elements are recognized, power imbalances are addressed and sufficient attention is paid to structural causes of poverty rather than to the basic delivery services can food banks capitalize on their potential to be politicized places, meaning places for organized actions and activism (de Souza, 2019). Indeed, since food banks seem to be here to stay, they are encouraged to aim to play a greater role in advocacy in the future and to actively work towards their own irrelevance (Alemanno, 2017; Caraher & Perry, 2017). But what is the real potential of food banks on that front?

Caraher and Furey (2018) report that a few food banks in the UK have voluntarily shut down to protest further institutionalization by the state and, elsewhere, there are wider campaigns based on lobbying and advocacy led by volunteers. These are perceived to be promising new development in food policy action that warrants further research (Alemanno, 2017; Sutton, 2016). Some food banks collect data on the growing number of their users and attempt to publicize that food bank usage reflects deeper problems of poverty. Moreover, next to the traditional food banks, new initiatives are emerging that attempt to avoid some of the sins attributed to food banks, notably by not requiring proof of need from users or by allowing them to have a "real" shopping experience, just like other customers. Social groceries are examples of such alternative approaches (Downing et al., 2014).

Besides, for Cloke et al (2017), food banks can be conceptualized as spaces of care shaping a transitioning ethical and political response to welfare. They argue that by allowing people from different social classes and backgrounds to meet in a meaningful way, food banks serve to articulate a new understanding of the common good and new notions of social care. In that sense, food banks become "liminal spaces of encounter". Food bank staff and volunteers can see the different faces of hunger, therefore freeing themselves from stereotypes of the poor as lazy and irresponsible. This new understanding may fuel political awareness and activism.

This type of "reflexive engagement", as termed by Williams et al (2016) or "desirous proximity" (de Souza, 2019), is a source of knowledge for the volunteers and the catalyst of physical affectivity that serves as a shield against derogatory depictions of the poor in the media. Williams et al (2016) also suggest that this newfound awareness can give rise to a feeling of frustration in volunteers and the feeling that "we could do more to challenge that..." (p. 2305). The authors also found that these experiences of reflexive engagement would often generate extensive political conversations between volunteers, regardless of backgrounds and political stances. In that sense and given the advocacy work that they engage in, food banks could therefore be conceptualized as "emergent micro-public sphere [s]" (Barnett, 2014; Williams et al., 2016). As stated by Williams et al., (2016) in their research with food bank volunteers:

> For many of the individuals volunteering at Levington Foodbank, then, their work as volunteers seemed to act as a catalyst for a transformation in their ethical and political sensibilities, with real implications for the relationships they forged with clients within the food bank, and for work, they did beyond the food bank. (Williams et al., 2016)

Furthermore, talking broadly about food banks can hide the diversity of food banking models that may exist and which may influence volunteers' political sensibilities differently. Volunteers are not blank slates but rather autonomous individuals with identities, motivations, and experiences that will to a large extent define how organizational values affect them and how willing they are to comply or not with them and to engage in deliberations. Williams et al (2016) recount a rather common situation where a food bank user does not have the proper referral to obtain their food parcels. In these cases, it is likely that a volunteer's decision to either blindly enforce, negotiate or question the rules may depend on personal factors such as motivation but also on whether their organizational context is conducive to critical reflection.

Understanding the role of reflexivity and the influence of organizational visions, discourses, and practices on volunteers' critical agency can be helpful when investigating the politicizing potential of food banks (Henriksen & Svedberg, 2010). It is crucial to recognize that the discourse of the altruistic and neutral volunteer is, in fact, backed by broader political structures that lead both people and organizations to engage in certain activities instead of others.

The notion that food banks and other related initiatives can serve as micro-public spheres warrant further exploration as it can reveal important insights into the future evolvement of food banking. Indeed, if this conceptual possibility is proven true, then food banks "can, even if only partially, rework, reinforce and generate new and progressive political sensibilities" (Williams et al., 2016, p.22), which would mean that they have the potential "to connect with, and help catalyze, wider food justice campaigns that seek to address deeper inequalities in the food system" (Williams et al., 2016, p.22). Therefore, food banks could, even indirectly, promote the right to food through volunteers' actions within and beyond the food banks.

As explained previously, the right to food can be advocated by individuals but they have to be aware and be encouraged to act politically. Based on the argument of Williams et al. (2016), we can say that even if only a small portion of volunteers become politicized in and through their activities at food banks, activist groups can seek to collaborate with them and engage them further toward more radical approaches to solve food poverty. Moreover, food being "a vehicle to understanding and tackling interrelated socioeconomic, cultural, political, and ecological processes" (Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015, p. 1558), their awareness of food poverty issues can lead them to take part in activism in other areas.

But while this perspective seems hopeful, some caution is nonetheless advisable. Food bank management and volunteers have been arguing for a long time that their organizations should not exist. Thus although this awareness exists, little has changed over the years if not the expansion and further institutionalization of food banks within states' welfare systems (Williams et al., 2016). Furthermore, despite reasons to think that food banks may help to politicize the issue of food poverty, Williams et al (2016) warn that food banks do not always result in politicization in a progressive sense for volunteers. Indeed, Cloke et al (2017) indicated that a feeling of burden or fatigue can arise in volunteers after a long period of involvement and they can become even more inclined to divide the poor into deserving and undeserving. Moreover, Caraher and Furey (2018), in their interviews with volunteers, found that the latter rarely used a protest discourse or discussed notions of solidarity or rights. They further suggested that volunteers may be somehow aware of the deeper issues of poverty that are driving more and more people to food banks but their immersion in the day-to-day activities of

their organization may keep them from taking the necessary steps back to spur engagement in more transformational actions. Thus, reflexivity could be the missing link.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Food banks as micro-public spheres

The concept of public spheres has been developed by Habermas (1991) to mean a place where the public could gather to deliberate. For Habermas, these public spheres that provided a template for Western liberal democracies represented spaces where “a reasoning public could enter into a rational-critical debate of the main issues of the day to form the public opinion of the people” (McCallum, 2011, p. 174). They were additionally a tool to guarantee the accountability of the state as they mediated between the latter and the society. Hauser (1998) refers to a public sphere as “a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible to reach a common judgment about them” (p. 21). In an ideal democratic setting, the discourses and the counter-discourses that emerge from these discursive arenas can flow into a broader, multicultural public sphere to feed rational debates regarding public issues (Fraser, 2014).

Keane (2013) proposes a categorization constituted of macro-public spheres that are transnational., regional or global., medium-sized meso-public spheres that gather millions of people, and, finally, micro-public spheres that are “bottom-up, small-scale” public spheres consisting of maybe dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people (Keane, 2013). To Williams et al (2016), food banks are an example of these small-scale spheres. A public sphere however small, has the potential to influence the public behavior of participants and to raise a debate that can transcend the limitations of the sphere and even become part of the national discussion on a public issue and contribute to changing the opinions of non-participants.

In his attempt to reveal the existence of religious micro-public spheres, McCallum (2011) used three descriptors: issue, text and media, and participants. It can be argued that there essentially needs to be an issue that affects or interests a particular group of people for them to become constituted into a public sphere. Specific events can serve to bring to light or put emphasis on this issue. They, therefore, serve as triggers, stimulating emotional responses and debates. Cloke et al. (2017) refer to events such as when a user does not have the proper referral allowing them to obtain food so that a volunteer, in that case, may have to decide whether to provide the food support or not. These occurrences that test the limits of organizational rules and volunteers’ willingness to enforce them are conducive grounds for discussion. Thus, it can be said that volunteers can extract discursive substances from their own experiences.

However, text and media can play the same role as events because they often serve as a channel to publicize opinions. Members of a micro-public sphere can react critically on self or externally-produced materials; texts and media thus serving as mediators. In the case of food banks, it is said that volunteers are aware of the critics coming from other public regarding the perceived role of their institution in maintaining a charity approach to food poverty issues (Cloke et al., 2017). Exposure to newspaper articles and academic works has likely contributed to this awareness. Moreover, as mentioned by McCallum (2011) in his study on the Christian public sphere, micro-public spheres produce written and oral texts of different kinds and may

use audio-visual ideas to share their views, as illustrated by the newsletters, handouts, and TV and radio stations. But while food banks have made use of these means, for instance, through the publication of data on the number of users and other materials, by some large food banks to give an overview of the extent of the food poverty issue, the existence of texts and media produced by volunteers themselves is less substantiated.

The last feature of a micro-public sphere according to McCallum (2011) is the participants. He perceives the identity, motivation, and ability of the actors as significant. "Each individual participates as an autonomous actor but inevitably brings an agenda which may be influenced by organizational allegiance or vocation" (McCallum, 2011, p.183). The question of volunteers' motives has been largely studied in the literature. Caplan (2016) reports that for many volunteers their involvement in a food bank constitutes a nice addition to their social life or rather an opportunity for capacity building. To Allahyari (2000), food banks can also be a mechanism of "moral selving" allowing volunteers to feel good about themselves for providing help. However, Marta et al (2006) suggest that volunteers' motivations can be rather complex, balancing both self and other-oriented motivations. These motives as well as volunteers' intention to continue volunteering can also vary with time, in line with volunteers' satisfaction with their work, among other variables that include "educational attainment, mental well-being, social support and fulfillment of altruistic and self-oriented motives as well as volunteer experiences of integration into the volunteer group" (Cheung et al., 2006).

Furthermore, it is worth adding that if each individual food bank represents a micro-public sphere, the food banking system that encompasses all these different volunteer groups can be conceived as a larger public sphere. Members of these groups "may never meet, being separated by geography, circumstance or ideology" (McCallum, 2011, p.183). For McCallum, (2011), the most important value of the concept of the micro public sphere is that it allows a multiple discursive approach, which takes into account the socio-political dimensions of smaller communities within a broader system, showing and explaining the diversity of views, practices, and beliefs that can be expressed. The lack of unification in the voices within the larger public sphere is not a valid reason for alarm but rather a positive development as from these multiple voices, ideas, and strategies, food for thoughts may arise with the potential to benefit and transform the entire sphere and trickle down into the society at large.

One of the critics of Williams et al (2016) on the current literature is that researchers persist in studying food banks as one entity with specific concerns and orientations by focusing on the larger traditional food banks while ignoring the multiplicity of organizations and initiatives within the food support landscape where spectrums and divergences can be found. It is safe to assume that the values of the particular organization that a volunteer belongs to can have an incidence on their political sensibilities. Therefore, the authors advised that the multiplicity of food aid providers embodying and articulating various politics should also be taken into account and one should question whether they "promote different understandings of the problems of food poverty to a wider public, or the negotiation of these politics within the micro-publics" (Williams et al., 2016, p. 7). Taking micro public spheres as a theoretical lens, one can notice "the interaction and occasional collision of different groups and assess the nature of their response to one another" (McCallum, 2011, p.183).

Reflexivity and awareness

Reflexivity has been defined as "a self-defining process that depends on monitoring of and reflection upon, psychological and social information about possible trajectories of life" (Elliott, 2001, p. 37). To Ferguson (2003), reflexivity can be seen as a competency, "the ability to act in the world and to critically reflect on our actions and in ways that may reconstitute how we act and even reshape the very nature of identity itself" (p. 199). A reflexive individual can therefore shape their environment instead of simply being modeled by it. As a competency, reflexivity can be taught and such teaching may lead to emancipation and self-actualization.

Individuals are perceived as possessing tacit knowledge, meaning a pool of knowledge that they are unaware of at any point in time but that can be mobilized through reflexivity (Cook & Yanow, 1993; Polanyi, 1962). However, without denying the individual's agency, other authors have remarked that structural limitations exerted by the environment should not be underestimated as they can effectively prevent individuals from engaging in a project of self-reflexivity (Scourfield & Welsh, 2003). Thus, it is important to consider at once the individuals and their interactions with social structures and the broader context (Kemshall, 2001). This broader context includes "social expectations, cultural practices, institutionally sanctioned forms of behavior, peer group influences, dominant group norms, and so on mediated by particular local settings" (Boud, 2007, p. 127)

The idea of reflection-in-action, which is often used interchangeably with reflexivity, is challenged by authors, like Gilliss (1988), who believe that the daily stream of routine activities does not leave room for reflection to happen. Within organizations, workers are often caught "in a whirl of activity, in which attention must be switched every few minutes from one subject, problem, and person to another" (Watson, 1994, p. 36), and spontaneous actions are prioritized. Disruption of routines may be necessary to allow them to shift from subsidiary to focal awareness, from absorbed to deliberate coping (Weick, 2003).

To Yanow and Tsoukas (2009), more ethnographic research is needed to understand how disruptions to routines affect people within organizations. "Such research could usefully identify the organizational conditions, including power and political dimensions, in which reflection-in-action may flourish or, by contrast, be constrained." (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009, p.1360). However, ethnographic research into this theme would be time-consuming and arduous if, for example, one would have to observe organizations' members over a long period to witness surprises. A better approach could be for the researcher to directly introduce a disruptive element. Such an intervention may be justified if reflexivity is considered beneficial within a particular setting or towards a specific goal; in our case, fostering politicization and pushing food bank volunteers toward transformational political actions on food poverty.

Research questions, hypotheses, and objectives

The two main research questions that this thesis project will attempt to answer are:

1. Does the food charity sector in Ghent help to politicize the issue of food poverty?
    - What are the dominant discourses within the food charity sector and how are they linked to patterns of politicization and depoliticization of the food poverty issue?
    - Does volunteering in food charities help to develop a more politicized view of food poverty?
2. How can volunteers be engaged in the politicization process?

- Do organizational visions, discourses, and practices influence volunteers' political sensibilities and critical agency?
- Could reflexivity and deliberations help to engage volunteers in the politicization process?

This study will first attempt to uncover the discourses articulated within this sector and their articulation with (de-)politicization processes in the sector. Secondly, the evolution of volunteers' views on food poverty through their involvement in these institutions will be considered. The first hypothesis is that volunteering in food charities helps to develop a more politicized view of food poverty but that depoliticizing discourses remain persistent. The first mechanism of this politicization will likely be found in the creation of "liminal spaces of encounter" between food charity volunteers and users while depoliticization may come as a result of underlying volunteer motivations and a lack of opportunities for reflexivity.

As for the second main research question. Two key elements stand out from our discussion up to this point: reflexivity and political conversations within and between micro-public spheres. We can therefore hypothesize that creating opportunities for reflexivity, meaning occasions to step back from their work, can temporarily detach volunteers from the overpowering strength of the daily bustle that creates fatigue and disengagement and helps to engage them in the politicization process. Moreover, as food aid volunteers have distinct values and can be more or less politicized, likely, enabling political conversations that involve a variety of views and experiences can enlarge the possibilities to foster political awareness.

The main objective of this research is to understand what role if any food banks can play in politicizing the issue of food poverty. Firstly, in order to achieve this objective, it will investigate what patterns of politicization and depoliticization are expressed within the food support sector in Ghent, Belgium. Secondarily, it will attempt to understand whether the experiences of volunteers within food banks help them to develop a more politicized view of the issue of food poverty. Moreover, adopting an action-oriented approach, this research will use a photography method to encourage volunteers to be reflexive about their work as well as focus groups gathering volunteers from different organizations to exchange perspectives and contribute to the politicization process.

This research will enrich the debate regarding food banks by discussing the ambiguity of their position at the intersection between food charity and food right. The study will also serve to inform food banks management and right to food activists on food banks' potential capacity to politicize the food poverty issue and propose ways that volunteers can be involved in that process. It will also inspire volunteers to be critical of their work and promote reflection on volunteers' motivations, views, and experiences. Finally, it will encourage the creation of spaces for dialogue to engage volunteers from different food aid agencies and will, considering all of the findings, discuss perspectives for a right to food movement in Ghent.

Chapter 4: Materials and methods

Materials and methods

This research consisted of a four-months project, including in-depth interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, informal discussions, photo-elicitation through individual interviews and focus groups, and finally a joint exhibition highlighting the voices of food bank users and volunteers. An interdisciplinary approach was used both to shape this research and to interpret its findings, drawing on social work, political theory, and food systems concepts. Although a case study methodology has been adopted referring to specific organizations, networks, social restaurants, food distribution points, social groceries, individuals, events, and anecdotes, it has not been considered necessary to consistently link each participant with their organizations as the objective of the research is rather to elucidate the discourses expressed within the food charity landscape, to understand how they contribute to politicize or depoliticize the food poverty issue and how individuals and entities with diverging beliefs and motivations support or challenge these processes.

The methodology used within this study involves in-depth interviews lasting 30 minutes to two hours as well as observation and participant observation. Moreover, to realize this study, a Photovoice method was envisioned and implemented wherein participants were invited to take pictures that were later interpreted during semi-directed interviews of 28 minutes to two hours and subsequent focus groups with the researcher. This method is sometimes called participant-photography. Following in-depth interviews with food support volunteers from different food banking initiatives in Ghent, they were invited to take pictures related to the research question. The rationale behind preliminary interviews was to be inclusive of respondents who may be reluctant to engage in photography taking for diverse reasons, to elicit volunteers' motivations, and to provide an opportunity to explain the principles and ethical implications of the photography method as the limited availability of volunteers did not allow for the planned technical workshops to take place. Nonetheless, ethical considerations were addressed at the end of the individual interviews and discussions preceding the realization of the assignment. The participant-photography methodology's main ethical requirements are that participants comprehend the moral dilemmas surrounding the act of taking pictures and that they obtain the informed consent of everybody who would appear in the images. The volunteers who agreed to participate in the photography segment signed an informed consent form (Appendice 1) that addressed the ethical aspects of the study and permitted the researcher to dispose of the pictures within and beyond the scope of this research. Participants were required to take 5-10 pictures answering the following prompting questions: If a politician comes, what would you show them? What would you not show them?

After taking the pictures, participants sent them by email to the researcher. Photographs were printed in A4 format to facilitate individual semi-directed with participants and subsequent focus groups. During the semi-directed interviews, both the SHOWED and the ORID methods were applied. The SHOWED method includes 5 questions: What do you See here? What is really Happening? How does this relate to Our lives? Why does this problem or strength Exist? What can we Do about it? (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). An additional question use was "what has been left out of the photo?".

As for the ORID method, it is a facilitator's guide that uses the ORID questions (objective, reflective, interpretive, and decisional) to help participants think through the benefits and drawbacks of the photography project and their experience participating in it. The questions adapted for this research included: How many pictures did you take? Did you make any new observations or reflections? How long did it take you to complete your research assignment? How did you feel when you took that picture? Was there anything challenging about taking these pictures? How did you decide to take this picture? Do you think you have achieved something by taking this picture? What possible solutions do you have to address the [issue]? What needs to change? Who is responsible to solve these issues? The themes extracted from each interview were sent to the concerned participant for confirmation.

For those who agreed, two optional focus groups ranging from two to three hours were held in the Green Hub local on one of Ghent's university campuses, which was selected as a relatively neutral and cozy location. Initial plans to project the pictures were abandoned to adapt to the small group of participants and create a friendlier moment of participatory engagement. A4 printed pictures were put on the table either individually or in pairs to allow participants to engage with pictures both visually and tactilely. The small group size also granted the possibility for one person to play both the role of the facilitator and the note-taker, while observing and staying mindful of the group's dynamics. Participants were asked to comment on any aspect of the picture that he/ she feels is significant or compelling. They were given post notes to write captions (based on feelings or themes) to describe the pictures. This is an exercise that requires critical thinking and the achievement of a consensus. Then, participants were encouraged to think individually about what themes were raised during the discussion. The next activity required them to work in groups to match the themes that emerged in the individual semi-directed interviews with the pictures and to create new themes if seen as necessary. Subsequently, participants collectively decided on five pictures reflecting the final themes and messages that they wanted to send to policymakers. Finally, participants were asked to write and then describe their feelings and feedback on the session.

Following the data collection, the processing involved the use of Microsoft Word, Descript, and Trint transcription tools to create auto-transcripts that were then carefully refined. The logical DeepL was used for translation as interviews were held in both French and English, and participants made comments in Dutch which was also the language used on printed materials and at the two Right to Food events. NVivo was used for initial coding.

Data analysis involved qualitative coding (making sense of the data collected, identifying concepts and similarities, and labeling). The analysis also entailed finding patterns in the data that could be reinforced by the different methodologies used and then confronting them with the existing literature. An interpretive approach was adopted supporting the idea that supports the idea that reality is socially produced or given meaning by how actors interpret occurrences. This also required recognizing the subjectivity of the researcher.

The quotes and excerpts from the interviews are presented verbatim, with a few changes made to improve intelligibility. Some quotes have been translated into English with DeepL.

A number of measures were adopted in this research project to ensure confidentiality. First of all, only the researcher knows the participants' real names. All identifying information such as names has been removed from the transcripts and replaced by empty brackets. Participants have not been required to answer any question that could have disclosed sensitive

information regarding income, religion, political affiliations, sexual orientation, or health status. The signed consent forms have been kept separate from the photographs and dialogue transcripts. Recordings, transcripts, and photographs have been stored on UGent's SharePoint platform. Files were saved under codes known only by the researcher rather than participants' names. A password-protected metadata file linking the codes to the participants has been kept.

During the photo-elicitation interviews, it was confirmed with participants that they had, indeed, asked for permission when taking pictures or edited the pictures to ensure that the people appearing in them could not be identified (e.g. cropped, blurred, taken at a distance). Within the focus groups, participants were free to disclose which specific pictures he or she had taken but the researcher did not personally supply this information to avoid causing any harm to participants. Furthermore, participants were reminded throughout the project that they were free to step out and discontinue their participation at any time. Given their contribution to the photo-exposition, participants were later asked whether they agreed to have their first names publicly attached to the project (not to any specific picture) or preferred to choose a pseudonym. No identifying information has been attached to the participants' quotes presented in this study.

This study certainly had some limitations, the more important being the language question. As I do not speak the dominant language used in the studied context, some subtleties have surely been missed, particularly when collecting observation data. Moreover, it could have been useful to include text data from the materials such as newsletters or magazines published by the organizations. Secondly, a more lengthy research project may have allowed further deepening of the topic.

Action research

This study drew on the principles of action research. It is a type of research that involves "learning by doing". It has been defined as "comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action" (Lewin, 1946, p.35). The objective of action research is to address practical issues while concomitantly advancing social science knowledge.

Reflexive critique is a key principle of action research. It requires that "people reflect on issues and processes and make explicit the interpretations, biases, assumptions, and concerns upon which judgments are made. In this way, practical accounts can give rise to theoretical considerations" (O'Brien, 1998, para. 10). It also encourages researchers to be self-reflexive and acknowledge their own views and bias.

Moreover, action research is particularly adapted for ambiguous issues or situations. The literature has revealed the ambiguous role and position occupied by food banks regarding food charity and the right to food (Williams et al., 2016). Such an approach can allow the flexibility necessary to research this topic.

Lastly, collaboration is also central to this type of research. While the present study has not been fully collaborative, it has engaged methodological tools that softened the barriers between the researcher and participants. It also created spaces where each participant's ideas held the same importance, where the main objective was learning from one another, and where meaning could be negotiated within the group. As such, its approach fell more accurately in the realms of co-operation, which qualifies this research as a practical inquiry (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The latter is a type of action research that hinges on constructivist approaches to allow

the exploration of beliefs and knowledge through reflecting on an experience. It aims to understand practitioners and to transform their consciousness (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

The rationale for using a photography method

Photography methods have been used in many fields of study including organizational research, studies of people's emotional experiences, and media studies (Buckingham, 2009; Parker, 2009; Warren, 2002). Photovoice methods have been used with food bank users to understand the health and social impact of these programs (Enns et al., 2020). The use of this method to study people's motivations has been scarce (Chang, 2022). Specifically, to the best of our knowledge, this method has not yet been applied to study volunteers' motivations and political views. Volunteers' perception of their work at food banks has mostly been investigated through surveys (Agostinho & Paço, 2012) or in-depth interviews (Van der Horst, 2014).

This research is set in the context of a Master trajectory on food that emphasizes participatory approaches, including when defining research questions. Therefore, it makes sense to employ a participatory method to answer the research questions. During the first participatory round with stakeholders involved in the food banking world to refine the research question, keeping volunteers engaged was one of the key concerns raised. Thus, a method that actively involved them and may give them the possibility to propose solutions collectively, is relevant. Furthermore, a photography method allows for easily shareable and accessible outputs that can later be used for communication with stakeholders.

Moreover, it was expected that a Photovoice method would provide new perspectives on the topic. Soronen and Koivunen (2018) argue that the act of taking photos of their work and discussing them afterward encourages people to dive deeper into the particularities of their work and to integrate abstract concepts such as time in their reflections. Barton (2015) explains that visual methods can serve to bring to light previously unformulated or ignored thoughts. Particularly, visual methods like photography constitute a powerful tool in attempts to discern what people feel or think (Buckingham, 2009). This method has also proven useful to understand how people's identities are constructed which is relevant to the objectives of this study (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006; Vila, 2013).

Photography methods can allow participants to step back from their daily practices and be reflexive about them. Furthermore, given the widespread consensus in the literature on the intersections of food banks with concepts of food charity or the right to food, a method that allows eliciting information that researchers may not have thought to seek or that respondents might not have considered mentioning in traditional interviews may be particularly insightful.

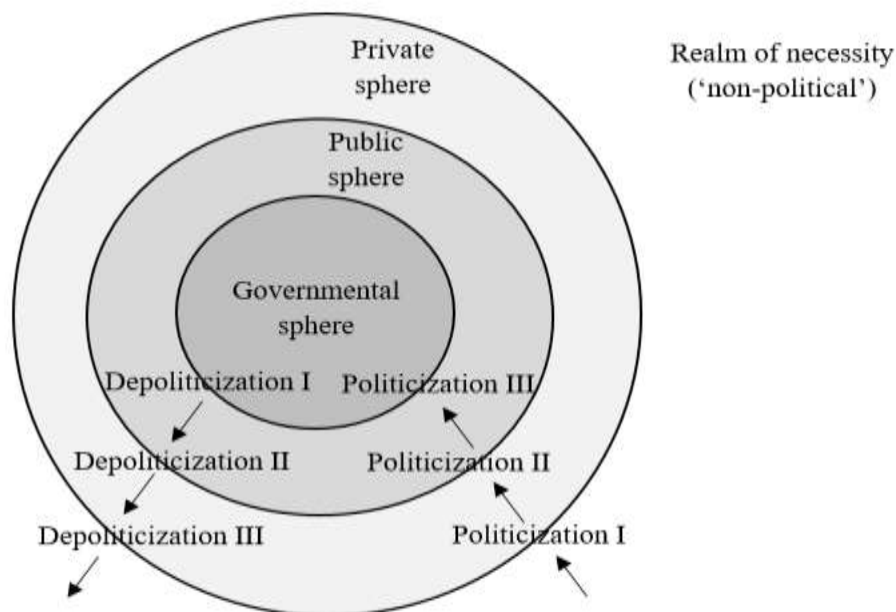
Analytical Framework

Any discussion on politicization can be enriched by a clear distinction between the "political" and the "politics" with which politicization concerns itself. As explained previously, the "political" is "the space for the egalitarian public encounter of heterogeneous groups and individuals" that allows the confrontation of both divergent and convergent views (Moragues-Faus, 2015, p. 8, based on Swyngedouw, 2014). The "political" can also refer to the statement of disagreement with the state or any institutionalized system (Swyngedouw, 2014). While politics or policy-making is best seen as the way in which established organizational structures'

daily policies and management practices are shaped by the interaction of social, political, and other power relations (Swyngedouw 2014). This process is laden with tacit and non-tacit rules as well as both asserted and secret interests (Swyngedouw, 2014). Politics is the “always contingent, precarious and incomplete attempt to institutionalize, to spatialize the social, to offer closure, to suture the social field, to let society coincide with community understood as a cohesive and inclusive whole” (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 373). This dimension of politics and policy-making as an ongoing and contentious process is acknowledged within Colin Hay’s (2007) framework of politicization, which is the preferred approach in this research.

Figure 1

Hay’s (2007) Model of Politicization/Depoliticization



Source: Hay, 2007, p.80

Note. This model shows depoliticization processes (I, II, III) wherein issues are migrating away from public view within the state (governmental sphere) towards the outside of society (realm of need), where discursive practices are absent. Politicization processes (I, II, III), on the other hand, depict issues going in the opposite direction, with increasing public deliberation and acknowledgment that solving them requires collective actions and agency.

This framework presents three types of politicization and depoliticization and can be mobilized at the aggregate levels, meaning when trying to understand politicization processes in the context of specific issues or policies. According to Type I politicization, for sufferings to no longer be perceived as belonging to the realm of fate or inevitability, actors must be able to express them as socially produced difficulties. This implies that citizens must be able to articulate their own immediate needs, aspirations, and identities as a means to identify structural and social barriers to their emancipation or self-realization. This capacity is also necessary to ensure that injustice is understandable and that citizens can become autonomous. Instead of focusing on an individual's or a family's well-being, Type II politicization involves turning problems into matters of public concern. Such a task requires that interactions take place

between different social groups confronting their interests and their views on the common good, therefore making issues political. Only at this condition can the structural and social impediments to the recognition of rights, accomplishments, and shared obligations be overcome. Here the concept of micro-public spheres is relevant to understand how these different perspectives are confronted. Last but not least, Type III politicization is linked to institutionalization procedures, such as legislative discussions on relevant topics, new laws, or public policies to enforce the accountability of governmental authorities (Fawcett et al, 2017; Hay, 2007; Maia, 2019).

Type I depoliticization comprises politicians' efforts to shift responsibility for their misdeeds and dodge accountability for policy change. In this situation, elected politicians frequently look to appoint semi-independent bodies or extra-governmental organizations to carry out purported governmental tasks or to provide solutions to identified problems. Privatization and attempts to push public concerns into the private sector are components of Type II depoliticization. Choices are no longer contested, and issues of public importance are now viewed as matters of personal interest. As a result, neither the government nor the general public is required to work together to solve these issues. In numerous welfare states of the western world, when outright privatization has not occurred, a process of hybridization has taken place, wherein civil society has taken on or been given more responsibilities in the delivery of welfare services (Frederiksen, 2015). Finally, rejection of the social aspect of issues is the foundation of the third and final type of depoliticization (Type III). Indeed, disadvantages are seen as the product of personal actions, skills, and decisions rather than being based on economic-social systems or ingrained in the culture. As a result, these problems are seen as the sole responsibility of the person, and no institutional, communal, or shared obligations are necessary for regulation (Fawcett et al, 2017; Hay, 2007; Maia, 2019).

Carole Bacchi's work can provide a starting point to study politicization in the context of the institutionalization of food charity. Her research focuses on the conceptualization of social issues that serve as the foundation for creating public policy. She is particularly interested in how governments and other policy players give these issues a specific shape through the language used to discuss them and the solutions that are put forth (Bacchi, 2012; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Booth, 2014). Bacchi's WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be) tool for analysis requires considering the problem representation, its origin, its underlying assumptions and "silences", alternative ways to think of the issue, the consequences of the problem representations, and finally its dissemination and confrontation with other views.

This perspective suggests that it may be relevant, taking implemented or proposed solutions as a departure point, to reflect on which representations of the problem underlie a particular response. This de-construction process can be particularly relevant when dealing with a social issue such as hunger that warrant broadly divergent policy responses. As argued by de Souza (2019), depending on the solutions being discussed, different depictions of the hungry are mobilized. Therefore, to elicit the patterns of politicization and depoliticization occurring within the food charity sector, it is essential to investigate the actors' motivations and perceptions, but more specifically how they problematize the issues that justify the existence of the structures to which they belong. This tool can be used to make sense of the themes emerging from the discourses of the different actors while relating them to Hay's (2007) type of politicization. However, to link the two frameworks and in keeping with the concept of

politicization, an additional consideration is added to complement the tool which is "Who is perceived to hold the responsibility to solve the problem?"

Drawing on these two frameworks, this study will discuss processes of politicization and depoliticization as they play out in the study context both at the macro-level of policies and at the micro-level in the motivations as well as the discourses adopted within food charities.

Data analysis

The data analysis process included various steps and approaches in accordance with the different methods used to gather data to answer the research questions. Both content and discourse analysis were used as methodological tools in this study. Content analysis aims to uncover the "manifest content" of a message (Berelson, 1952). Specifically, conceptual content analysis was used, which is a research technique used to find specific words, themes, or concepts in a given set of qualitative data (in this case, pictures and interview data). In applying this method, the researcher can quantify and examine the occurrence, significance, and connections of such specific words, themes, or concepts.

For instance, volunteers' self-described motivations were coded with categories based on the relevant literature (Allahyari, 2000; Batson et al., 1995; Caplan, 2016; Cheung et al., 2006; Marta et al., 2006; Omoto & Snyder, 1990; Russell, 2011; Snyder & Omoto, 2008; Wilson, 2000) but keeping the flexibility to add categories through the coding process as they emerged in the data (Table 1). Content analysis was also applied to the pictures (frequency of content) and the ensuing photo-elicitation interviews and focus groups (occurrence of themes). Pictures were categorized between food-related and non-food-related categories according to surface content and volunteers' answers to the question "What do you see here?" (Table 2). Almost every picture contained food-related elements although some depicted other items or activities. Transcripts of the photo-elicitation interviews allowed the extraction of emerging themes by the researcher, which were checked with individual participants for confirmation.

Contrary to more systematic approaches like content analysis, discourse analysis is a qualitative and interpretive approach to data analysis. Discourse analysis is rooted in social constructionism. Interpretations are based on both the specifics of the source material and the researcher's understanding of the surrounding context. It is a dedication to investigating how knowledge—the social production of individuals, facts, and problems—relates to behaviors and practices (Burr, 1995). It entails carefully analyzing the data's many components, including words, phrases, paragraphs, and general structure, and connecting them to the characteristics, themes, and patterns pertinent to the research question. In light of the research question and analytical framework, the data was analyzed to identify wording and statements that reflect or relate to characteristics of politicization and depoliticization, including problem representation, views on poverty and the poor (neoliberal values of work, self-sufficiency, self-help, responsibility, and related terms versus structural considerations), and approaches to solutions. The data used for discourse analysis in this study comprised preliminary interviews, ethnographic data (observation and participation observation including volunteering), photo-elicitation interviews, and focus group discussions.

Study context

Belgium's independence occurred during a time of demographic expansion, industrialization, and urbanization. This growth was characterized by widening inequality as Wallonia led the industrialization process while Flanders remained densely populated and essentially rural. Catholic private charities played a key although not entirely effective role in answering to the food crisis caused by this imbalanced growth process in East and West Flanders (Van Molle, 2017). This extensive Catholic charity network has been described as "an empire by invitation" as public and private charities became virtually undistinguishable (Viaene, 2001). The extent of the crisis which overwhelmed the poor relief system, to a large extent due to the internal migration of the poor from rural areas to cities, also led to a reinforcement of the criterion of "place of residence" in the delivery of support which can be seen as an earlier version of Ghent's current zoning system for food support. As the national strikes of 1886 paved the way for Belgium's social welfare to emerge, they also provided the impulse for the Catholic Church, which was supremely powerful in Flanders and particularly in Ghent, to build their social project centered on Christian democrat's values, a blend of Catholic social teaching and neo-Calvinism, which although putting forwards social justice and a favorable view of welfare, leaves room for charitable responses to social problems, particularly following patterns of mutual dependence and hybridization between Church and state (Van Molle, 2017). Neo-Calvinist beliefs also emphasize the "dignity of work" as well as responsibility and discipline (Kis, 1993; Kuyper, 1991)

Charitable food support has prominently expanded in Belgium in recent decades, moving from a marginalized sector challenged by social welfare to an institutionalized secondary economy (Vandekinderen, 2022). In Belgium, the number of food bank users doubled over two decades from 2000 to 2020, rising from 92,000 to 195,000 people a month (Vandekinderen, 2021). It is estimated that there are over 700 food charities in Belgium. A total of 754 organizations distributed over Belgium submitted food orders as part of the EU's Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) 2021 campaign. 322 public centers for social welfare (PCSWs), including 138 PCSWs from Flanders, and 432 accredited non-profit organizations, majorly operated by volunteers, were among them. The number of food aid recipients in the program increased from 225,549 applicants when it started in 2014 to 381,951 by 2020. As a result of the energy crisis and the refugee issue from Ukraine, it is anticipated that this figure will rise even further. 10,450.40 tons of food goods were provided through the FEAD in 2020, adding up to 857,736 meals and 2,021,607 food packets. The remaining supply originates mainly from funding from the Belgian Intervention and Refund Bureau (BIRB), food donations from industry, auctions, supermarkets, and various other targeted efforts or direct purchases of food products. The target demographic includes not only underprivileged populations but also increasingly more single moms with children and seniors with insufficient pensions. The focus of this study is on Ghent, a mid-size city in the East Flanders Region.

Ghent, the second largest city in Flanders, can be characterized as a liberal city with an important industrial past that is still visible through some of its major landmarks. The *Open VLD* (liberal democratic party) is the governing political group in Ghent, along with *Groen* (ecological party), *Vooruit* (social democratic party), previously *Socialistische Partij Anders* (sp.a), and CD&V (Christian democratic party). Ghent has a population of 267,712 inhabitants, 16.2% with non-Belgian nationality (Jive, 2023). Food aid and poverty alleviation initiatives

have a long history in Ghent. This can be explained by the fact that, in comparison to other Flemish cities, a larger part of its population is dependent on a living wage. In Ghent, it's estimated that 55,000 people live in poverty and social marginalization. 40,000 people who live in Ghent are at risk of going without money (Stad Gent, 2018). At the *Openbaar centrum voor maatschappelijk welzijn* (*OCMW*) in Ghent, the Flemish version of the PCSW, there are 28,000 people with active files, and 25% of them are receiving benefits (Stad Gent, 2018). Non-Belgians face a three times greater chance of poverty than Belgians. Families with only one parent and those who live alone are significantly more at risk. Additionally, the probability of poverty is not evenly distributed among the neighborhoods (Stad Gent, 2018). These figures are likely to have worsened following the Covid-19 crisis (Degerickx, 2022)

The charity economy in Ghent is characterized by a range of organizational structures and management systems, encompassing the provision of food parcels for free or at discounted prices, social groceries, cooking groups as well as community cafés and food recovery programs. Most of these organizations source food from Foodsavers, a logistics distribution platform created by OCMW Ghent in collaboration with the City of Ghent. Regularly, organizations can also go to the Food Bank of East Flanders[1] to obtain food, especially canned goods from the European Poverty Alleviation Fund. On a smaller basis, when the supply obtained from these sources is insufficient, organizations resort to shopping. Social groceries must shop more often to stock up their paying shelves while their free products are from the two previously mentioned sources. Some notable exceptions to this format include Poverello whose supply largely comes from donations and shopping, and Let's Save Food which works with a different network of shops in the city and handles food collection through its volunteers.

Retail industry actors in Ghent's charity economy, or "hunger industrial complex," like Delhaize or Colruyt, give excess food to Foodsavers, who then distribute it to food distribution points, social groceries, social restaurants, and other service providers for the underprivileged. Commodity crops, foods judged inappropriate for retail due to manufacturing flaws or damage sustained during shipment and handling, and foods that are close to expiring may all be included in this list of excess foods. To get extra food from the source to the hungry, Foodsavers use logistical equipment such as trucks and cold rooms, in a structure that runs like an enterprise.

Other important actors in the Ghent context include the long-standing KRAS network, where over 550 volunteers within eighteen civic initiatives support people in poverty. Twelve community-based Ghent organizations, some of which are food-related, are gathered under the umbrella of the Ghent Solidarity Fund, a new network that emerged during Covid times. Enchanté is a network of locals supporting anyone in need of a coffee or supper or a ticket to a cultural event. Let's Save Food is a grassroots movement that strives to stop food waste in a sustainable manner. For payment of one euro for a meal and dessert and 20 cents for soup, volunteers at Poverello prepare and serve meals to people over 55 years old. Social restaurants offer social jobs along with income-based pricing. Though a new initiative like De Grote Tafel does not use the city's *UiTPAS* has a reference for its pricing system. Several social groceries provide people in poverty with a shopping-like experience. Another recent initiative,

[1] For participants in this study, the term "Food Bank" generally refer to this specific organizations while the ones that directly provide food to people in poverty "the middle field" as described by Foodsavers' coordinator, are called food aid or food support initiatives. In this research however, outside of participants' quotes, the different terms including food charities are used interchangeably.

Koekploeg Solidair prepares meals for other food support organizations. Finally, there are numerous individual community programs for giving food packets or cooking together.

Chapter 5: Results/Findings

Data set and Participants

The project involved the realization of 28 preliminary in-depth interviews and one group discussion with volunteers from KRAS (SIVI, Toontje, De Sluis Onze Thuis, De Tinten, and Open Plaats) and Samen Solidair (De Rode Lotus, Sociaal 9050), Poverello, Enchanté, De Grote Tafel, De Knoop, and Let's Save Food. SIVI is an association where the poor speak out (an official accreditation from the Flemish Government) and functions like a social grocery that provides additional administrative and legal services, similar to Toontje and Open Plaats. De Tinten organizes free food distribution for people without papers who are therefore not entitled to OCMW support. They also provide administrative and medical services. De Sluis Onze Thuis is an income-based social restaurant operated by volunteers. Sociaal 9050 runs a weekly food distribution where certain products are free while a basic fee and/or an extra contribution is paid for other products. A similar pricing system is used in the volunteer-based social restaurant De Grote Tafel. De Knoop is a community center founded by the city that encompasses a social restaurant and a host of supplementary services.

Additional interviews were held with paid coordinators at the social restaurant Toreke, OCMW-run social restaurant IKOOK, Enchanté, Foodsavers Gent, Kookploeg Solidair, and finally with the KRAS network coordinator. The project also involved six weeks of volunteering at the catholic social restaurant Poverello, four weeks of volunteering at the newly founded social restaurant De Grote Tafel, informal discussions with numerous relevant stakeholders including paid coordinators and social workers (e.g. from SAAMO), observation and participant observation at De Tinten, De Rode Lotus, Toontje, Sociaal 9050, and SIVI, which involved, for instance, assisting or observing food distribution events, and lastly participation in organizations' meetings, including one meeting of the KRAS network. Moreover, I attended two important events on the Right to Food held in Ghent[2].

The photography project was conducted with 11 participants. The group size is ideal as similar projects generally work with a maximum of 15 participants and have been conducted at times worked with as few as five or six (Blackman, 2007; Catalani & Minkler, 2010). The participants who joined the photography project were volunteers at six food charities: De Rode Lotus, Sociaal 9050, De Tinten, De Sluis Onze Thuis, Open Plaats, Poverello, and the solidarity initiative Enchanté. Three participants who had signed the informed consent form could not take pictures because of scheduling difficulties. Of the 11 participants who took pictures, 10 participated in the photo-elicitation interviews and seven (7) could join a focus group discussion due to conflicts with discussion session times. One participant who did not take pictures was present at the second focus group discussion. In total, 90 pictures (4 were redundant, 1 was too blurry to identify content) were received of which 23 were selected by participants to be included in the focus group discussion and 30 were presented at the final photo-exhibition.

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[2] Human Rights @ De Krook: Beyond our own plate. On the food democracy barricade.
Do food initiatives satisfy the hunger for human rights? At HoGent

Volunteers' motivations and politicization

Table 1

Volunteers' motivations to work in the food support sector and relevant comments

Motivations	Relevant Comments
Moral selving/Self-satisfaction	*And if we are really honest, we do it a little bit also because it's a good feeling, I can help you.*
Social life	*I want to be out of my hous.*
Affinities/Satisfaction with the work	*Because of the anarchistic way of thinking. How should I say? The low step you have to go over to enter. I'm explaining from Dutch to English. I like the way her vision about the project I like, to keep it as cheap as possible for those who cannot pay. Yeah. Those who can pay, they pay a little bit more for those who can't.*
Integration into the volunteer group	*The way we take care of each other. Especially in these times. And also the fact that if I have a difficult situation, they won't be angry at me if I don't come like today. They understand.*
Practicality	Participant explained that she is not from Ghent. Her daughter studied in Ghent and so she would come and volunteer while her daughter is at school. So at the end of the volunteering day, she could go and get her daughter. So it was a matter of convenience for her.
Giving back	*I want to do the same thing as people did with me. So I want to be at the other side of the table when I'm capable. Because I have learned a lot from these people.*
Altruism/Do good	*What keeps me going? The people who need us.*
Social awareness/Strive for change	Participant explained how moving into a neighborhood where she was first confronted with poverty and realizing that children were going hungry at her daughter's school prompted her to start a volunteer initiative.
Religion	Participant is a nun and has explained that her vocation requires her to engage in such charity work. For her, the motive was also to be closer to the poor and interact with them.

Predominantly, in the interviews, practicality (location, free time, freedom) appears to be the most common motivation for volunteers to work in the food support sector (Table 1). Most volunteers interviewed are retired people with a large amount of free time who chose to volunteer instead of staying idle at home. While making the selection of a place to volunteer, they often value convenience, choosing a place in their neighborhood or with which they have had a link in the past, for instance, their previous workplace. They also elect the places based on relevant skills that they can contribute, for instance, some volunteers who enjoy and/or master cooking become involved in social restaurants. Volunteers also value the freedom one gets from volunteering as there are fewer expectations and they can decide the number of hours that they are willing to dedicate to that.

As mentioned in the literature, volunteers are critical agents and therefore, sometimes, choose to volunteer because of their affinities with the organization's values or practices. For example, one volunteer decided to leave an association where the poor speak out and opted to work at a more traditional food charity because the politicized work of the former was not appealing to him as he believed it to be impossible for poor people to escape from poverty.

Nevertheless, most frequently, volunteers express a certain detachment from the organization's principles, content with "doing their job" and not focusing on the way the organizations are ruled. In at least two of the social restaurants where the UiTPAS is not used, volunteers expressed their disapproval of the openness of the system that allows every *user*[3] (or visitor, the preferred term in this organization) to pay the same small price for the food that they are given. They hold the belief that many people are profiteering as their money and status can be inferred from the way they dress. These volunteers would be favorable to the use of a system like the UiTPAS for entitlement to be more clearly defined. However, such a perspective often stood in contrast with the coordinators' and general organizations' values. In some rare cases, volunteers made their position known to coordinators as in one particular situation where a previously free food distribution was introducing a payment system. The volunteer reported being told to "shut up" by the organization's management. More frequently, volunteers are unwilling to attempt to influence organizational practices.

The need for social interactions is a common motivation for volunteers, many of whom are living alone and welcome volunteering as an activity to supplement their social life. Additionally, sickness or disability which renders other jobs difficult or impossible is often an incentive to engage in volunteering. Moreover, some volunteers expressed their motivations in terms of "doing good", "helping the people" or "providing a service" often rooted in a self-described history of engaging in altruistic behaviors or values inherited from their upbringing.

Only one volunteer, a nun at the catholic organization De Tinten gave faith as the motive for her involvement in volunteering. Social awareness was rarely mentioned as a motive and only for volunteers who started an initiative rather than joining an existing one. It is worth adding, however, that most volunteers expressed a mixture of different motives. Indeed, some

[3] Different terms are employed to refer to people who receive food support including users, visitors and clients. Some organizations deliberately choose to use one of these terms instead of the others. For instance, visitors is the preferred term at Poverello while at Sociaal 9050, clients is favored given the organization's particular approach wherein people receive free food but can also pay a price based on their income for some products. As the most common term in the literature, "users" is most commonly employed in the present document.

concepts of "doing good" was often articulated along with self-oriented motives such as practicality or social interactions.

While social awareness rarely appeared as an original motive to volunteer in the sector, it has developed sometimes in the process of interacting with people in poverty. Through that experience, new understandings of poverty, its reality, and its underlying causes flourished and served to overcome volunteers' preliminary bias.

Sometimes I saw children with the chips to eat for lunch. Why are they giving chips? Get some bread and I'm like: why do you do this? Prejudice, not knowing, yeah. It changed. Now I think when they give the chips, perhaps they get the chips from the food banks and they don't have nothing else. So they give it to them. I will see it that way and before: why do they do that? And so yes, I've changed.

Because before, I was also, I felt better. I have culture. Of course and that's what I learned…you don't need much to come in this situation.

However, in certain conditions, volunteers do not perceive any evolution in their views, especially when opportunities to interact with users are scarce. Indeed, food distribution does not always allow for meaningful interactions to take place between volunteers and users. Firstly, the particular role played by the volunteers in the organization can limit the possibilities for volunteers to exchange with users; for instance, some volunteers are placed in the kitchen, cooking or washing dishes, and some are in the stockroom selecting and passing on food items to another volunteer or coordinator who directly interacts with users. Nonetheless, in some organizations, this limitation is attenuated through, for example, the habit of having volunteers and users eat together. In one organization, however, although the coordinator has acknowledged the problem, and encouraged volunteers to eat with users and listen to their problems, in her absence or when she fails to insist on that, volunteers tend to gather at one table together. One volunteer even expressed resentment at being "forced" to have such interactions and praised the practices of one of the two organizations where he works, where volunteers share a meal in the kitchen after users are gone.

Therefore, the second reason for this lack of opportunity for exchange is the fact that some organizations purposefully adopt practices that separate users and volunteers. In these places, generally, users wait in line outside the distribution point or are allowed a place to sit as volunteers set up tables and make other arrangements. Their interactions with volunteers may last a few minutes as they are receiving a package or selecting products. During a discussion with an intern in one of the networks, she shared an anecdote about a time when in the middle of the distribution, the volunteers stopped because it was lunchtime and went to eat and drink inside while the people waited outside. It was winter.

Organizations' practices and principles in which control is emphasized with few opportunities for meaningful interactions between volunteers and users may incite or reinforce prejudices against the poor and depoliticized understandings of their reasons for accessing these structures. As warned by Cloke et al (2017), volunteering at food charities can at times result in politicization in a negative direction (depoliticization), meaning that some volunteers developed even more derogatory visions of the poor through working in these institutions.

Perceptions that a lot of people are profiteering and using the money saved from accessing charity organizations as a means to elevate their social status are rampant. A young

volunteer in one of KRAS' organizations reported, for instance, how her coordinator would remind her "You're a strong woman, so you have to show them as well". Thus, although, as she confided, she did not receive any particular training on how to interact with or build rapport with users, she was given specific guidelines regarding the entitlement of each visitor based on their household size. Having to be strong or acting strict are expressions that have come up when discussing with several volunteers within the two big networks. The primary reason was the perception that such a stance was needed to deal with users' trickery. Secondly, conflicts often arise regarding the amount of food given to users, and the latter are said to adopt disrespectful behaviors in such cases. Food support in Ghent is a landscape marked by scarcity and unreliability. The ebb and flow of food availability in the system is a source of tension between users and volunteers. And apart from the recent strikes at Delhaize that have caused a spike in food supply for the organizations, there is a sense that food availability is dwindling in post-COVID-19 time. A volunteer complained that users' mentality has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic, they are less happy and display more disrespect and egoism.

I always say you have to be happy with what you have and then go living with that. Point. Not getting more, more, more.

For the organizations, volunteers' motivations or views are largely irrelevant unless they are outright harmful like invading the privacy of users. Transversal in the data is a general sense that volunteers should be appreciated for providing a service for free and the expectations set on them should be minimal. The organizations mostly expressed gratefulness that people are willing to offer a few hours of their time. Therefore, although in some organizations where coordinators hold a rather politicized view and develop policy-oriented actions like in KRAS, there is some interest to find volunteers who would be willing to engage in more reflexive thinking, because all of the organizations rely on volunteers for their functioning, this interest is superseded by the fear of scaring them away by asking them too much.

…We asked, can you do some like more work, even if it's something computer, communication even more the lobbying and then no, no, no, I want to do the food distribution, I want to pick up the food, put it in my car, bike. I want to do practical work. You know, at my work I have all this brain activity…I just want to work with my hands now.

Not everyone is, even if they may in general, when they act with people, they may work well, that's how they are, the vision is okay but it's hard to discuss things more reflective, self-reflectional work. In Flemish, they say they say blah, blah, it's blah, blah. People don't want to work. Yeah, they just do their things…they just want to help people and not talk about it.

As apparent in these quotes, for most of these organizations, as long as volunteers treat users in an acceptable enough manner, although some prejudices might still persist, they are not required to share the organization's vision. The few acknowledged mistreatments of users by volunteers tend to be excused by their frustration having to deal with scarcity. Furthermore, one coordinator expressed a preference towards more compliant volunteers whom they can discreetly call out in case of blatantly disrespectful or racist behaviors but who, in general, "do their job" and are not disruptive of the organization's approach to doing things albeit not necessarily sharing its vision. One interesting instance involved a volunteer at SIVI (an

association where the poor speak out) who expressed complete shock when she was exposed during the interview to her coordinator and the organization’s belief that "they should not exist" because structural solutions to poverty alleviation should be preferred. She also appeared to be unaware of the “food aid under protest” concept guiding the actions of the organization and the KRAS network.

Organizations are especially careful around volunteers as the difficulty to recruit the latter is a common challenge. Some coordinators explain it by the increase in the retirement age. Indeed, current volunteers may be people who retired in their 50s and have been volunteering for 10, or 20 years since then. However, given that people retire at a later age nowadays, they have less interest in volunteering when the time comes. One coordinator also perceived that young people adopt a more casual, short-time approach to volunteering. Observation data in this research also indicate that the volunteer group in some organizations is ever-changing, as volunteers skip days or weeks, and interns or students, required by their schools to complete a certain number of volunteering hours, come and go.

Deliberative opportunities are also rare within these organizations. While knowledge of the right to food is increasingly advancing in the two big networks, it tends to remain at the coordination level. In some places, volunteers have limited possibilities to sit together and exchange ideas. In cases where meetings are held, they tend to focus on practical matters, with some rare exceptions.

…that's a group that has reflection in there. They already have volunteer meetings but not every group. A lot of groups just have volunteer meetings for very practical things. Who's going to do the dishes? How are we going to organize? We have 20 families extra. So where should we put things? Yeah. And then they're happy that the volunteers come in two days a week to help and then an hour extra to discuss this.

…those coordinators also, they don't really dare to impose too much reflective moments on their volunteers. Because they're already working so hard to say, okay, we have to go together an hour and then sit together and discuss this.

We try once a month…to have an after meeting to say what went good, what didn't went good. What should we do? What do we need to buy? Do we need to buy garbage bags?

Therefore, for volunteers, their work in the food charities can, for a large part, becomes a routine that does not require active mental engagement: setting the tables, getting coffee ready, cooking, and serving the food. As they cater to a growing number of people in a limited number of hours, it also often feels like a rush, “It's like a train that doesn't stop” said a volunteer. Opportunities for reflection-in-action” and personal reflection-on-action emerge, at times, when an unexpected event occurs or an unusual element is introduced. Volunteers readily shared such anecdotes in which something out of the ordinary happens. For one of them, it was witnessing another volunteer acting out of prejudice with a client, prompting her to ask herself questions like “What if it happens another time? How should I react? What should I have said?” Having to take pictures for this research project was perceived by one volunteer as an example of a disruption to their routine. Others talked about the introduction of newcomers to the group.

Like, in the corona time, we have younger volunteers, and…they also bringing new dynamism in the, new action because they're new, they're younger, they look at things a bit different, they ask questions. Just sometimes it's

just: Why do you do this? To understand how to help. And then people who are working there for 20 years are like actually, why are we doing this? Anyone knows why we are still doing this?

Additional findings from the content analysis

Table 2

Content and frequencies of pictures taken by volunteers

A. Food-related	A. Not food related
1. Food distribution	1. Talking with users/Administrative service (2)
a) Event/Giving Food (4)	2. Medical service (1)
b) Logistics (1) and Setting up (5)	3. Books and/or posters (4)
c) Shopping (1)	4. Book event (1)
d) Welcome (1)	5. Logo/Organization's identity (2)
2. Stock (17)	6. Playing together (1)
3. Volunteers cooking (6)	7. Making calls (1)
4. Cooking together with users (4)	8. Taking care of a pet (1)
5. Eating together (4)	9. Sitting together (1)
6. Food items or meals (8)	10. Other volunteer (s) (11)
7. Recipe (1)	11. Users (4)
8. Other	
a) Empty fridge (1)	
b) Table with coffee (2)	
c) Fruits and vegetables shaped toys (1)	

Food, food system, and food waste

As expected, food was predominantly represented in the pictures provided. Twelve (12) pictures are directly related to food distribution and the interactions between volunteers and users in these instances. In most cases, volunteers insisted on the notion of choice, explaining that users could request what they wanted from the volunteers. The latter highlighted the importance of allowing people to make their own choices, both to respect their preferences and as a deterrent for food waste.

I don't think we give a package. No, it's better when you ask what you want, this is what you want, this is something you don't like, we leave it, and we give it to someone who likes it. No, because like that, there are people who throw things in the street and it still happens, even here. We always ask. You want this? You want this? But still, there are people who throw things away. [Translated from French with DeepL].

And that's also different with us that is people think maybe oh we have to get a food package, but no people shop with us. People can choose what they want, because if I give you potatoes and you don't eat potatoes, you will throw them away. So you are not helped and we lost our potatoes.

At an event on the Right to Food at a public library in the city attended by various actors in food support, the participants were engaged in an interactive activity wherein they had to express whether, in their opinion, people who use food banks are given food parcels. The

majority of people believed that to be true. Therefore, this insistence on the question of "choice" may be seen as an attempt to change the public perspectives on food charities.

Nonetheless, the limitation of choices was acknowledged and this idea was set in the context of a system largely characterized by "scarcity" and a lack of reliability. The theme of scarcity dominated discussions of the pictures showing either stock (17) or the setting up (5) of tables for distribution. One of the volunteers explained how this lack of options as compared with big supermarkets was the principal element that impeded a real shopping experience for users. While they would have 20 options for a single food item on a big surface, at the food distribution, they often had to be content with the fewer available options. For that reason, "versatile" food items are particularly successful with users like potatoes or eggs, which can easily be integrated into the confection of a cheap meal. This signifies that when the quantity of these items provided by Foodsavers is insufficient, the organizations often have to resort to purchasing them to have them available, as indicated in the shopping (1) picture which reflects one time when the volunteers had to run to the shop during a distribution seeing the influx of people that they did not have the resources to serve. "Collaboration" was also highlighted as one of the means that they can cope, as they receive food from other food charities that have a surplus. Scarcity and unreliability were also linked to external events and forces such as Covid, the war in Ukraine, and the recent strikes at Delhaize.

In contrast, a picture of the stock was used by one participant to highlight the "availability" and abundance of food originating from food waste.

I don't think people have an impression of how much food we get every week. Every week we receive at least two vans and, sometimes, it's four vans. We are not the only ones in Ghent who give food, it's a lot of food [Translated from French with DeepL]

This observation was accompanied by a display of anger at the imbalance of a world where that level of food waste co-exist with extreme food poverty and at the behavior of some shops' management who destroyed food with bleach instead of giving it away. The volunteer also manifested support with the idea that shops should be required by the government to donate all their leftover food. This impression can be triangulated with data obtained from informal discussions and interviews with volunteers but also with a paid coordinator at Foodsavers. Complaints also included that while some shops are willing to donate to a logistical platform like Foodsavers, they often refuse to give leftover food to individuals or smaller organizations; a decision that tends to be justified by safety reasons. In substance, the availability narrative insists on the fact that there is sufficient food waste being produced by supermarkets that could serve to meet the needs of all the hungry people in Ghent. An extension of that narrative was the proposal that the solution to food poverty would be for the government to implement a centralized warehouse processing all the leftover food coming from all the major shopping outlets.

Within this perspective, no critical reflection is offered on whether leftover food should be used to meet the food needs of people facing poverty nor on the underlying causes for the abundance of food waste generated by the current food system. Such reflections are quite rare but appeared two or three times during this research, notably during an interview with a coordinator at one of the major food and material support networks in Ghent, KRAS.

So they overproduce just to make sure that their product is also visible in high quantities so people don't see the product next. Yeah, I understand it from a business point, but it's a crazy way. And then for them, is then cheaper to give that to poverty organizations, the overproduction, then to destroy them or and they don't want to sell them at lower prices when they have overproduction because then the next time people won't buy their product at the real price anymore.

Another coordinator argued that giving to poverty organizations was an integral part of the companies' marketing strategies. She explained that they often received large quantities of highly processed and sweetened food. Food bank users get used to these foods and develop a preference for them that can be impactful when they can afford to shop in the primary economy. She expressed feeling uneasy and almost refusing to give that food to people and refers to these occurrences as one of several reasons why she, at times, question her belonging to this sector, the work of her organization, and the network as a whole. But, she added that compromises are an important part of their job and of living in society in general. One coordinator at a social restaurant shares a similar view, stating:

I don't know if you know the system of the Foodsavers. So in the beginning, I said I am not going to work with it because they are not doing it right in the sense they take the food, the left food, but they don't say that they may not produce so much food. So in the beginning, the market, they had a lot, had too many foods because then it's better to have too much and throw it away than to have what we need. And so ok, that's their thing. It’s a pity, I think but that’s their way of doing it. But if they throw it away, they are paid for it because we are going there, to pick it up. They don't have to hire containers. And then they are coming in the journals with the big smile that they help. But no, they don’t help, they are the problem. So I said no, I don’t want to work with them. But it was not possible because other social restaurants still work with them so I had to. But at the meetings, I tell it to everybody.

However, in general, the views are majorly supportive when it comes to using food waste to help people in poverty and most actors interviewed expressed gratefulness for the existence of a system like Foodsavers to the point that certain powerful stakeholders are lobbying for the government to implement tax reductions for the companies donating leftover foods. However, such a policy is perceived elsewhere as “a positive incentive for them [companies] to overproduce” by the same participant arguing that what is needed is “higher income of the poor people and not higher income for the company so they produce more food”. During supplementary interviews, other criticisms were expressed, notably concerning heavily subsidized electrical companies that are not paying taxes or the fact that taxes on incomes are higher than on assets, meaning that their weight falls more heavily on the less well-off members of society. Therefore, tax redistribution was vividly advocated by holders of this viewpoint.

Income and health

The theme of “income” also appeared in relation to the pictures, particularly when discussing pictures linked to food distribution (12). One user who appears in a picture was described as a recently retired Belgian man who “doesn't have enough money to live”. The lack of income and therefore economic access to food was explained by the participants in the photo-elicitation, as related to illnesses, low pension, and not possessing legal papers in Belgium. The common denominator between people facing these different situations was the absence of “work”, prompting employment to be actively suggested as the solution to food poverty.

However, two coordinators, during the interviews, highlighted the fact that “there is a smaller group and growing group of people who work but have a very low work income”. And both for this group of people and for those affected by illnesses, acceding the food distribution points represents a challenge, either in terms of physical ability or time. Most food distribution happens during weekdays and normal working hours, primarily because of the unavailability of volunteers to cover night time or weekends but also because of the perception that the larger public of users is unemployed and, thus, not concerned with this difficulty. One of the sampled organizations attempts to address the issue of physical access by delivering food to those who cannot leave their house: old, sick, or disabled people, and mothers of small children. The making calls (1) picture shows a volunteer calling to make sure that people are home so that her parents could realize the delivery of food parcels.

Figure 2

“Those are filled tables waiting for our customers” (Participant’s caption) [Translated from Dutch with DeepL]

Participant: We see fruit and vegetables and that's our main purpose to give the people healthy food.

Income was also majorly linked to “health” in the photo-elicitation interviews (setting up (5), stock (17), food items or meals (8), fruits and vegetables shaped toys (1)…). The difficulty for poor people to have access to healthy foods was particularly emphasized (Figure 2). Volunteers explained that low-cost highly processed food was more accessible to poor people while fruits and vegetables could be assimilated to a luxury, particularly the less common options like melons or grapes. This was often provided as a reason why giving money, or shopping coupons to people would not be as effective as organizing food distribution. But if for some the justification is that the “value” of the food given by the food charities is higher than what could be purchased with the budget that they could afford to give people, for others,

it is rather that poor people could not be trusted to spend the money wisely as the temptation to satisfy addictions or to purchase unhealthy food is perceived to be too high.

It doesn't work. I don't believe it works. And it's not only the fault of the people, but it's more the attraction of things because they came in the shop. I see all those things. I see cigarettes. I understand you want cigarettes. If you're addicted to get all those energy things. I don't know. But if you come to us, with the food distribution, I'm sure you have some food. I'm not a big fan of this.

Talking about healthy food often prompted discussions about the importance for the poor to learn "how to eat cheap and healthy". The majority of the food items or meal (8) as well as cooking together with users (4) pictures came from a volunteer who, because of a disability, is also directed to food charities to get a weekly parcel by the relevant government service. He designs and shares recipes using "only what is available in the food packet" and requiring fewer inputs in terms of cooking utensils or appliances.

For me, I'm a good creative, I make some recipes also for the homeless people. So every three months I make a recipe they can make on the street when they don't need nothing... I do it like you go to the food bank and you get that. So we make something of it.

Choice and entitlement

But eating cheap and healthy was also an important idea for one volunteer who insisted on the importance of making good choices. Talking about "choice", volunteers often insisted on the choices that people make which maintain them in poverty: "people who choose to have a car", "people who don't want to work" and "people who choose to stay homeless". Volunteers also talked about those who choose to come to food charities even though they have enough money and therefore do not require food support. Within one of the organizations where this view is prominent, access can be refused to users if there is any suspicion that they own a car, or a house, have a good job, or are visiting other food distributions. Various means are employed by volunteers to investigate and uncover these situations, including through social control by other users. Through almost all the data collection methods in this research (observation, informal discussions, interviews, and photo-elicitation), a car appeared as an important social marker delineating the distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Though the undeserving poor were more easily described as "those who are young, not sick, who can work but don't want to work", this group also encompasses those who feel too "entitled", who ask for too much or not politely, who believe that they have a right to the organization's food, or those [migrants] who forget that they have "not only rights but also duties". Making sure that the food goes to "those who really needed it" is a major concern in times of scarcity, either due to a lack of availability of food or increased demand. In "normal" times, some volunteers expressed not feeling too concerned that people come to save food for environmental reasons, because they feel lonely at home, or as a way for them to obtain help to address other needs.

Participant 1: I had a man of Afghanistan, from the war, he has moved.
Participant 2: He played victim.
Participant 1: He asked when his wife became [receives] her money. Did you work or is she ill? No. I became [receive] money, my children became [receive] money. I'm waiting for the money of my wife. So I told him his wife don't become [receive] money. I asked him if you stay in Afghanistan, from what you buy everything. Family,

friends and the street. And do you have money for your children? And money for your wife? And for yourself? And now you expect you became [receive] money for you, you became [receive] money for your child and now you expect money for your wife. You have a social house with three sleeping rooms for a little money. And here there are people who worked 40, 45 and 50 years and they have 1200, they even don't have a social house and you have this all and they have to wait 10, 15 years or longer. At the end of the conversation, I had the feeling that he was very ashamed that he asked me this. He asked me: what can I do? What can I give back to the community that you all do this for me? And I said, well, you do something as volunteer, maybe in the football team your boys are playing.

Control, conviviality and informality

The themes of “conviviality” and “informality” emerged particularly when discussing the setting up (5) of the food distribution, the welcome (1), and other group activities such as eating (4) or playing together (1). These elements are seen as tools to counteract the dehumanizing aspects of poverty such as the isolation, the lack of a network, the invisibility of the poor to the rest of the population as well as the “impersonality”, brutality, and “control” of bureaucracy (Figure 3). Volunteers voiced the difficulty for people in poverty, especially the elderly, to go to a government office where there is a need to explain their problems to people younger than them, where they are asked private questions before they can obtain a referral to access a food charity service.

Everybody knows when you have such a card in your pocket, you went already through too much control. They control your finances. They control where you live. They control if you have clothes enough, they control if you have the energy, things like electricity, water, gas. They know everything. They know the size of your pants. They know the size of your shoes.

Figure 3

Coffee table set up for the food distribution

Participant: I think people like it. They are a person here, they are not a case that is poor, that comes here. No, they are people. […] That's one thing that's always there, a coffee, the ability to have a coffee or a soup and talk to somebody. I always want someone there, it's not just that they're having coffee, no, no, there's someone to talk to [Translated from French with DeepL].

Therefore, volunteers at the majority of the sampled organizations perceive it as a priority to offer a place where people “can just be there and it's like a home for them”, where they are not required to discuss their problems. However, not all organizations have the means either financially or in terms of space to offer that to the users. Not all organizations are subsidized and for them, their funds come from donations or other activities such as the sale of clothes or books. In certain organizations which do not receive support from the city or the Flemish government, such a referral is not needed but control is exerted in a different way as explained above, according to subjective distinctions between the deserving and the undeserving poor. In any case, for non-subsidized organizations, it is often difficult to go beyond the simple provision of food, even when this may be seen as necessary.

The theme of “control” is also present in the context of the tensions between charity organizations and the State. For organizations that are not subsidized, the reasons put forward are varied. They include outright illegality for an organization catering to people who have not been granted papers to live in Belgium, and therefore cannot be helped directly by the OCMW, as in the case of De Tinten. Within the Samen Solidair network, the reasons suggested are rather the fear of government control and resistance from the organizations to comply with certain requirements such as the necessity to remain closed during holidays which they see as detrimental for people in need, and competition from the large number of food support initiatives existing in Ghent.

Thus, while some elements of the growing governmental control stemming from the institutionalization process are welcomed or tolerated, others are more resisted. For instance, the use of referrals from government entities to define entitlement is largely accepted, even in non-subsidized organizations, although less commonly. Apart from the OCMW, referrals can also be obtained from other institutions such as CAW or the *Mutualiteit* though De Rode Lotus accepts referrals from any source including from other poverty organizations. On the other side, a technological tool has been developed by the city of Ghent and is being tested in some of the organizations to create a centralized platform allowing to control food support access by people in poverty, keeping them from, for example, accessing different distribution points. This platform is operated through a QR code system. One organization’s reasoning for praising the system was both its straightforwardness and the fact that it allowed better control against fraud as users tended to inflate the size of their families. While some volunteers acknowledged that the food that people obtain from one distribution point may be insufficient to last them a week, it is either argued that food support is not intended to be the sole source of nourishment but rather a mere contribution, or that the efficacy and the protection against fraudulent users brought by the tool largely compensate for this downside. Lastly, the zoning system implemented by the city, wherein people are required to access a food distribution in their district, is opposed by De Rode Lotus, again for its potential dehumanizing potential, one volunteer coordinator perceiving that it may be disconcerting for people to stop visiting a food charity where they have developed a relationship of trust, simply because they have moved a few kilometers away.

Structural issues

Figure 4

A book addressing the right to food and recipe from the Flemish government

Participant: It's like our social net. But the strawberry falls through it because there's a hole you can see it for the ingredients. But there's also our social network with the different people and one is falling out.

For some of the research participants, accessing food charities is a way for people in poverty to alleviate their financial burdens or to find solutions to underlying issues regarding housing, papers, health, and more broadly access to rights. According to them, a lack of knowledge of the rights that they can call on is perceived as a major reason why people experience food poverty.

> What we believe is we do not think that there are many people hungry who come to our food distribution.

Discussing Figure 4, one participant perceived a form of symbolism in the image demonstrating how governments can be disconnected from the people in need, developing healthy recipes requiring countless ingredients and materials that people in poverty, especially homeless people may not have, but also the failings of the social safety net from which individuals can fall from the simplest failure to meet bureaucratic requirements.

Apart from access to rights, housing is seen as a transcendental issue and one of the primary causes of poverty in Ghent. This perception engenders different forms of action within the organizations. Some organizations consider it beyond their mandate to act on this question. “Food is our core business… this is what we do” asserted a volunteer during a photo-elicitation interview. Nonetheless, volunteers may sometimes use their networks to secure accommodation for individual users whose situation resonates with them. At the network level, however, such as for KRAS or Samen Solidair, individual help is seen as secondary to finding solutions to structural problems, often through influencing policies. Recently, in one KRAS project, users were engaged in a creative video project on housing.

I think three quarters of the people who come for food help, if they would have better housing conditions and living conditions, they could look for their own nutrition.

In that context, some of the organizations offer administrative services (2) to "connect people to their rights" but also support them in addressing other issues. For instance, as part of their recent innovation project, the KRAS network is increasing focus on so-called short-term solutions to get people "as quick as possible" out of the food support system although for some users, their issues are more complex and require a more important time investment. The signals gathered from providing these services are used to communicate with policymakers on observed issues such as the current housing crisis or low pension benefits.

It is worth noting that the provision of administrative services is carried out differently by the organizations. While in some places, people are attended by paid social workers, in others, they are assisted by volunteers with no relevant training prompting the question of whether the latter are skilled enough to undertake these tasks. In one informal discussion, a social work student expressed her disbelief at seeing volunteers perform what ought to be the job of the OCMW. During the photo-elicitation interview, a participant also expressed her discontent at the increasing reliance on volunteers to provide all sorts of services.

Figure 5

Volunteer providing administrative support

Participant: That's where people come with all their problems and they ask for: Can you help me for food? Can you help me to live? To have a house? Can you help me for school? Can you help me for papers? I can't read.

Observing Figure 5, some participants in the second focus group pointed out the distance and the formality of the exchange.

It helps but it's with a distance. It's like going to the OCMW. When they don't understand it there, this guy tries to help them but it's in the same way that they do it. It's with the distance, just the paperwork, not the interaction with the person.

They're sitting on the other side of the desk. If they would be together, looking from the same side on the computer, it would be so different.

One participant also mentioned the abstractive nature of the help provided. When the volunteer operates on the computer, then the user is told that he/she has been helped, but remains largely oblivious to the process and its meaning.

Approaches to solutions and perceptions of responsibilities

Generally, there appears to be more consensus on the causes of poverty than on the approach needed to solve the problem. While certain structural solutions are suggested addressing housing, migration, tax regulations, or labor policies, there are about as many voices calling for more support for food charity organizations to allow them to grow, either to reach more people or to offer more choices to their existing group. Sometimes, these voices are interchangeable. In that perspective, food support is perceived to be a good solution or at least, a solution "in the meantime".

It's possible both so in the meantime when you look for those you know better organization from the government, we can do this while this is happening, I mean I say something stupid when you have bad lungs and you need new lungs and while you are waiting for lungs they can put you on a machine to help you breathe.

Figure 6

Volunteers' private car getting food from another food support organization

Figure 7

Bookstore in one of the organizations

Participant: Because we do everything with our car and we need to sometimes drive two times a day because it doesn't fit in our car. So I would really show them that. I want them to think…What can we do to support people who do food donation? Maybe my brother has an auto garage and he can give a car. I will give 1000 euros and the food distribution has a bigger car. (Figure 6)

Participant: I should always show also the store to say we don't have money from you and we need many money. (Figure 7)

Diverging perspectives arose throughout the photo-elicitation interviews and the subsequent focus groups. For instance, two pictures (Figures 6 and 7) that were widely interpreted as expressing the limitations of volunteer organizations of which even the subsidized ones struggle to cover their expenses led to contrasting messages addressed to policymakers.

Participant 1: We do need to sell books to have enough money to do what we do.
Researcher: What do you want the government to do when they see that?
Participant 2: Give money more.
Participant 1: Make that people have enough money that we don't have to do this.
Participant 2: I will show also this to politicians. There is a private car example.

Responsibility for change was mostly placed on the government, which was encouraged to make better choices and to listen to the people. The government was expected to implement the suggested solutions domestically but for one of the organizations, working specifically with migrants, it was seen as important “to give good support [financial and technical] to countries who are trying to make things in their country better”. As for the rest of the community, their roles were perceived to be helping to get people who have fallen out back into the social net and to carefully elect their representatives. Finally, responsibility was put on the people in need themselves, to learn to budget and to make better choices. Moreover, according to a volunteer, income support from the government should be contingent on people’s will to work and if they cannot do so formally, to volunteer.

However, overall, given the chance to answer the questions: “If a politician comes, what would I show them?” and “What would I not show them?” most participants chose to highlight the dedication of volunteers through pictures of other volunteer (s) (11), demanding more appreciation for volunteer organizations as they play a role in maintaining social cohesion. Without them, many argued, crime rates would skyrocket as the growing food poverty would become unbearable. Volunteers also insisted on the limited means of their organizations asking for more material or financial support from the government. Two participants from different organizations called for the creation of more places to “eat and meet”. “What I wanted to show them also is that it is not enough to give only food, but that the contact is important, meeting each other is important.” Some participants also acknowledged the importance of “diversity” within the volunteer group to facilitate engagement with the beneficiary group.

During the first focus group, one volunteer in the KRAS network, observing a picture depicting a food distribution from an organization outside the network, noticed the race differences and instantly assumed that these were white people helping dark-skinned ones. “I’m not a racist”, she hurriedly explained as she proceeded to bring to our attention that the white people in the picture were seen working while the others were not. To her, this observation paralleled the fact that 50% of beneficiaries at her food support organization were foreigners. In truth, the picture represented a multiracial group of volunteers in one of the organizations of the more recently founded Samen Solidair network where more diversity can be found. In the second focus group where more members of this latter network were present, the picture was correctly assessed and participants went on to praise the diversity within their groups, where different backgrounds, opinions, and cultures were represented. Furthermore, they suggested adding diversity to the list of themes extracted from the photos (Table 3). The diversity was also seen as offering a language advantage, allowing them to better engage with non-Dutch speaking users.

In contrast, what volunteers considered not showing is perceived “food safety” infringements. Volunteers noticed, in some pictures, that some food items that should be kept cool were simply placed on the table. Moreover, participants asserted people’s right to information when accessing food banks: users should be told about products' expiration dates and have the chance to make informed decisions, which is currently not the case everywhere.

This I don't want to show because it's not okay. It's not okay…And the government may see that, I don't know where it is, so they get an amend [fine]. It's not okay, because when you give this to people, they will get ill and they have to pay the doctor.

Tensions and collaboration

Figure 6 also drew out the theme of “collaboration”. As implied above, Ghent’s food support macro-sphere is a moving field that is being shaped and reshaped by a diversity of stakeholders. While a network like the KRAS has existed for years, new initiatives are continually emerging. The logistic platform Foodsavers Gent started in 2017. The Samen Solidair network was constituted during Covid. Smaller and younger initiatives have also sprung up such as Kookploeg Solidair or De Grote Tafel. With this diversity comes some degree of competitiveness in a landscape marked by scarcity. During one focus group, a participant explained that there is not always a good partnership between social organizations. Nonetheless, some of the participants in this study perceive this diversity as a strength that should be harnessed for greater political impact. Nonetheless, tensions remain present, particularly between the two networks.

Researcher: And what is the relationship between KRAS and these other organizations?
Participant: In the beginning, it was a little bit difficult because some people thought they come to take what we do but I think we have to work together and everyone has his knowledge and we have to put it together and then work to the government together.

Within the networks, organizations tend to support each other (e.g. by sharing food surplus with partners) and coordinators meet regularly both to discuss practical issues and to plan “actions” on housing or other issues. The realization of these political actions often requires partnerships with other poverty organizations outside the network. Out-of-network collaboration also includes partnerships with neighboring schools, local businesses, and academic entities such as Ghent University. Indeed, coordinators have on numerous occasions pointed out that there has been a surge of academic interest in the field of food support in Ghent, leaving organizations overwhelmed and incapable of agreeing to all of the demands, which was a key challenge in the present study. Researchers are often responsible for bringing different networks or organizations into contact through events such as those referred to earlier.

However, these different possibilities for interactions and deliberations largely concern coordinators. Volunteers have limited opportunities to engage in such dialogical practices because they tend to be unwilling to or sheltered from moving beyond the practical aspects of their work. Therefore, as was apparent in the focus groups, volunteers are mostly unaware of the existence, vision, and practices of other food support organizations.

Insights from the Photovoice project

As already mentioned, food support volunteers in Ghent have little opportunity to engage in reflexive deliberations and are impeded by a set of organizational and personal reasons from moving beyond the practical aspect of their work. The vocation of the participant-photography project was to create such an opportunity for them and, by bringing these representatives of different micro-public spheres together, to contribute to the politicization process.

First of all, the taking of photographs was intended to be a disruptive activity that would allow volunteers to step back and think. Indeed, this was found to be the case. As one participant from De Sluis Onze Thuis, a member organization of the KRAS network explained:

Researcher: So what was the most challenging thing for you about doing this project?
Participant: First to think what's important for me to show and how to show it...It was not oh, I take my camera and I take. No, I mean, this is important. And then: What can I show? What can I not show? Like their faces. It was not just take five photos. I go around and take five photos. No, I have to take a photo, and there has to be a meaning. I cannot just take it because you said we have to talk then about it so first I have to think about it because when you ask me something I have to know why I did it.
Researcher: Okay, so it made you think?
Participant: Yeah. It made me think. That's important also.

Another participant at Sociaal 9050, part of the Samen Solidair network expressed similar feelings:

I told you, the first time, I forgot and then. The second time I really looked around and what was I gonna...? And it took a while before deciding what I'm gonna do and somebody told me I'm gonna do that. And I was thinking, I want something else. So I really thought of it. It's not just [click], [click], [click], [click]. It was, I felt like, yeah, giving you a day into the food process.

Participants' feedbacks also make a strong case supporting the idea that reflection-in-action can indeed occur whenever a disruptive element challenges routine actions (Weick, 2003).

I was on a table and we were talking and then, I thought, Can I take a picture? Yeah. You can take it and then oh, it's almost done. I have to take this picture.

Another participant recounted:

Sometimes it's just luck. When I saw this tower with all the buckets [crates], yeah. Now, it's less. But I saw it and I saw: that's the picture. Yeah, yeah, or the empty fridge. First. I took the week before the full fridge, with all the carrots and also the empty fridge and I think that too and it's a real contrast.

For participants, the project was also an opportunity to reflect on their actions and prompted new reflections. One participant, explaining a picture she took of her organization's clients playing together, highlighted the importance of places like this for people in poverty who often lack a network. This discussion led her to reflect on the reasons why such a problem may exist, suggesting that perhaps, in contrast to what she thought previously, it could be a two-way relationship wherein the absence of a network may lead people to poverty while the latter accentuates the difficulty of developing a network. She promised herself to look for answers to this new questioning. Others reported adopting a new lens to observe their actions through this project.

I wouldn't say it was really different or new reflection. But it made me look different...We started with a whole table. We started with a lot of buckets [crates] and we end with nothing. And then, next week we start again. So it's a whole process...Like we get food, we place them on the table and if we don't have enough, we buy more.

I look with new eyes. Because it's normal, because every Sunday evening, we make this, every Monday, Tuesday, every day. But you say to me: Stop. Stop. And that's, I think, I feel, yes. And from time to time, we need this.

She further suggested that it was useful for reflexive moments to be coupled with deliberations.

We need this from an outsider. Because if we are together, it's all the same. All the same. But we need someone to ensure and make the confrontation. And then maybe we have a new vision.

Most participants expressed that they have learned from the experience:

Researcher: So you feel like you've learned something?
Participant: Yeah. The way we were all working together. I didn't have the opportunity to go to look at the other ones. Yeah. I have a lot to do and I have little children to take care of. And I learned here different ways for food donations.

Table 3

Collaborative theme extraction from the autophotography and photo-elicitation project

Emerging themes from the photo-elicitation interviews	**Emerging themes from focus group 1**	**Emerging themes from focus group 2**
Choice	Choice	Choice
Control	Scarcity	Scarcity
Income	Food Safety	Control
Food Safety	Health	(against) Food Waste
Food waste	Appreciation of volunteers	Conviviality
Access to food	Respect	Volunteers' satisfaction
Access to rights	Informality	Appreciation of volunteers
Appreciation of volunteers	Income	Income
Conviviality	Scarcity	Informality
Informality	Privacy	Access to rights
Entitlement	Limited means of organizations	Collaboration
Scarcity		Network
Privacy		Equality
Equality		Housing
Collaboration		Diversity
Health		Culture
Network		Engagement
Work		Impersonality
Housing		
Responsibility		
Volunteers' satisfaction		
Respect		
Limited means of organizations		

Table 3 illustrates the various themes that emerged throughout the Photovoice project. Following the photo-elicitation interviews, the themes identified from the content analysis were sent to participants for confirmation. The themes of the focus group were identified through a collaborative exercise by the researcher and the participants based on the original themes of the photo-elicitation interviews. Participants were allowed to modify themes or create new ones if seen as necessary.

This collaborative exercise reveals the discursive richness that the use of pictures enabled as each picture took on different meanings for the involved participants who could, moreover, confront and negotiate their own understandings with the views of others through the focus group discussions.

Participants reflected on the best way to set the food distribution to preserve the dignity of users. Although each focus group session moved towards a consensus through the collective selection of key messages to deliver, even consensual agreements were underlined by divergent views. For example, one of the key messages identified by participants through the first focus group discussion is that "poverty is more than not having food". When a participant expressed the idea, all nodded in agreement but further discussions revealed that their frame of reference was quite different. To the one who first shared this thought in response to Figure 4 while pondering the ingredients needed to make people stronger, it was a starting point to assert the necessity of adopting a new paradigm to think about poverty, one that includes notably the understanding that poverty is not necessarily solved by work. She later advocated for a universal basic income. But to another participant, the one who elsewhere insisted on the necessity to teach poor people better budgeting skills, the missing ingredient was simply courage.

Dominant discourses

The themes and perspectives (Table 3) elicited through the pictures (individual interviews and focus groups), substantiated by the supplementary interviews, provide sufficient grounds for elaborating on the dominant discourses in the studied sector. The data reveal that there is not a unified discourse within the food support macro-sphere in Ghent and not even within individual organizations but rather a plurality of discourses, drawing upon different assumptions on the underlying causes and subsequently leading to different ways of thinking about solutions and responsibilities.

Predominantly, the root causes of poverty are seen by the participants as more structural than personal, for instance, lack of income, either from an inadequate pension, child allowance benefits, or insufficient salary, particularly for people without papers working illegally. The housing crisis, a lack of knowledge surrounding rights are all advanced as potential root causes of poverty. Other causes suggested were, for instance, high birth rates among the poor and generational behavior patterns such as alcoholism. This perspective was largely defended by volunteers interviewed in one of the oldest catholic organizations giving food support, notably through their social restaurant in Ghent. There, a fatalistic view of poverty prevails and the concept of "multigenerational poverty", that is poverty that is transmitted from one generation to the next is heavily referenced. A somewhat attenuated version of this viewpoint hold that people do get out of poverty but not everyone as one's mentality and capacity play a key role.

The protest discourse

- Poverty is a social problem. Addressing the individual needs of people in poverty should not distract from searching for more structural solutions.

Predominantly, and that is the most widely publicized discourse, there is a tendency to articulate the food poverty issue as a socially constructed problem, particularly in the two bigger networks of self-titled poverty organizations, KRAS and Samen Solidair.

The conclusion is quite simple: enhance the chances of people to live in a good and not too expensive house; enhance the minimum wages and there will already be less poverty and food support will be less or not needed anymore. But all that is a political discussion and decision… (personal communication, 15 March 2023)

While individual members of both networks have at times problematized poverty as a question of "bad luck" or "bad choices", it is often accompanied by the view that there are issues of inequality of chances and social difficulties at play. Besides, the public discourse of these organizations largely adopts a political tone. The assumption underlying this vision is that people in poverty have agency and would be able to change their situation if the structural impediments that limit them were annihilated. Terms like "equality of chances" or "food support under protest" are central to this discourse that entails other specific choices of words.

People in poverty, we don't like to speak about poor people, but people in poverty. Because then it's only from the self. When we said poor people like when you say to a child, you are a bad boy. That is also not the case. You have to say, you are not bad, but what you have done is bad. So the situation is the poverty, not the person.

Our vision is that everyone has strength so also people in poverty are strong. So we have to search this strength so they can come out and that they can do it, they can do it themselves.

For the proponents of this discourse, it is a perspective that has emerged over time with the accumulation of crises and growing poverty. Gradually, the necessity of more activist thinking has become more obvious.

Now it's a lot more political work. There have been so many crises. Also, more people have become conscious of it and also the need to do more activist thinking.

Within this discourse, the problem is represented to be a structural one that needs to be addressed at different levels of society but the main responsibility falls on governments to find solutions and poverty organizations can support this process by contributing the signals they gather from working with vulnerable people and the expertise gathered while doing so. Moreover, poverty organizations forming networks for knowledge and experience sharing, also gain a more powerful voice when it comes to taking the observed issues to policy-makers. The mechanisms to enforce changes and ensure government accountability may include formal and informal interactions with policymakers, lobbying, and diverse forms of protest actions. For instance, last year, one of the networks led an "action" on housing that involved making and disseminating drawings of homeless people in Ghent at night. Some volunteers and coordinators also take part in street protests in Ghent and Brussels against racism, homelessness, the housing crisis, or the increase in living costs.

We are not the good guys who are still and say thank you...we can be the bad guys and say you have to do this. These are the needs. This has to be done. And if there is no action then they know we go to the social media.

Thus, food support organizations are increasingly vocal in denouncing the growing poverty in Ghent and identifying the structural roots of the current situation. Through the concept of “food support under protest”, these organizations attempt to resist institutionalization and depoliticization by the State, asserting the incongruence of their existence in a developed country that has the means of guaranteeing decent lives for its citizens.

But a future without food support is not a perspective that everyone is open to considering and different opinions are co-existing when it comes to the roles of food charities and volunteers in contributing to the realization of such a future.

The neoliberal/paternalistic discourse

- Poor people, if they are willing, only need a push to get out of poverty. We can give them food so that we are sure they are helped and support them on an individual basis.

In parallel to the protest discourse persists a powerful narrative that, to a large extent, individualizes poverty. Therefore, although poverty is problematized on structural grounds, its remedies are, first and foremost, individual. The themes of work, responsibility, and choice are common in this discourse, which moreover put forth ideas relating to dignity, humility, self-worth, and self-help.

One person has to go alone with every family alone. You need a lot of people go and then listen to them and help them. Not one man but several people. Come and I help you. The next family, come and I help you.

They have someone who trust them, who believe in them, who is not always...but give a second chance, a third chance, of course not. But you see, don't lay down on the floor. Come on. Come on. I believe in you. So believe in yourself.

In the poor, I distinguish several types. There are people who are in misery, people who have the means, who are capable of rising again. So those who want to and who succeed because they have the character and the ability. There are those who want to and who fight but who do not have the capacity. So that's a reason of natural ability or education. There are also people who don't want to and can't. [Translated from French with DeepL]

Within this discourse, differences between the poor are central to any discussion, as poverty is believed to result, in many cases, from a character flaw. Therefore, “real Belgians” are opposed to newcomers, the latter seen as advantaged compared to the others who have worked all their lives and are currently experiencing poverty due to low pension incomes. Further distinctions were made between “those who can’t work” because of illnesses or other conditions, “those who cannot find work” and “those who don’t want to work” who constitute the most undeserving class of poor. Two volunteers in a Catholic organization have also framed it in terms of “those who want to” and “those who don’t want to”, thus putting forth questions of character and education.

Thus, one of the key solutions advanced by the proponents of this discourse involves some way or another of educating the poor. A volunteer coordinator in one organization explained, for instance, how the clients have been taught to be less greedy during food

distribution. She also explained how she "gave herself the right" to call out her users on their spending habits and/or addictive behaviors. A common argument is also that the poor need to be educated on how to eat "cheap and healthy" and be taught financial management skills which they often lack. Bad choices are seen to be reflected in, for instance, parents owning a car, a TV, or a video recorder while their children are going hungry.

I think, every family goes to that course "How to spend your money good", there will be a lot of problems solved. ...I came to Ghent, they gave a course "How to spend your money good". There were few people and I was very sad that there were not a lot of people to learn how to get on with your money. Because it's easy to spend a little bit, less there and then you get money, it's like a puzzle.

Given the different categories in which poor people are placed within this discourse, different solutions and level of responsibility are articulated when it comes to helping them. While the responsibility majorly sits with poor individuals to lift themselves out of poverty, they can be supported to move towards self-sufficiency. A coordinator at Enchanté reported that their organization chose not to engage in politicized action nor to develop an extensive partnership with organizations known for doing so as these sorts of actions are perceived to be lacking in efficacy and the government is already "doing enough". Therefore, the focus should be on helping individuals to find employment, which is seen as the solution to all poverty-related issues. This type of individualized help is perceived to be more impactful than advocacy work that attempts to change the lives of plenty while failing at helping the few that could concretely be helped. Another coordinator at a Catholic institution where the next to be introduced narrative is prevalent dreams of moving to a more "concrete" volunteer work where his experience and skills can be put to good use in advising poor people and helping them to change their situation.

To some extent, it can be said that there is an Enchanté discourse, which borrows elements from the two previous ones but accentuates the responsibility of "civilians" rather than the government to keep people within the social network. It is a "solidarity" discourse that emphasizes the necessity for the more sell-off members in society to support the most vulnerable, voluntarily, without any government intervention in the form of tax redistribution policies, for instance. Thus, apart from providing individual help, the focus should be on raising awareness and combat bias surrounding poverty so that wealthier members of society can be encouraged to reach out, understanding that we can all be "people in need" at any time.

Proponents of the neoliberal discourse do not always recoil against politicized actions, particularly on behalf of children or "those who can't work". Nonetheless, at the core of the discourse is the belief that voluntary organizations can lend a helping hand and provide individual help, preferably material or heavily regulated money handouts, as poor people cannot be trusted to spend their money wisely. Other forms of help can also be provided and the greatest pride of proponents of this discourse is found in the individual success stories of people who freed themselves from poverty thanks to their help and through work. Lastly, in exchange for the help received, poor people are expected to express gratitude and the desire to pay back.

And that's the way also we look for house then we look for a job, we look at education, everything he needs, he becomes [receives] his right. But he has not only rights, but also duties.

The charity/fatalistic discourse

- People do not get out of poverty, the most we can do is give them food.

Yes, but they always talked about the poor having to try to get out of their situation, but the poor sometimes can't do that. Because they have too much misery, too much disease and therefore it is better like here that we can give something to help them…and I have learned that someone who is poor is a generation poor…. I have always seen the same poor people in the same meetings, I have never heard that someone came out of that and sometimes started with a job. [Translated from French with DeepL]

The quote above is from a volunteer who has discontinued his work at an association where the poor speak out and joined a Catholic institution where a more charity-based approach is adopted. This discourse was pervasive within this latter institution which was described in the following terms during one of the focus groups:

It's still in there and it still goes this slow way. It doesn't change. It's not really a Christian organization anymore, but they have to do it like this. And it goes like that. And it's not amusing like that. We do it to help the poor and forget it. It's not like we think in a way that we are social mammals that help each other so the other one can help the other one and like that make a network. But there is just, you help, you're good. Praise the lord.

In a sense, this is a more traditional discourse that has informed Catholic charity work for centuries. Interestingly, however, it was also expressed by younger participants who tended to perceive poverty as an inherent social fact that is unsurmountable for any government, making either self-help or charity the preferred solution.

In this view, the focus of voluntary organizations should therefore be on expanding to meet the demand. There is also a tendency for proponents of this viewpoint to insist that poor people are "happy" that structures like theirs exist and to plead for the creation of more such structures.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The food banking system in Ghent can be considered a sort of macro-public sphere that encompasses several micro-publics formed by multiple organizations and initiatives with specific concerns and orientations and operating under widely divergent rules and principles. Within this setting, discourses and counter-discourses are articulated by volunteers, coordinators, social workers, and users. This research focused primarily on individuals directly involved in the functioning of the food banks, thus volunteers and paid or volunteer coordinators. However, the distinction between volunteers and users is not always clear-cut as numerous volunteers have previously used food banks themselves or continue to resort to them.

As argued by McCallum (2011), public spheres are configured around specific issues or interests. The food banking system is constituted by a diversity of bigger or smaller groups sharing a common objective of supplying, distributing, or preparing food for the poor and food insecure. However, as expected, in the process of accomplishing these tasks, they "promote different understandings of the problems of food poverty to a wider public, or the negotiation of these politics within the micro-publics" (Williams et al., 2016, p. 7). Even within a single

organization, as explained in the previous section, coordinators and volunteers may, for instance, hold contrasting views.

The overarching question throughout this research is whether the food charity sector in Ghent helps to politicize the issue of food poverty. To address this question, first of all, volunteers' motivation, organizational influence, and the evolution of volunteers' views on food poverty have been considered. Secondly, the dominant discourses within this sector and the manners in which they problematize food poverty and hunger have been presented in the preceding section. These conflicting discourses that co-exist within individual volunteers or organizations not only have implications for the way that poor people are addressed and treated but also shape the different patterns of politicization and depoliticization within the sector and the roles of volunteers and organizations in these processes.

In this discussion section, the politicizing potential of volunteering at food charities will be addressed, the "silences" in these different discourses will be highlighted as they are related to Hay's (2007) framework, the particular methodology adopted within this study as well as its benefits and drawbacks will be explored as well as challenges and perspectives of constructing a Right to Food movement in Ghent.

Politicization through volunteering

As hypothesized in the literature review leading to this research, it is possible to develop a more politicized view of poverty through volunteering in food charities, for a large part through interacting with people in poverty; food charities constituting indeed "liminal spaces of encounter". However, volunteers are more often brought into these structures by self-oriented motives and some concepts of "doing good", and their interests in any reflexive engagement are limited. Many also believe that it is important to divide their work and their personal life and thus avoid engaging too deeply with the stories that they are confronted with in their interactions with users. Apart from these interactions, politicization could occur through other means but as explained above, there are numerous challenges to that possibility.

Indeed, although some organizations may hold politicized views on food poverty and make attempts to politicize the issue publicly, most steer clear from involving volunteers in their vision, generally because of the aforementioned practical challenges (e.g. time, age of volunteers…) but, at times, purposefully, for example when volunteers are more valued for their compliance than their critical agency.

Therefore, it can be said that the organizations' views and those of volunteers are not always in agreement. This also means that most of the politicizing work done in the organizations is conducted by a few, mostly paid, coordinators. However, as argued previously, moving from charity to activist work requires mobilizing volunteers "who not only provide services but also critically reflect on the structural aspects of disadvantage". The methodology used in this study aimed to contribute to encouraging such a process.

Politicization in the Ghent food support sector

In essence, the protest discourse presented above fits well within the conceptualization of politicization adopted in this study and is contributing to politicizing the issues of food poverty. The issue, however, is that even when accessing food support organizations where this discourse is publicized, users are not met with a unified empowering discourse but rather with

contradicting narratives, drawing elements from the different discourses articulated above. Neoliberal values and power imbalances are pervasive in their interactions with volunteers as well as in the procedures operating within these organizations. As the vocation of politicization is to empower disadvantaged members of society, it can be questioned whether individuals accessing these spaces are being given the necessary tools for emancipation and self-realization. It can also be asked whether the type of encounters that occurs within these spaces contribute to or hinders the politicization of both the food poverty issue and the views of volunteers.

Type I of politicization

Creating a place for meaningful encounters

Are users allowed "to articulate their own immediate needs, aspirations, and identities" in these settings? And are volunteers given the chance to join them in this process? Our findings indicate that although food charities constitute spaces of encounter for people from different social classes and backgrounds, this does not always result in the emergence of a politicized view on food poverty for either volunteers or users. Unaddressed power and race dynamics as well as elements of segregation in the practices of certain organizations limit the potential that volunteers' views could evolve progressively through their involvement in the sector.

Increasingly, organizations seem to understand the need to go beyond the simple provision of food and aim to "create a place" for people (Vandekinderen, 2021). The KRAS network is currently running a trajectory on conviviality wherein member organizations are encouraged and supported in investing in offering a warm welcome to users. Many of the volunteers interviewed have also talked about informality, making room for people to talk not only with volunteers but to each other in a less controlled environment.

However, it is worth noting that the volunteer group and/or the board of many of the organizations are often constituted of elderly white men and women from more privileged classes. I had the opportunity of attending a KRAS network meeting and could hardly help but notice that I was the single racialized person there. This is relevant as, although in some of the food support organizations, the beneficiary group is formed by mostly elderly white people as well, the majority of those studied within this project, cater to a very diverse public. As explained by de Souza (2019), if the volunteer group is fully or mostly white, it may serve to reaffirm the notion of white superiority as these "good white people" or "real Belgians" as some volunteers say, are helping the underprivileged non-white people. Though the race difference is not necessarily problematic, the lack of acknowledgment of race and power dynamics as well as the internalized sense of superiority in some volunteers undoubtedly are. The example of the participant's comment on the idleness of non-Belgian people can be given.

Additionally, power dynamics unfold in countless different ways within these spaces, without volunteers generally being aware of them. Indeed, although some volunteers are willing to understand that users may experience shame through accessing their services, they often resent any apparent lack of gratitude. While users may not be outright refused food unless they frame their request as an entitlement or "impolitely", there are tacit rules indicating that smiling or otherwise acting friendly may yield more benefits. The example of the young volunteer who was praised for her strength is revealing in that sense. In some instances, she has challenged these guidelines by giving more food than allowed. While on the surface this can be seen as a manifestation of volunteer autonomy and a challenge to the neoliberal governance structure (De

Souza, 2019), the reasoning behind her actions remains rooted in the dependency structure of the relationship and her “do good” motivation. Indeed, she hands out more food when users act friendly towards her. Whenever they fail to do so, she shows her “strong” side. These patterns reinforce the paternalistic relationship that develops between users and volunteers, particularly in smaller organizations where an infantilizing tone and language are often used to refer to users.

Besides, many of these distribution points can be conceptualized as "neoliberal enclosures", meaning regulated places that indirectly shape human behaviors by enforcing mechanisms of surveillance, appraisal, and evaluation that force people to self-regulate (de Souza, 2019; Foucault, 1995). In other words, there are both implicit and explicit rules, schedules, and spatial arrangements that starkly divide volunteers from users.

Issues such as those highlighted above are not unique to the studied context. Van der Horst (2014) in a study on food banks in the Netherlands found that food bank users’ interactions with volunteers were emotionally charged and influenced by tacit notions of social rules and power. He found that volunteers often had to battle their own stereotypes or those originating from other users and resist adopting a patronizing tone with users. He suggested that a social hierarchy exists in these spaces and that users have internalized that they hold an inferior place within this hierarchy. In that sense, users may only feel allowed to express gratitude (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003), which could lower the potential for reflexive engagement.

All this means that, for volunteers, the possibility to engage with users in a manner that may result in helping both volunteers and users to express food poverty issues as socially produced difficulties is limited. The first reason is that practices encouraging segregation between the two groups render it difficult for volunteers to exchange with users and understand the underlying issues leading the latter to these spaces. Secondly, when volunteers are not stimulated to reflect on the power they hold and on their racial advantages, they are hardly able to move beyond their self-image as “saints” and become too shielded in their “do good” motivation to be critical about their interactions with users (De Souza, 2019). This reinforces their tendency to expect users to only express gratefulness or even happiness. Therefore, if the only focus when “creating a place” is on conviviality, volunteers may easily believe that offering coffee and a chair to users is sufficient to construct a “place where they can simply be”, where they feel free to express their needs and identities. However, as long as existing power dynamics are not acknowledged and addressed, users will enter a place where they feel inferior, which is not suitable for an empowering encounter between them and the volunteers.

Organizations may address that by implementing training, formal and informal staff discussions, and other types of activities that favor reflexivity. Furthermore, as some organizations already do, creating opportunities for exchanges between users and volunteers is beneficial. As illustrated in our results, keeping food charities from becoming neoliberal enclosures may require constant but worthwhile efforts from coordinators. Eventually, volunteers must be led to understand that the frustration that they feel as a result of managing scarcity should be a ground for questioning the unsustainability and unreliability of the food support system rather than a cause for tightening entitlement conditions or for blaming users’ “greediness”. Finally, to counteract these dynamics, more representation of vulnerable people in the volunteer group should be encouraged.

Food charities are not neutral spaces. When organizations that use a politicized tone in their public discourse, resist sharing their values with volunteers or inciting them to engage in reflexive processes, they allow negative perceptions of the poor that may have arisen from different sources, including from the prevailing culture of suspicion, to go unchallenged. In conclusion, this deceptive neutrality, if not questioned, may lead organizations to have volunteers who are not only unaware of "the structural aspects of disadvantage" but openly dismissive of them.

Building bridges

Nonetheless, there are instances where users-volunteers interactions are more extended, such as when parties or other events are organized gathering not only users but also their families and when users are receiving administrative support to help them access their rights. This is the bridge-building function of food support organizations as conceptualized by Vandekinderen (2021). Within the two networks, there are attempts to see food as a bridge or a lever toward other rights. Thus, users are encouraged to express their difficulties, which can be related, for instance, to pension, housing, or child allowance. Volunteers can therefore help them by reading letters and connecting them to the relevant government services or other organizations with more resources for administrative support.

While this constitutes a first step to encourage people to start thinking in terms of rights and entitlement, it can be rather limited in helping both users and volunteers to see beyond individual struggles and recognize the existence of structural and social barriers. Although the idea of connecting people to their rights is laudable, there is an efficiency focus to it, at times, particularly within the KRAS network that does not sufficiently challenge the dehumanizing aspect of government bureaucracy. Therefore, while De Rode Lotus, an organization of the Samen Solidair network is resistant to the city government's zoning system which undermines the trust relationship that users and volunteers may have developed, in this efficiency perspective, it is seen as a welcomed development ensuring that people do not get too comfortable or dependent on food aid.

There are, of course, as we have indicated, alternative ways of performing the task of providing administrative help as demonstrated in our results. Driessens (2010) defines six characteristics of caring relationships, of which three forms leading to dependency, namely the distant relationship, the bureaucratic relationship, and the paternalistic relationship (elements of each of them can be observed in the approaches described above), and three forms leading to increased autonomy which are the close relationship, the personalized relationship, and the emancipatory relationship. The example of sitting together to look at papers can be seen as a case of a caring relationship. But while this format can already be seen as a step in the right direction, the "helping" approach may hinder the possibility for the disadvantaged citizen to develop his/her understanding and agency and for the volunteer to outgrow their helper position.

Another approach is adopted in SIVI, one of KRAS' organizations where users are invited regularly to give their opinion on a topic of interest which can be health or children amongst others. These conversations can be rather empowering as they put people in a position where their opinion is valued and can be an opportunity to gradually familiarize them with rights-based and social justice perspectives. On the same emancipatory note, at another organization, SAAMO, users are set in groups sharing similar problems so that solutions can

emerge from the group exchange. While in these two cases, these tasks are rather performed by paid social workers, both present elements that organizations, where volunteers provide administrative services, can inspire from. Indeed, approaches that foster a more equal relationship may not only have the potential to encourage people in poverty to adopt a social lens to look at their issues, but they would also place volunteers in a mediating rather than helping role and allow them to witness the agency of people in poverty.

Type II of politicization

Publicizing the discourse

As required by Type II of politicization, issues must move from the realm of individual or family well-being to become matters of public concern. And one key way to achieve this is through publicizing the protest discourse. The protest discourse is the most publicized view as it is held and shared by the coordinators of the two major poverty networks in Ghent who represent their organizations at events addressing the theme of the right to food. These public events serve to articulate strong statements such as “people in poverty are seen as compost” problematizing the fact that people in poverty are being seen as a solution to climate issues as they are expected to consume the food waste produced by the food system. Nonetheless, in these instances, the voices of food support volunteers and coordinators are central.

Currently, there persists a tendency for the problems of users to be expressed by volunteers, highlighting their voices as witnesses rather than the ones of those who have themselves experienced or are still experiencing poverty. Indeed, the voice of food bank users has been largely absent from reporting on food banks and advocacy efforts. In the rare cases in which quotations from users are shared, they tend to put forward users' gratitude for the food received. More often than not, activists, politicians, celebrities, and particularly volunteers (although in the studied context, this role is more often taken on by food charities coordinators rather than volunteers) are seen as representatives of food bank users sharing the latter’s most painful stories to encourage donations or advocating on their behalf (Wells & Caraher 2014). These authors have suggested as potential explanations for this state of affairs the possible reluctance of users to take part in interviews, the opposition of food bank managers, or journalists' own hesitation or disinterest to reach out to users directly. Regardless, to Caraher and Furey (2018), the voice of food bank users must be emphasized in future advocacy efforts surrounding food poverty and the right to food. They should be allowed not only to share their experiences but also their proposal for solutions because they are ‘experts by experience’. Moving from a charity to a right-based perspective requires telling an alternative story, one where the voice of users is emphasized. “Dismantling neoliberal stigma can only come about by listening to the voices of the oppressed” (de Souza, 2019).

Thus, if the politicization of volunteers is to be seen as progressive and in line with a right to food perspective, it should not simply aim to influence the discourses and activist engagement of volunteers but also sensitize them to create suitable environments where the informed insights of users can be welcomed and put at the forefront in decision-making surrounding advocacy campaigns and to elaborate strategies for users’ policy recommendations to be publicized widely.

In the studied context, efforts have been made in that direction: users are invited to join street protests, there has been more than one art project amplifying the voice of users, and the

KRAS network's magazine published for its 20th anniversary, featured an interview with a "poverty expert", meaning someone who has lived through poverty. A recent project on food support that provided a space for users to express themselves through art was championed by KRAS and the Movement of low-income people and children (BMLIK). The project cumulated in an exhibition of the artworks in an interactive exhibition "EXPO APIA-1: Food Aid" where the photos from this study were exhibited to propose a counterpoint.

Type III of politicization

Gathering signals

Type III of politicization is associated with institutionalization techniques, such as parliamentary debates on pertinent issues, new laws, or public policies to ensure that governing bodies are held accountable. Signaling is a key way in which civic organizations can contribute to this process (Drèze, 2004). At the network level, for both KRAS and Samen Solidair, the necessity of collecting signals from the work of individual organizations is asserted. Food support and other poverty organizations are at the forefront when it comes to interacting with people in poverty. Thus, they are often first to notice changes, for instance, an increase in the number of people accessing their services or a shift in the composition of the group, indicating that new types of individuals or groups are becoming vulnerable. Networks also collect data on the housing or migration situations of their users. It has been suggested that data from food banks may distort the reality of poverty as they do not accurately reflect the extent of the need in society (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012; McIntyre et al., 2000; Rainville & Brink, 2001; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003). Indeed, a large number of people in poverty are resistant to resorting to food banks (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). Nonetheless, efforts to collect data are significant in Ghent where some of the participants within this study have expressed that politicians only respond to data. Therefore the signals gathered are a tool used in interactions with policymakers to support efforts to influence policies and bring lasting change. Thus, this signaling of poverty issues is a way in which organizations contribute to the third type of politicization.

The key legislative battle of the two networks currently concerns the question of housing. Within the Samen Solidair network, it is seen as aberrant that a large number of social housing remains empty in Ghent while thousands including children are homeless. Thus, they attempt to influence policies on that front. The tools of democratic politics such as lobbying, advocacy, and street protests are all mobilized in this effort to enforce the accountability of governmental authorities. For these organizations, there is a perception that forming a network amplifies their voices and that their advocacy has yielded some results, albeit limited. In the political arena, matters progress ever slowly.

However, it can be asked whether subsidized and non-subsidized organizations share the same combative stance. This is relevant as it is worthwhile to question to which extent organizations that do receive help from the government are free to express critical views. As indicated in our results, compromise is seen as necessary at times and organizations are not always willing or able to challenge their institutionalization by the city government. During one focus group, one consensual opinion expressed was that the government in Ghent was forced to take action against poverty because of the strong presence of poverty organizations in the city. While this may be true, it is nonetheless possible that the existence of these organizations

encourages a charity-based response to poverty despite their attempts to challenge that as we will see in the subsequent patterns of depoliticization.

Depoliticization in the Ghent food support sector

Type I and II of depoliticization

Discussing type I of depoliticization in this context requires that careful consideration be given to the fact that the right to food is being studied at the city level. Indeed, not only are cities limited in terms of resources and power to implement certain changes, the obligations regarding realizing the right to food are legally situated at the State rather than city level. Therefore, although some volunteers have asserted that the government is not doing enough or is actively trying to hide the existence of poverty in the city, the dominant perspective is rather that Ghent is a social city where politicians are willing to listen and, to some extent, act. This is one reason that numerous Participants have argued that Ghent is a magnet for people in poverty due to its open and solidary features. Organizations reported that they have often been consulted by city governments when designing new policies. But, although changes in legislation are slow to emerge, politicians in Ghent are largely seen as responsive but limited by the complex federalist system in Belgium that disempowers local governments.

Therefore, it is not the occurrence of actions that should interest us but rather the forms taken by these actions and their deeper implications. Our results have indicated that there is an ongoing process of institutionalization of private food support in Ghent. It is apparent in the aforementioned zoning and referral systems and in the centralized online platform to integrate these different initiatives. It can, indeed, be said that food support has become a key element of the city's poverty alleviation efforts or rather poverty control (Degerickx, 2022) and part of the poverty governance system.

A system of poverty governance is characterized by control, surveillance, and monitoring (Soss et al., 2011). Through this system, control is enforced by various actors and institutions (Piven, 1981), including non-governmental players who are included as partners in the processes of implementing policies in the new hybridized welfare system (De Souza, 2019; Dowler, 2014; Højlund, 2009; Frederiksen, 2015; Salamon, 2002; Kettl, 2002). Poverty governance characterizes a welfare system more preoccupied with preserving public order than with addressing the structural roots of poverty (Soss et al., 2011). In fact, in this perspective, the structural causes are seen as secondary or inexistent, while perceptions of the poor as lazy are prominent albeit carefully disguised. Therefore, poverty governance is often mobilized in a welfare system based on neoliberal values where work activation is the main focus. Indeed, several welfare states have conditioned the provision of services on the will and ability to find work (Cho et al., 2005; Dwyer, 2019; Morgen, 2001; Schöneville, 2018; Shaw et al. 2006; Silvasti & Riches, 2014; Watts et al., 2014).

In Belgium, the benefits granted by the social security system are often accompanied by the condition that beneficiaries, whose assets are thoroughly assessed, are demonstrating all possible effort to secure their own income and are willing to work unless they are impeded to do so by health or equity reasons (Samyn, 2022). This generally implies that unemployed persons must register as job seekers with a government service like the VDAB the public employment service of Flanders and take any employment that is deemed fit (Samyn, 2022). As part of its mission to monitor job-seeking activities by unemployed persons, an organism like the VDAB has the mandate to exclude an unemployed person from entitlement to benefits

and to administer penalties in cases of confirmed or suspected voluntary unemployment or unavailability for employment (Samyn, 2022).

Within this activation paradigm, the well-being of the unemployed is made secondary to the necessity of motivating them to find work. In that perspective, Schöneville (2018) perceives a two-sided and conflicting role of the charity economy. Firstly, it can be seen as the last resort wherein people who are not fit to find work can receive some level of social support; “the safety net of the safety net” (Butler, 2013, para. 11). Secondly, Schöneville (2018) argues that the charity economy and the stigma operating within it could be part of the welfare state apparatus supporting its activation strategy, resulting essentially in the institutionalization of shame. The result of the hybridization is essentially a system that is an extension of the government apparatus while remaining at the same time undeniably private (Andreotti et al., 2012). Within the charity economy, principles of equality and non-conditionality that should underpin the welfare system are not necessarily present. Instead, a relationship of dependency is established between the helper and the beneficiary who can make no claim of citizenship or individual rights (Schöneville, 2018). KRAS, the biggest network that integrates a number of food distribution services depend largely on a referral system, wherein users are directed to them, principally by the Public Centre for Social Welfare (OCMW). Such a system relies on a rigid and bureaucratic screening to define who is entitled or not to receive food support. The referral system is often perceived in the literature as a symbol of governments’ institutionalization of food banks and therefore a form of depoliticization (Caplan, 2017; Schöneville, 2018).

With increasing institutionalization, volunteers have expressed that the people coming to them do not always seem aware of the private and voluntary nature of their initiative as they have been referred to them by governmental bodies (Vandekinderen et al., 2022). Nevertheless, thanks to this system, politicians can deflect blame since it can be argued that organizations maintain their autonomy and are free to establish the way of functioning that is most suitable to their volunteer group and their beneficiaries. In fact, when accessing food banks, people are exposed to the same poverty governance protocols that they encounter when interacting with governmental bodies (O’Brien, 2014), they are questioned about their income, whether they own a referral, and if they are not, they can either be refused food or receive a one-time aid, the number of people living in their families, and sometimes, as we have explained above, whether they require help to access any other services. Thus, in parallel to the efforts deployed by organizations to “create a place” for people, a tightening of control can be observed. Volunteers are marshaled into these control procedures in a system perceived to be marked by scarcity and an environment where suspicion reigns free (Dowler, 2014).

Another feature of a governance system is that it is not only reflected in management techniques or through directly enforced measures but equally in the manner in which policies purposefully alter human subjectivities, or, more specifically, modify people's perceptions and desires in order to entice them to discipline themselves towards adopting desired behaviors (Dean, 2009). Therefore, the social control exerted by users on each other, as we have mentioned in the results, is a tell-tale symbol of their internalization of degrading portrayals of themselves, which propelled them towards differentiating themselves from others, leading eventually to increased individualization and posing an immense challenge to politicization.

Thus, by subsidizing these organizations and heavily regulating them (Andreotti et al., 2012) (although there are cases where non-subsidized organizations also operate according to the referral system and centralized platform), the government can maintain the perception that

they are helping people in poverty. In substance, it is a form of help that requires an important investment of time and effort from poor people to maintain their eligibility while at the same time placing a heavy mental burden of shame and stress on them (Degerickx, 2022; Kent, 2015). Nonetheless, it remains a powerful political tool.

Coordinators have reported how politicians' visits to their organizations are growing in frequency as elections are nearing. Being associated with a powerhouse like Foodsavers is, for instance, a prized veneer on politicians' reputations. The case of Foodsavers is particularly interesting to consider. This institution has become such a salient feature of the landscape that for some long-time volunteers, it has become difficult to remember the time before Foodsavers. The latter represents one of the key reasons why Ghent is dubbed a social city and living proof of local politicians' willingness to act against food poverty. Nevertheless, this approach to solving the issue conceals many "silences" and not-so-carefully hidden assumptions.

Type III of depoliticization

Hints at this form of depoliticization can be found throughout our results and the preceding discussions, particularly in the neoliberal/paternalistic and charity/fatalistic discourse. In the neoliberal/paternalistic discourse, for instance, the underlying assumption is that hungry people are deceitful, fraudulent, and despicable welfare abusers (de Souza, 2019). According to Garthwaite (2016), the expansion of food banks has been followed by misunderstandings, moral judgments, and stereotypes about those who are hungry. Calvinist divisions between the deserving and undeserving poor at the core of certain political narratives blame individuals for accessing food banks (de Souza, 2019). These narratives, which are depoliticized because they privatize what out to be a social issue, frame food charity users as selfish and lazy, irresponsible parents with addictions and harmful spending habits. However, although these "personal defects" are emphasized in both discourses, it is in the charity/fatalistic that the belief is stronger that they render poor people powerless when it comes to changing their circumstances. The hopelessness narrative was, for instance, dominant in the interview with a Foodsavers coordinator, justifying the necessity of such a structure.

But as depoliticizing can be depictions of the poor as entrepreneurs (Jarosz, 2011) as they lead to ignoring the systemic barriers that certain members of society face when attempting to improve their conditions (Clair & Anderson, 2013). This neoliberal view highlights individual success stories and wields them as a weapon to blame those who fail to follow the entrepreneurial model and frame them as lazy or unskilled. Indeed, the need to "educate the poor" has been constantly asserted by volunteers throughout this research. It has often been argued that food poverty could be partially or fully solved by increasing the food skills of people in poverty. The ability to choose and prepare nutrient-balanced, age-appropriate, and satisfying meals using the resources at hand, planning and budgeting skills are an ensemble of capacities that are collectively defined as having food skills (McGowan et al., 2017; Terragni et al., 2020). A related term is food literacy considered to be empowering for families, households, and communities (Perry et al., 2017; Vidgen, 2014).

In the present study, one of the main advocates for teaching the poor to "eat cheap and healthy" was a volunteer for whom over half of the pictures provided depicted meals that he had prepared with limited resources. Although he made some points regarding the pervasiveness of capitalist marketing contributing to overconsumption which inflates, for instance, the ingredients needed to prepare a satisfying meal, individualization remains a key

pitfall of the food skill framing which can easily be used to frame poverty as a consequence of the bad consumption choices of poor people. In fact, it is a two-way relationship wherein groups suffering from social inequalities may be more limited in developing food skills, the lack of which in turn can worsen their health outcomes and subsequently increase poverty (Vidgen & Palumbo, 2018). Thus, despite evidence that better diets can result from improved food skills (Dollahite et al., 2003; Greder & Brotherson, 2002; Pooler et al., 2017), this should not distract from the fact that these skills are insufficient by themselves to address food poverty, especially in populations that experience significant financial hardship, social isolation, and limited access to food (Begley et al., 2019; Terragni et al., 2020). The danger is that the discussion can too quickly turn into saying "it's easy" and believing that one can leave adequately with any level of income (O'Brien, 2014; Vandenbroeck et al., 2011), shifting once again the focus back on the individual., specifically the individual's character, independence, accountability, and self-sufficiency (De Souza, 2019; Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2008). Moreover, the volunteer's remark that it is a pity that so few people attended the course on budgeting is in line with perceptions that the poor "are not interested in educating or improving themselves" (de Souza, 2019, p. 55)

The values underlying the discourses held by volunteers are a mirror image of the values shaping the neoliberal welfare system. This can primarily be observed from the overemphasis of volunteers on the question of work seen as a panacea for all the ills of poverty (O'Brien, 2014). Rarely has it been mentioned that work may still result in insufficient income to live an adequate life or that there are real impediments to people accessing or keeping a job such as the provision of care for children by mothers or limited means of transportation. This latter restriction was acknowledged by a volunteer in an organization where other volunteers and coordinators alike tend to see a car as a luxury purchase and an important social marker to define eligibility for food aid. Otherwise, distinctions between those who want and those who do not want to work abound. For De Souza (2019), this concept of "those who do not want to work" is primarily a political myth and often refers to a racialized category, in this case, migrants (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). One example is the volunteer identifying the non-Belgian people in the previously mentioned picture as those who are not working.

Giudici (2021) explains that these marginalized categories are pushed to attempt to redeem their image through compliance with stereotypical concepts of European citizenry, such as volunteering (Rozakou, 2016). Indeed, the institutionalization of volunteerism in the context of welfare hybridization or privatization has encouraged a framing of volunteers as "responsible citizens" in the context of social care privatization (Giudici, 2021; Muehlebach, 2012; Rozakou, 2016). Thus volunteering is perceived as a way for marginalized foreign individuals or groups to assert their deservingness of modern social support by mobilizing their "productive" body (Silverstein, 2005; De Genova, 2016). Therefore, it is the primacy of work that is once again reaffirmed in this narrative as in the volunteer's anecdote on the Afghan man. Besides, an erosion of the rights discourse is underway when entitlement is seen as requiring any form of reciprocity or repayment (Giudici, 2021). Finally, this anecdote is framed in terms of "Us" versus "Them", emphasizing the "commendability" and superiority of volunteers as opposed to the irresponsibility and the "culture of entitlement" of the Other (Berg, 2011).

Nonetheless, the poor's unwillingness to work is not always attributed to laziness, but in line with what de Souza (2019) termed the flexibility of neoliberal stigma, a compassionate discourse that rather pictures the poor as weak and as lacking self-esteem is sometimes used,

warranting a more therapeutical response (Fraser, 1987). It is in this context that the participant's quote "But you see, don't lay down on the floor. Come on. Come on. I believe in you. So believe in yourself" can be understood.

In any case, these different depictions conveniently ignore the structural and political components of food poverty and contribute to the depoliticization process. It can also be understood that the vision that food poverty can be solved through food waste is often rooted in perceptions of the poor as inferior. Indeed, "leftover food for leftover people" as termed by Professor Elizabeth Dowler.

Perspectives for a Right to Food Movement in Ghent

The Right to Food Campaign in India, at the forefront of which was the Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes is seen as a popular and successful case in which civil society has championed the right to food and imposed it as a matter of public interest. Within this campaign, multiple activities were undertaken, which included "public hearings, action-orientated research, media advocacy and lobbying, as well as participating in public interest litigation on the right to food" (Clapham, 2007, p. 123). While some elements of these can be seen in Ghent, it is relevant to question whether it can be said that a Right to Food campaign or movement is currently underway in this city and if yes, what is the place of food support organizations in that fight.

Our data indicate a steady shift towards a politicized discourse but the tendency for valuing charitable treatments remains present and there are significant challenges to the politicization process including weakly challenged patterns of institutionalization, dependency-oriented forms of interactions between volunteers and users, exclusion of volunteers from organizations' visions and pervasive neoliberal values in the discourses. Furthermore, the emerging activist stance of "Food aid under protest" emphasizes structural solutions such as raising the minimum wage, increasing employment and benefits, and addressing the housing crisis. However, a critical component lacking from the conversation is the need to reform the food system. The functioning of the agri-food system has only rarely been referred to as a potent cause of poverty. Instead, there is widespread praise for the logic of Foodsavers as basically the connection between food waste and hunger. During the second focus group, the volunteers propose adding the word "against" to the original food waste theme of the photo-elicitation interviews, explaining that without them, all this food would end up in the garbage can. Some were in favor of any policy that would obligate shops to donate all their food surplus.

The Delhaize strikes represented a "feast" for the organizations which saw their food supply greatly increased and rejoiced in the fact that they could offer more food and additional choices to users. Thus, essentially, the food support machinery relies on even justifies constant or increasing production of waste in the food system. Moreover, a critique of the causes of the strikes and corporate practices is also lacking. As noted by Dowler (2014), the food industry is notorious for its low pay, precarious part-time employment, and zero-hour contracts, as well as its propensity to market unhealthy food at steep discounts. The Delhaize strikes are only a more recent example of such practices. At the root of the strikes is the grocery chain Delhaize's announcement that it will turn all of its directly-managed locations in Belgium into franchises which would lead to more insecure jobs and less bargaining power for its employees. Precarious jobs may eventually send these men and women to grow the lines of food charities as income poverty is the primary cause of food poverty (Kõre, 2014).

According to Booth (2014), a rights-based assessment of food banks and charities may serve as a starting point for critical discussion, but it can be impeded when relevant organizations prioritize employment, housing, and health over food policy. Indeed, in the Ghent context, although a right discourse is increasingly been integrated, its contours remain imprecise and its main manifestations have been at the level of creating “convivial” spaces for users, offering them a warm welcome and treating them humanely. The crucial issue remains however that no amount of kindness can compensate for the loss of autonomy that having to resort to food support entails for people in poverty. However, in the studied context, the right to food is, at times, perceived to be a dangerous idea stemming from the fear that it may too easily be reframed as a right to food aid. Vandekinderen (2022) talks about “the danger of institutionalizing the right to food aid rather than the right to adequate income (or even the basic right to healthy quality food)”.

Nonetheless, although there is undeniably value in targeting housing or employment, not challenging agricultural and food policy might be akin to treating symptoms. As argued by Silvasti and Riches (2014), right to food approaches could offer an alternative agenda for moral, legal, and political action informing 'joined-up' food, agricultural, public health, income, and social policy as a key strategy for addressing food poverty in wealthy first-world societies. In his study of food regime genealogy, McMichael (2009) has brought to attention that the development of the globalized food system has been characterized by a constant privatization of resources (such as land, water, or seeds) in the agri-food sector, as well as a proliferation of agricultural free-trade agreements and a deresponsibilization of the State in the matters of food security and sustainability from governments, shifting the burden to markets and individuals. Agricultural and trade decisions provide the groundwork for overproduction that poor people are then required to eliminate (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003) while food prices are not permitted to sink below politically agreed levels despite overproduction, keeping the price of food high and pushing people into a vulnerable position of needing food assistance. Therefore, instead of creating a “secondary food market” for people in poverty, the primary market should be restructured to be more socially and environmentally just (Tarasuk, 2001). Finally, for initiatives to be transformative, they must go beyond individual acts of resistance and reform to address the underlying roots of the existing food system's problems and attempt to institutionalize alternative food discourses in policy and practice (Levkoe, 2011). While fully restructuring the food system might be impossible at the local level, Ghent could be part of a transnational movement.

Such a perspective, however, remains rather distant in the studied context, firstly because of actors’ reluctance to mobilize the right to food as a tool and secondly because the system is artificially kept from reaching the “critical tipping point when maintaining the present quo is impossible” and when therefore “action on rights-based responses to food poverty will take place” (Booth, 2014, p. 26). Food support organizations in Ghent have considered the idea of going on strike as a form of political action but have discarded the idea as they feared hurting people in poverty in the process. While it is hard to foretell the outcomes of such an action, the fact remains that politicizing economic concerns during times of economic stress is a primary route to political engagement as was demonstrated following the 2008-2010 economic recession when a surge of protest activity could be observed (Kern et al., 2015; Grasso & Giugni, 2016; Kriesi et al., 2020). In that sense, it can be said that perhaps by concealing the rougher edges of poverty, food support organizations may be quelling the anger and revolt that could spur a powerful right to food movement.

Reflections on the Photovoice method

The Photovoice method has allowed volunteers, through their own words, to stop and think, and to look with other eyes. New reflections and questions have emerged from this process. Through the focus groups, volunteers' views and perspectives could be confronted as they worked together towards constructing a unified message.

As demonstrated in our results, various discourses were articulated and confronted during the sessions. Such dialogues are undeniably politicizing. The deficit of a consensus, instead of being a matter to deplore, is in fact politicizing and an effective stepping stone for learning. Goodman et al (2012) advocated for the adoption of an open politics of reflexivity, which accepts contradictions, and differences, and acknowledges the complexity of daily life while emphasizing deliberative democratic processes. To address or at least make visible many of the tensions, neoliberal trends, and discriminatory actions, these learning and discussion spaces must establish reflexive "communities of practice" to create truly emancipatory spaces. Thus, it is recommended to accept that the reflective process can be messy, open-ended, and potentially leads to pragmatic compromises (Goodman et al., 2012). Indeed, although participants were rather vocal about their opinions during the sessions, their body language at times reflected unvoiced disagreements, silenced by the desire for compromise. Nonetheless, such deliberative practices strengthen political action capacity and constitute a breeding ground for "the political" to emerge and thrive, enabling those who "do not count" to gain recognition in institutionalized spaces. Although in the food support sphere, volunteers are not the most marginalized group, it can be said, to some extent, that they are valued for their services while their voices are silenced.

As a result, participant photography can aid in the process of politicization by 1) engaging stakeholders in expressing their perceptions and concerns through photographs and narratives; 2) involving participants in a reflective process where they critically discuss and analyze their environment and practices; and 3) sharing self-produced results with the community and local policy-makers (for example, through a photography exhibition as in the case of this study) (Belon et al., 2014; Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Murray & Nash, 2016).

Nonetheless, some considerations regarding the implementation of this method involve notably the importance of considering meticulously the subject matter and wording of the question that participants are required to respond to, using photography. The question must, according to Lardeau et al (2011), touch on a topic that people wish to "speak to" and be simple enough for everyone to grasp because if not, the photographs' underlying message will not be as powerful as it may have been.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Perspectives

Food support organizations can contribute to the shift toward a rights-based approach to food and as demonstrated in this study, some of them are already. Most of the organizations involved in this study and the volunteers within them perceive that their job should not be solely limited to distributing food, rather they are involved in providing additional support for people to access their rights and some are at the forefront of political actions targeting the structural roots of poverty. Nonetheless, their capacity to help to transform users into citizens capable of articulating their socially constructed problems and of asking for change is limited by the impediments of creating a truly empowering space. In a chapter of her book on food pantries in

the United States, de Souza (2019) wonders what would happen if all the food pantries volunteers of today became the activists and advocates of tomorrow. This research highlights the difficulty of such an occurrence becoming a reality in the Ghent context. First of all, most of the participants in this study are retired volunteers over 60, many of them living alone; a fact that is revealing of the constitution of the majority of volunteer groups in Ghent's food support sector. This not only serves to explain why some of the primary motivations to engage in this volunteer work are self-oriented including, for instance, the search for social interactions or the avoidance of idleness but also the reluctance of a large number of them towards anything political as they see activism as a task more fitting to young people. Moreover, although self-oriented motives generally serve volunteers to justify not getting involved beyond "their job" of providing food, one may wonder whether the motivations of these volunteers are intrinsically wrong. Other volunteers have expressed largely "good intentions" for their volunteering such as the desire to "do good", a perceived need, or a willingness to give back. Should volunteers demonstrating ethical and social awareness-oriented motivations be prioritized over others?

The question may be irrelevant as with the overreliance of organizations on voluntary work, they can rarely afford to be selective of whom they are recruiting. Moreover, a "do good" orientation may actually hinder the emergence of activism in volunteers. Indeed, the latter often feel content with the self-satisfaction that they experience from being the helpers and become defensive of any hints of criticism that seem to challenge their "commendability". Moving from "we are volunteers, we are doing the best we can and they should be happy about it" to "we are volunteers, we are doing the best we can but we are limited and this should not be our job in the first place" may be the first step towards politicization. This distinction has often been the element that separated the protest discourse from the other two discourses elicited in this study.

A note of hope can be found, however, in the fact that, regardless of initial motivations, as we have demonstrated, some volunteers do develop a more politicized view through their involvement in the sector which allows them to perceive more clearly the complexity of poverty experiences and to see beyond the downgrading depictions of poor people as lazy, fraudulent or selfish. Through their own confessions, these volunteers have explained that this change has occurred as a result of meaningful interactions with users and the subsequent reflections and questions about the prejudices that they previously held. None has attributed this change to the influence of the organization to whom they belong. Nonetheless, it can hardly be argued that organizations' practices and principles are irrelevant. Some organizations actively try to implement opportunities for this "desirous proximity" to develop between volunteers and users through, for instance, designing informal settings or even allowing users to make choices, which already set a less mechanical exchange than the mere handing out of a parcel. Not involving volunteers in the organization's vision ignores the fact that volunteers are at the forefront of help provision and can express a depoliticizing discourse when interacting with users. Moreover, the very real potential of mobilizing volunteers in politicizing the food poverty issue is dismissed. Even in organizations where it is seen as desirable to engage volunteers in more reflexive work, the fear of overburdening them generally takes precedence.

Besides, the possibility for the politicization of volunteers' views to occur is often seriously hampered by both the fast pacing of the work that leaves little room for reflection as well as the organizations' procedures and policies that volunteers are asked to comply with without being given any possibility to reflect on the reasoning underlying them. Indeed, volunteers are recruited within a neoliberal poverty governance structure where they are encouraged to enforce control and contribute to maintaining an environment of suspicion

without criticizing the power that they hold. Therefore, even when they subvert the rules, it often involves merely confronting their subjective and emotive distinction between deserving and undeserving poor to that of the organization. Therefore, as argued by De Souza (2019), for the progressive potential of food support to be unleashed, volunteers "will have to engage in the grueling task of reformulating their identities: from "saints" to belligerent citizens, advocates, and antiracists, who see themselves as raced and part of the unjust food system." As suggested in this research, both reflexivity and deliberations can be powerful tools in achieving this transformative process.

Nonetheless, one limitation of this study was that although it draws on elements of action research, it has not been a fully participatory project. The research questions were partially influenced by food support stakeholders through the Stadsacademie trajectory but the orientation adopted was more informed by the needs expressed by the coordinators present at this initial meeting than by those of the volunteers. However, I deliberately prioritized introducing the project to volunteers myself rather than letting the organizations handle the selection. Nonetheless, support from the organizations was needed, at times, to identify French or English-speaking volunteers. The prompting questions used for this photography project can be said to be self-selecting to some extent due to the wording referring directly to policymakers. Some volunteers declined to join the project after the initial interview with some putting forward the challenge of time while others expressed resistance to the questions themselves. It is therefore probable that the participant group would have been different had the request been simply, for instance, to capture elements of their volunteer work that they find meaningful.

Moreover, the partial dearth of elements referring to the structural roots of poverty in the final selection of messages by volunteers is not necessarily a sign that volunteers are unaware of them. Rather it can be due to both the difficulty to reflect housing or other issues through pictures taken within their organizations as well as elements of political trust and distrust. Firstly, the perception that Ghent is a city where politicians are willing to listen and the fact that many organizations through their integration into networks are already able to reach out to politicians may signify that photographs were not seen as a necessary tool to send them a message. Secondly, political distrust means that participants may not expect their messages to have any significant impact as many participants expressed the view that politicians, particularly at the regional or national level, are disconnected from the reality of the people. This feeling of powerlessness to truly impact policies and influence politicians' priorities was a common justification given by the volunteers who turned down the offer to join the project.

The study addressed these limitations by complementing the photography project with other methods such as in-depth interviews and ethnographic data to accurately reflect volunteers' views and motivations and the dominant discourses in the studied sector. Furthermore, the dialogue and the politicization process could continue and extend to other actors through the subsequent photo-exhibition that gathered users, volunteers, and politicians from the city, researchers, and other citizens. The implications of this research's findings are plentiful and they provide important ground to build upon for both praxis and research.

First of all, the finding that volunteering in food support organizations can be politicizing is meaningful as it challenges the idea that volunteering represents an impediment to the development of activism. As suggested by Thomas et al (2017), any active form of volunteerism or generosity can be conceptualized as a form of collective action, wherein participants reunited by shared motivations, may develop a politicized identity as they become aware of injustices and decide to strive to eradicate them (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Therefore, "charity organizations and volunteers can offer services that draw attention to a problem and advance change, especially if their work addresses the structural causes of inequalities or empowers the out-group" (Kende et al., 2017). In other words, what may have started with the basic provision of services can evolve towards a variety of politicized actions with high impact potential for changing public perception and policy orientation (Gould, 2001).

Our second most important finding is that tools can be found to encourage this process. It is not argued that photography is necessarily the only or even best method for accomplishing this. Nonetheless, coordinators should not shy away from introducing reflexive tools in their organizations and some form of training for volunteers is recommendable to truly transform food banks into empowering spaces. It is also advisable that opportunities for exchanges that target more than practical considerations are created. To achieve that coordinators will have to identify the most suitable manner to introduce reflection moments and activities in their groups.

Art-based methods are powerful as they tap into carefully hidden subjectivities and can foster the emergence of a novel and critical view of elements or events that have become familiar. Therefore, I argue in favor of the democratization of art to recover the "silenced voices" of both volunteers and users. Politicization through art is facilitated by the possibility of delivering a tangible output that can serve to broaden the conversation, indeed extending the discussions outside of individual micro-spheres and into the larger macro-sphere as politicization does entail. As third parties and outsiders to the sector, researchers could take on the role of bringing these different micro-spheres together to confront their perspectives as was done within this research and partially, through the conferences that I have attended.

Interdisciplinary research within the food support sector also has the potential to bring additional matters for discussion, notably regarding food safety or fair food systems. As suggested above, the mobilizing power of the right to food as a concept is restrained in the studied context by a widespread focus on issues of housing, health, or income and fear that talking about the right to food might lead the government to take the shortcut of instituting the right to food aid. However, the right to food holds governments accountable for facilitating equitable and sustainable food systems to meet populations' needs, which would considerably, and perhaps more than other solutions, contribute to solving food poverty. After all, how high would income need to rise if the prices of agricultural products keep on rising and if the nation's food sovereignty is so limited that any external event suffices to disrupt its food markets and amplify food poverty domestically? As such, there are benefits for poverty advocates to demand changes in food and agricultural policies alongside other structural solutions. A complete restructuring of the food system is needed to curtail overproduction and to ensure that people can access foods that have been produced in a socially and environmentally just manner. There are ways to address food waste but it should not be through feeding citizens leftover food.

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Appendice 1

Participant consent form

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Purpose of the study

The main objective of this research is to study the impact of volunteering at a food support organization on attitudes and behavior'. Specifically, it will help to gain a deeper understanding of volunteers' motivations.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this project, you will be asked to take photographs that relates to aspects of your work. You will also be asked to attend a short training workshop. The training workshop will be held in a location that is convenient and acceptable to you.
The training workshop will explain the purpose and procedures of the project; underlying issues about the use of cameras, power, and ethics; potential risks to participants; and how to minimize these risks. You will take photographs with your own phone. The training workshop will last approximately 20-30 minutes.
After you take your photographs, I will arrange for you to transfer the photographs to me. Then, we will schedule an individual dialogue session to discuss your photographs and the stories that you want to share about them. You will choose which photos to share at the dialogue session. Your individual dialogue session will last approximately 1-1½ hrs. A week or two after your dialogue session, you will also be invited to give feedback on my summary of your comments to be sure I understood what you said. This is optional; you do not have to agree to give me the feedback in order to participate in the study.
You also will be invited to an optional group dialogue session with other participants in the study. At this session, we will talk about the photographs and share ideas with other food support volunteers. The group dialogue session will last 1½ - 2 hours and will be held in a community location that is convenient for you. Attending this group session is optional; you do not have to participate in order to be in the study. If you decide to participate and you want to have any of your photos included in an exhibit, you can give permission for that by putting your signature to the 'Voluntary Participation to Release Photographs' section below.
With your permission, I will audio-tape record both the individual dialogue session and the optional group dialogue session so that the results are more accurate and better represent your actual words. This study will take place over a period of 1 to 2 month (s) depending on your choice to participate in the optional activities. At the end of the study, you may be invited to a community art exhibit of the photographs taken.

Risk, Stress and Discomfort

The use of cameras to photograph your work experiences and issues of concern may have potential risks, such as loss of privacy to yourself and/or your communities. It is important that others' privacy and rights are respected. You will be advised to always obtain verbal consent before taking any photographs of other people. In addition, you may feel some discomfort or embarrassment from participating in the dialogue sessions because the stories behind your photographs may be personal. However, you do not have to share or discuss anything you do not wish to discuss and you are free to stop the dialogue at any time. If you experience any stress or discomfort during your participation in this study, you are free to discuss that with me or withdraw from the study.

Benefits

The benefits to participating in this study are: (1) you will have the opportunity to voice your concerns through your photographs to influential community advocates, and (2) your participation will contribute to the understanding of the role of food banks in Ghent.

Costs

The training workshop, photo printing and dialogue sessions will be conducted at no cost to you.

Confidentiality

All information that you provide in this study will be kept strictly confidential. All participants will choose a pseudonym (make up name) for purposes of anonymity. Only the researcher will have your real name, and this will be kept private. While all participants in the group dialogue session will be asked to keep what is said in the group dialogue private, we cannot guarantee that others in the group will not share what is said.

Your name and consent form will be kept separate from the photographs and dialogue transcripts and data to ensure that you cannot be identified. If you consent to participate, all identifying information will be removed from the audio-tape transcripts so that your responses remain confidential. In other words, the transcripts will not include any identifying information and the audio tapes will be destroyed once they are transcribed. The information gathered will be stored in the password protected computer of the researcher.

Some of your comments may be included in the reports written to summarize what has been learned from this study, however, the summary will not include any identifying information about you. Neither your name nor your identity will be used for any publication or publicity purposes. The verbal and visual information gathered in this research study may be published or presented at public forums, however, none of your photographic images will be released without your written consent, and your name will not be used or revealed.

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking part in the study		
I have read and understood the study information dated [24/03/2023], or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	☐	☐
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.	☐	☐
I understand that taking part in the study involves an audio-recorded interview that will be transcribed to a digital text. When the research is completed, the recordings will be destroyed.	☐	☐
If I agree to take photographs, I understand that I must obtain verbal consent before taking pictures of other people.	☐	☐
I understand that I am still able to join the group sessions even if I have not supplied any photographs.	☐	☐

Voluntary Participation to Release Photographs

Your decision to release your photographs for publication or use in public forum is completely voluntary. You may refuse to release your photographs for any secondary uses in this project. I give my consent for these photographs to be reproduced for educational and/or noncommercial purposes, in reports, presentations, publications, websites and exhibitions connected to the food support project. I understand that real names will NOT be used with the photographs.
signed..date..

Use of the information in the study		
I understand that information I provide will be used for (scientific) publications and presentations	☐	☐
I give permission to the researchers to collect, process and store (personal) data from me for the purposes of this study.	☐	☐
I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as [e.g. my name or where I live], will not be shared beyond the study team.	☐	☐
I agree that my information can be quoted in research outputs (anonymized)	☐	☐
Future use and reuse of the information by others		
I give permission for the anonymised transcripts to be archived in a data repository so it can be used for future research and learning.	☐	☐

______________________________ ______________________________
Signature of Participant Date