White Rose Research Online

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York

Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/143800/

Version: Accepted Version

Article:
Psarikidou, K., Kaloudis, H., Fielden, A. et al. (2019) Local food hubs in deprived areas: de-stigmatising food poverty? Local Environment, 24 (6). pp. 525-538. ISSN: 1354-9839

https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2019.1593952

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Local Environment on 20/03/2019, available online:
http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13549839.2019.1593952.

Reuse
Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
University of Sheffield
UNIVERSITY of York

Local food hubs in deprived areas: de-stigmatising food poverty?

Katerina Psarikidou[a]* , H. Kaloudis[a], A. Fielden[b] and C. Reynolds[c]

[a] *Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK;* [b] *School of Psychology, University of Newcastle, Newcastle, UK;* [c] *Department of Geography, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK.*

*Corresponding Author email address: a.psarikidou@lancaster.ac.uk ; psarikidouk@hotmail.com

*Corresponding author postal address: Dr Katerina Psarikidou, Department of Sociology, Bowland North, Lancaster University, LA1 4YN, Lancaster, UK.

Abstract: This paper aims to explore the potential of 'local food hubs' to address issues of stigma associated with the use of food banks in urban deprived areas. 'Local Food Hubs' are a relocalised distribution channel, however, like other Alternative Agro-Food Networks (AAFNs), it can be an elite phenomenon for affluent areas and consumers. Our research focuses on the Open Food Network (OFN) local food hubs in order to explore their potential to constitute 'an alternative' to the conventional ways of addressing food poverty. Currently, food banks are the main avenue for accessing food in conditions of food poverty, carrying significant implications of stigmatisation for their users. In this paper, drawing on existing social science research on stigma, we identify the diverse ways 'local food hubs' help overcome as well as reproduce existing discourses and practices of stigmatisation. We conclude that, despite their efforts, as they currently stand, 'local food hubs' are unable to address stigma in food poverty. We suggest that his is due to the specific individual-focused stigma-management strategies they employ, as well as the wider underlying societal structures that cause food poverty, and which local food hubs are unable to address by themselves. We thus propose that addressing the broader structural conditions that cause and reproduce stigma in food poverty is pivotal for 'local food hubs' to be in a position to constitute an AAFN for all.

Keywords: local food hubs, alternative agro-food networks, stigma, food banks, food poverty.

Word count: 8,693

Introduction

There are an increasing number of alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs) that aim to prefigure alternatives to the conventional agro-food system. This paper focuses on the example of 'food hubs' and explores their potential to challenge, not only the conventional agro-food distribution system, but also the conventional way of accessing food in conditions of food poverty. 'Local Food Hubs' are a relocalised distribution channel that aim to reconnect local small-scale producers with consumers (LeBlanc et al. 2014, Cleveland et al. 2014). Such processes of relocalisation and reconnection are important for maintaining their 'alternative' character, by fostering relations of solidarity, justice and care for proximate and distant others and supporting more diverse economic relations of exchange, gift and sharing (see Ballamingie and Franklin 2013; Psarikidou and Szerszynski 2012a; 2012b; Kneafsy 2010). However, as they currently stand in the UK, local food hubs appear to constitute an elite phenomenon, mainly involving affluent areas and consumers (see Franklin et al. 2011; Stroudco Foodhub 2015).

Our research focuses on 'local food hubs' in urban deprived areas in order to explore their potential to address issues of stigma associated with the use of food banks. Currently food banks constitute one of the main avenues for food access in conditions of food poverty, with significant implications of stigmatisation for their users (Garthwaite 2016a, Purdam et al. 2016). In collaboration with the Open Food Network (OFN) UK and two third sector organisations, we developed a pilot study that aimed to assess the conditions under which 'local food hubs' could provide an alternative model through which low-income households can have access to healthy affordable food. In this paper, we explore the potential of local food hubs to be 'an alternative' to food banks. More specifically, due to the emerging debates on 'stigmatisation' associated with the use of food banks, we focus on their potential to de-stigmatise food access in conditions of food poverty. This potential arises as food hubs facilitate formal money-based relations of exchange, whilst aspiring to connect people in urban deprived areas to lower cost, sustainably sourced food.

To initiate such an investigation, we start by unpacking key concepts, definitions and discourses. We first focus on the concepts of 'Alternative Agro-Food Networks' (AAFNs) and 'Local Food Hubs', before turning our attention to the specific food hubs under investigation. We then introduce the concept of stigma, as also specifically conceptualised and applied in the study of food banks and food poverty in Britain.

Drawing on data[1] from a series of interviews, knowledge exchange workshops and meetings with key food hub stakeholders in the UK cities of Preston and Newcastle, we provide evidence of the potential, as well as the limitations, of local food hubs to address issues of stigma associated with the use of food banks in the UK, and situate that in the narrow individualistic understandings and management strategies through which stigma is approached and addressed.

Local Food Hubs: An alternative to what?

In recent decades, there has been a proliferation of 'alternative agro-food networks' (AAFN) of initiatives and actors involved in alternative methods of production, distribution and consumption that aspire to transform, or even replace, the conventional agro-food system (Renting et al. 2003, Murdoch et al. 2000, Sonnino and Marsden 2006). 'Local food hubs' are an AAFN that aims to configure an alternative distribution system by bypassing supply chain intermediaries, securing fairer prices for producers (LeBlanc et al. 2014, Cleveland et al. 2014) and also, potentially, for consumers.

Most of the existing academic literature on 'local food hubs' has a North American focus, a fact that is not unrelated to the origin and prevalence of 'food hubs' as a model (although see also Morley et al. 2008). Existing studies provide clues to the heterogeneity within 'food hubs' – a fact also manifested in the diversity of existing working definitions (see Morley et al. 2008, Barham et al. 2012, Blay-Palmer et al. 2013; Ballamingie and Franklin 2013). They have unpacked their 'alternative character' (Cleveland et al. 2014), the diverse economic relations they enact and engage with (Ballamingie and Franklin 2013), the complex socio-spatial contexts in which they operate (Stroink and Nelson 2013; Le Blanc et al. 2013), as well as the multiplicity of meanings attributed to them (Blay-Palmer et al. 2013). They have highlighted that, like other examples of AAFNs, local food hubs can vary in multiple ways: a. in terms of their organisational structure (e.g. producer/consumer food co-operatives, charitable organisations, small-scale businesses); b. in terms of their function (e.g. sales only vs.

[1] Data come from the interdisciplinary cooperative research project 'Exploring the potential of local food hubs in deprived urban areas: Enhancing Knowledge Exchange for Best Practice Guidelines', funded by the HEFCE N8 AgriFood Resilience Programme.

educational/ training services); c. in terms of their products (e.g. food only vs. including other products); d. in terms of their values (e.g. driven by environmental or social or economic sustainability principles or a combination of the above); e. in terms of their scale of operation (also depending on their definitions of the 'local'). However, all food hubs share a common vision: to create more sustainable communities by creating a market for a number of small-scale producers that can aggregate and distribute their food to diverse groups of consumers locally (Blay-Palmer et al. 2013, Stroink and Nelson 2013, Cleveland et al. 2014, LeBlanc et al. 2014). As Blay-Palmer et al (2013) explain, food hubs are 'networks and intersections of grassroots, community-based organisations and individuals that work together to build increasingly socially just, economically robust and ecologically sound food systems that connect farmers with consumers as directly as possible' (p.524).

In this paper, we specifically focus on the OFN 'Local Food Hubs'. This is a recently introduced variant of a food-hub model that was initially conceived and developed in Australia. Despite an increasing number of 'food hubs' in the UK, the OFN 'local food hub' model is one of the most widespread across the country[2]. The novelty introduced by the OFN Local Food Hub model lies in its online platform that is based on open source software and is developed specifically as an online marketplace to facilitate reconnections between local producers and consumers (see https://openfoodnetwork.org.uk). The online platform accommodates a database of different local food hubs allowing the consumer to choose the collection point and local products of their preference. The OFN provides different organisations interested in setting up a hub with a free profile and option to develop their online 'shop-front' through which they can undertake and manage commerce through the internet - e.g. online payments, order and stock management. Each 'shop-front' is also then linked with a number of neighbouring producers and suppliers who also have their free profiles as 'suppliers'. They are also linked with a certain location, their 'collection point' where food is delivered by suppliers, sorted by the hub co-ordinator and then collected by customers.

[2] As of 22 November 2017, OFN UK reported a current total number of 141 front shops across the country, supplied by 450 producers, serving 980 customers who have placed more than 7,721 orders (OFN 2017).

By facilitating such producer-consumer reconnections, 'local food hubs' encompass various characteristics of an 'alternative' to the conventional agro-food distribution system: a. relations of care through fairer prices for the producers; b. relations of solidarity based on co-operative work structures and voluntary labour; c. a diverse economy that recirculates money to the local economy and encourages relations of gift and sharing – e.g. via the open access software (Phone interview with online food network representative 2017, OFN UK 2017). However, like with many other AAFN examples, as OFN 'local food hubs' currently stand, they mainly constitute a niche market for affluent middle class consumers – a fact also confirmed in a small-scale survey and focus group conducted by the UK OFN Local Food Hub organisers (Stroudco Foodhub 2015; see also Levkoe et al. 2018). Thus, local food hubs face their own challenges when trying to address wider issues of unequal distribution and inequitable access to quality food (see Allen and Wilson 2008, Gertz et al. 2008, etc.). As Cleveland et al comment (2014), a conflict between their economic and social sustainability objectives is central in their inability to secure access to food for low-income communities. Thus, in most cases, local food hubs constitute an elite practice that struggles to address food poverty and inequalities.

It is thus our intention, to explore the potential of local food hubs to go beyond their middle-class associations, and become an alternative not only to the conventional food distribution system, but also to the conventional ways of addressing food poverty. Drawing on the rising significance of food banks to address issues of food poverty in the UK, as well as the issue of stigma associated with food bank use, we explore the potential of local food hubs to address issues of food poverty by specifically investigating their potential to overcome stigma associated with food bank use in conditions of food poverty. However, what is stigma, and what does the academic literature tell us about its association with food bank use?

Stigma, food banks and food poverty

Stigma is a complex social phenomenon and a major challenge for contemporary societies. It is also a highly contested concept that has been variously analysed in different disciplinary contexts in order to describe an enormous array of circumstances of discriminations – e.g. from mental health and HIV AIDS to disability and racial

discriminations (Parker and Aggleton 2003; Link and Phelan 2001; Hunt 1966; CarMichael and Hamilton 1967). Many discussions of stigma take Goffman's work as their point of departure, conceptualising stigma as 'an attribute that is significantly discrediting', an 'undesirable difference' that results in a person's 'spoiled identity' that needs to be 'managed' (Goffman 1963). For example, Jones et al (1984) describe stigma as a "mark" (attribute) that links a person to undesirable characteristics (stereotypes), whereas Crocker et al (1998: 505) describe stigma as 'some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity…devalued in a particular social context'.

Such approaches appear to maintain an individual-based focus, through which stigma constitutes the property or the characteristic of an individual, or a perspective generated in social contexts that then needs to be managed by 'the stigmatised' through identity management and concealment (see Goffman, 1986 in Tyler, 2018). Such aproaches ignore the structural conditions and relations of power that may (re)produce conditions of discrimination and help maintain stigma as a form of 'social control' (Parker and Aggleton, 2003; Hannem and Brucket, 2012). As Pescosolido and Martin acknowledge in their 'Stigma Complex' (2015), understanding and changing stigma needs to shift from a 'changing behaviours and beliefs' perspective to one of 'understanding and changing the structures that shape social relationships' (2015:101). It is in this context that Tyler suggests situating stigma in the wider political economy of poverty and inequality, and understands stigma as not only 'an effect of neoliberal ideologies and polities', but also a form of governance which legitimises the reproduction and entrenchment of inequalities and injustices (Tyler, 2013:212).

There is an increasing social science literature specifically focusing on stigma in relation to food banks. In 2013, it was estimated that 4.7 million people lived in conditions of 'food poverty' in the UK, with over 500,000 people in the UK were reliant on food aid (CEBR 2013, Cooper and Dumpleton 2013). By food poverty, we refer to 'the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so' (see Dowler et al. 2001, p.2, Radimer et al. 1992, Riches 1997). Food banks are currently the dominant form of addressing food poverty.[3] Between 2009 and 2014, the number of food banks jumped

[3] Food banks expanded rapidly in the early 2000s. According to Trussell Trust, their food bank network has distributed more than one million food parcels in 2014, tripling in numbers since 2010 (Trussell Trust 2015 in Purdam et al. 2015, Loopstra et al. 2013).

from 29 to 251 across the UK, mainly appearing in areas experiencing greater cuts in local services and welfare benefits, higher unemployment rates and benefit sanctions (Loopstra et al. 2015). Existing research employs both qualitative (mainly ethnographic) and quantitative (mainly survey-based) methods, primarily aiming to contribute to a better understanding of people's lived experiences of stigma, thus maintaining an individual-based approach to the study of stigma.

This is also evident in the 'stigma-management' strategies adopted by the food bank users themselves. The emerging body of research of UK food banks concurs that the lived experience of receiving emergency food aid through food banks is strongly coloured by feelings of shame, humiliation and embarrassment. Respondents were deeply concerned about being seen as 'failures', as 'scroungers', as not being able to provide care for their families, as inadequate parents, as being reliant on others for their food, as not being able to exercise choice in what they eat or when they can collect their food (Garthwaite 2016a, 2016b, Caplan 2016, Douglas et al. 2015, van der Horst et al. 2014). Similar themes also emerged in the descriptive narratives of our research participants sharing their experiences of providing services to people in food poverty. They talked about people who would prefer not to eat in order to avoid the food bank, or they would prefer not to eat in order to give their children food to eat without having to go to the food bank, or they would try to connect with retailers to have access to surplus food to feed themselves and others (Interview with local stakeholder 1, Newcastle 2017; Preston Meeting 2 2017; Preston Workshop 2017).

However, a lot of social science research on food banks has also maintained a critical perspective acknowledging the structural underlying conditions of stigma and food poverty. Such studies underline the clear similarities between the stigma associated with food bank use and the 'benefits stigma' attached to people in receipt of state income support. For example, recipients of food aid were stereotyped as unwilling to work, making deviant lifestyle choices, including drug and alcohol use, and being morally lax (see Lambie-Mumford 2015, Douglas et al. 2015, Garthwaite 2016a, 2016b, Caplan 2016). A knowledge and skills deficit approach has also been prevalent (Dowler and o'Connor 2011) through which people were portrayed as lacking in knowledge and skills about how to cook, how to shop for the most nutritious food and budgeting effectively. Stigma has been associated with the use of specific spaces and materialities that, according to Lambie-Mumford (2015), also label users as 'needy'. For example, carrying

a supermarket bag when leaving a church was identified as an indicator of a person receiving food aid (Lambie-Mumford 2013, Garthwaite 2016a). The use of cars or mobile phones by food bank users was also stigmatisatised, reproducing public discourses of 'deservingness'/'undeservingness' (Garthwaite 2016a, 2016b).

Within this context, food banks have also been situated in the wider political economy of inequality. Studies comment on their inability to address the underlying conditions that need to be met through a wider welfare system transformation (Lambie-Mumford 2015). Food banks were argued, to only provide relief and alleviation from hunger and food poverty, themselves the symptoms of the wider context of poverty and inequalities, whose amelioration lies in creating the conditions for overcoming the wider social and political economic conditions of poverty (Dowler 2014). Thus, food banks have been perceived as a mechanism that is not only incapable of addressing the problem of food poverty at its root, but also instrumental in perpetuating the specific socio-economic conditions of deprivation and need and the social relations of exclusion and isolation that have led people seeking food aid in the first place.Thus, there is an urgent need for identifying an alternative food access model that would overcome stigma associated with food bank use. In this paper, we contribute to this by specifically focusing on the OFN local food hub model. By putting questions of stigma centre stage, we explore the potential of local food hubs to constitute an alternative agro-food network for all that can help overcome stigma associated with food poverty. In the following sections, we turn our attention to the specific local food hubs under investigation, and provide evidence of their potential as well as limitations to de-stigmatise food access in conditions of food poverty.

Methods

Aims and approach

Our research focuses on the small number of OFN local food hubs that were specifically developed in order to test the feasibility of the local food hub model in urban deprived areas. The research was conducted from January 2017 to May 2018, when these 'local food hubs' were conceived and trialled as part of a 'pilot' initiated by local food non-profit organisations in the UK cities of Preston and Newcastle. The aim of this pilot was to set up 'local food hub' in deprived areas and explore their potential to address

issues of food poverty in cities. In this context, the aim of our research project was to support 'this pilot' by studying the viability, feasibility and potential of local food hubs as a food poverty intervention. Our project was thus shaped around the local stakeholders' research needs. It was the product of a constant process of knowledge exchange between researchers and local food organisations from inception to completion of the project (Munro 2016). Local food stakeholders were named research partners and were instrumental in the co-production of the project proposal, the delivery of the project and its non-academic outputs. The researchers, inspired by the principles of Participatory Action Research (Kindon et al 2007, Reason 2003), were researching 'with' rather than 'on' the local food hubs – e.g. by participating in local stakeholder meetings and cooking classes, as well as being actively involved in helping with setting up and running the hubs.

Participating hubs

Our research specifically focuses on OFN 'local food hubs' in the cities of Preston and Newcastle, where local organisations expressed an interest in testing the 'food hub' model in deprived urban areas. Despite their common vision to develop a 'local food hub' model that would address food poverty, the hubs in each city varied depending on the specific needs of the local populations.

With an estimated population of 141,302 (ONS 2015), Preston is one of the 20% most deprived districts/unitary authorities in England. The 'local food hub' in Preston was envisioned to have the structure of a network of smaller hubs that would work both independently and together. These included: a. a local small-scale farm shop; b. three established community centres in deprived neighbourhoods of the city; c. a local church. However, out of these five organisations, only one moved forward with piloting the hub during our research project. The hub was initiated at a local church. The church was easily accessible, located in a city centre neighbourhood ranked in the lowest decile nationally for all measures of deprivation. Despite the hub being publicised widely locally, it was mainly used by members of the church . A young entrepreneur who had her own home-based, food-related start-up business set up this hub. The Food Hub started in January 2018. The organiser of the Hub did not make use of the online platform as she had a very small number of suppliers – a commercial organic supplier of fruit and vegetables and two allotment holders who donated their produce – and a very small number of customers, varying from 3 to 6 per week. Every week, the organiser of the hub contacted the

commercial supplier and the allotment holders to get a listing of the available produce. She then priced the products and e-mailed the priced listing to the customers who replied with their orders for the week. The organiser e-mailed her suppliers with the requested products and their quantities. The suppliers delivered at the Church site on the day of the Hub. The customers could collect their orders on the same day and time every week – that was set on a weekday early evening due to users' possible parenting and work commitments.

In Newcastle, the hub was set up by a community centre situated in a large housing estate in the North of the city, an estate that received negative public attention in the early nineties and has not fully recovered to this day (Interview with Newcastle stakeholder, 2018). The pilot was initiated after a community centre representative attended a local stakeholder meeting where the local university researchers presented information on the food hub model. The researchers were actively involved in supporting and setting up the hub in various ways: advertising the hub; identifying suppliers; running the platform and managing the orders; packaging the orders; designing recipes for their meal packs. The hub pilot was initiated in November 2017 for an initial four-week period that was then extended until the time our research project ended. The Hub operated every Thursday late afternoon from within one of the rooms of the Community Centre. A number of the products sold at the Hub (e.g. bread and vegetables) were delivered to the Hub by the producers while others were collected by Centre staff from the producers' premises (e.g. fish and meat). The Hub sold 'meal packs' i.e. sets of ingredients that could be used in a single recipe along with a recipe card. The centre staff and the volunteer researchers put together the meal packs the day before the Hub was open and these were stored on the Centre's premises. The hub used the online platform for its orders only. The customers placed and paid for their orders online and collected their purchase from the Hub. They were also given the option to receive help with their online order by using the centre's facilities and staff support, and could then collect and pay for in cash if needed. The hub was widely advertised across the community centre and the local neighbourhood and across social media, achieving a number of 5-10 orders per week, mainly by local people who were already users of other services at the community centre.

Data collection

Our research was based on a combination of qualitative research methods (interviews, knowledge exchange workshops and ethnographic participant observation). At the first stage of our research, it was agreed that we could attend meetings of local food organisations and community centres in each city, in order to gain a better understanding of the mainstream OFN 'local food hub' model and its diversified model in relation to food poverty. In total, 4 monthly meetings were attended, with extensive hand-written notes being made of all discussions and decisions reached. A second stage of participant observation was conducted during the running of the small-scale pilots in the two cities.

Our participant observation from these meetings informed the second stage of our research: a series of 8 semi-structured interviews of 1 to 2 hours duration, undertaken either face-to-face or over phone or via Skype, and conducted with individuals who had key roles in the attempt to create OFN Hub pilots in the two UK cities. For example, the representative of the OFN UK, directors of social justice food charities in both cities, representatives of community centres involved in hosting the hubs, a volunteer, a farmer and a baker interested in supplying the local food hubs. The interviews were aimed at unfolding the stakeholder views on the role of the OFN hubs in addressing issues of food poverty, also in relation to food banks, as well as the opportunities and the challenges they encounter setting up the hubs, and possible ways of overcoming them.

A series of knowledge exchange workshops (6 to 8 individuals per workshop) were also held in both cities. The first two workshops brought together local food hub organisers and local organisations working to combat food poverty to discuss experiences of issues of food poverty in each city and the potential of local food hubs to constitute a viable alternative. The second series of knowledge exchange workshops was intended to facilitate the sharing of experiences of the local food hub pilot in each city. This included one workshop with key organisations involved in setting up the hubs in each city (food charities, community centres and local suppliers) and a mixed workshop through which organisations from the two cities exchanged experiences from setting up their hubs and explored possibilities for future collaboration.

Data analysis

Interviews and workshops were recorded, transcribed and anonymised for confidentiality purposes. For our analysis, we draw on material gathered from the

interviews, workshops and meetings with representatives of different organisations that were involved in both initial discussions about setting up the hubs, as well as those involved in the running of the small-scale pilots. In the following section, we provide an analysis of data that were coded in relation to the themes of 'stigma', 'food poverty' and 'food banks'. We identify the specific characteristics and functions of the hubs that indicate their attempt to address issues of food poverty. More specifically, given the centrality of food banks in experiencing and addressing food poverty, we focus on understanding the potential as well as the limitations of local food hubs to constitute an alternative to food banks, and specifically the stigma associated with them.

Local Food Hubs, stigma and food poverty

In most cases, our research partners struggled to identify the ways in which 'local food hubs' could constitute an alternative to food banks. To a large extent, this was also due to the inability of the hubs to address the wider structural issues – or what our interviewee below described as the wider social, economic and political conditions – that make people resort to food bank use in the first place (see Dowler 2014, Lambie-Mumford 2015). As one of our interviewees said when challenged to think of food hubs as alternatives to food banks:

> 'I don't think that one has to be an alternative to another, I think they can all exist at the same time…I think that food banks serve a purpose and they can use the Open Food Network to meet that purpose…I think reducing the need for food banks is a bigger economic, political, social issue that won't be solved by a distribution problem, a distribution process' (Phone Interview with online food network representative 2017)

However, people's acknowledgement of the wider political and economic conditions of food poverty was also pivotal for motivating them to develop their hubs in ways that would enable them to address food poverty at its roots. This has been indicative in the case of both cities, in which food hubs were approached not only as a means for accessing local quality food at affordable prices, but also a strategy for addressing food poverty at its heart by enhancing young people's entrepreneurial skills and employability. For example, in Preston, one of the community centres was specifically interested in the pilot as a practical, educational and vocational, opportunity for young people excluded from the mainstream education system. In the case of Newcastle, the food hubs were seen as an opportunity to empower people by helping them develop certain food retail and

trading skills. As said by two interviewees, representatives of food hub initiatives in each city:

> 'I wouldn't want to start interfering with the work that they [food banks] are doing, this [food hub model] is very specifically about trying to empower people…' (Interview with local food hub network representative, Preston 2017)

> 'That's where I suppose it could make an impact on poverty, not directly in terms of offering cheap food or low cost food, but in giving job opportunities to people who can struggle elsewhere to become bakers or whatever, to work within the retail part of it so you're getting money into communities otherwise' (Interview with local food hub supplier, Newcastle 2017)

However, by employing a strategy of (re-)skilling for addressing food poverty, an individual-based 'stigma-management' approach, similar to the food banks, prevailed (see Pescosolido and Martin 2015, Tyler 2018). This was evident in the integration of cooking classes in the food hubs in Preston as well as the incorporation of food recipes in Newcastle hub's food parcels. Lack of cooking skills has been one of the dominant stigmatising narratives associated with food bank use (see Garthwaite 2016a, 2016b, Lambie-Mumford 2015). The local food hubs in our research have thus implicitly appropriated such dominant stigmatising assumptions, by employing cooking as a key strategy for encouraging people to use fresh fruits and vegetables. However, by developing such cooking classes in places with minimal equipment, they were also attempting to overcome internalised stigmatisation associated with a possible absence of specific cooking resources and equipment in their own households. As described by one of our interviewees involved in the organisation of the cooking classes in Preston:

> '...it's about just simply giving somebody the skills and that's really basic skills… I don't know if you've seen like a lot of the food hubs they just cook on camping stoves, we use one pan, one knife, one chopping board….So it's kind of giving people the skills to be able to be creative with when they've not got very much, you know, and are likely to have.' (Interview with local food hub network representative 1, Preston 2017)

"Choice" was another key characteristic through which local food hubs differentiated themselves from the food banks and the processes of internalised stigmatisation associated with lack of choice (van der Horst et al. 2014, Garthwaite 2016a). However, such an approach was mainly addressing stigma as a property or the problem of the individual that could be solved through a change in a person's behaviour, rather than a change in the structure of society (see Parker and Aggleton 2003). In our

research, participants described the ways allowing users to select ingredients and quantities of their own choice (instead of having prepacked boxes) was key for enhancing the users' sense of freedom (a key value in market economies): not only with regard to their food choices, but also with regard to the amount of money they could spend depending on their budget. As explained by one of the community centre representatives:

> 'So when you go to food hubs you've got a choice of picking what you want; whereas if you go to a food bank you can have one of those or here's your bag of food and that choice is taken away from you. So it's quite an interesting one really that food co-op here's your bag of food and we're going oh we don't want that, we want this and you know maybe it's something about choice sometimes.' (Interview with community centre representative 1, Preston 2017)

In this context, reconfiguring relations of exchange appeared pivotal - also for overcoming the stigma connotations associated with free access to food through food bank use. In many ways, in emergency food systems, individuals participate in informal relations of exchange that are antithetical to the socially accepted norms of accessing food in a market society. Being perceived as 'receivers' rather than 'purchasers' of food, individuals are stigmatised as deprived of agency and choice (another key value in contemporary market economies) (see Lambie-Mumford 2015). Thus, in the food hub model, the use of money was perceived key in de-stigmatising food access by turning 'users' into 'consumers' and 'food' into a 'commodity', part of formal money-based relations of exchange (see Sayer 2003). As the representative of a community centre in Preston describes:

> 'I think it still does give people that little bit of psychological thing that they've given money so they can take the food. So I don't think it feels like kind of free dinnertime thing… I'm paying some money and so I am getting something which I have had to pay for so I don't think there's an issue about being embarrassed…' (Interview with community centre representative 2, Preston 2017)

However, from the above, an individual-based 'stigma-management' approach again prevails, which, in this case, also becomes a strategy of 'social control' reinforcing individuals to become active participants in dominant capitalocentric economic practices of market exchange (Gibson-Graham 2006). Following the dominant frameworks of a market society in which de-monetised goods and services carry connotations of undeservingness, money becomes the means for destigmatising individuals by turning them into active agents in the very market economy which has stigmatised and marginalised them in the first place.

The local food hubs have also attempted to de-stigmatise the "spaces" associated with food bank use. Developing 'socially inclusive' hubs was one of their strategies. For example, in Preston, one of the community centres aspired to involve as many community centre user groups as possible. They advertised the food hubs to users of the social supermarket and the food co-op, as well as the attendees of the centre's health and cooking classes. However, as also evident in the quote below, by attempting to de-stigmatise such spaces, not only were they implicitly appropriating certain stigmatising assumptions for these spaces, but also reproducing social distinctions between 'the advantaged' and 'the disadvantaged', 'the rich' and 'the poor'. As described below:

> '..by making it available to all it reduces stigma and it just means that everybody's equal….Now you're going to find that most people who can afford it probably won't use it because…the community centres are in areas of disadvantage, so it's unlikely really that loads of rich people are going to start swarming in going right' (Interview with local food hub network representative 1, Preston 2017)

Discussions also revolved around the ways the OFN online platform could help overcome stigmatising assumptions associated with food bank use. Local food stakeholders acknowledged the significance of digitisation of the market place as a de-stigmatisation strategy. The placelessness of the online platform was thought of creating the conditions of facelessness, anonymity and invisibility that would help users overcome the stigma attached to the place-based food banks. However, in many ways, they constituted another strategy of 'concealment' and 'displacement' of stigma rather than of addressing the underlying societal context and relations in which stigma is produced (see Tyler, 2018). The latter was also evident in the case of certain materialities associated with ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) use – especially mobile phones and computers. On the one hand, like with cooking, a skills-deficit approach was adopted through which prospective food hubs users were at risk of being stereotyped as digitally illiterate in need of training (Newcastle Workshop 2017). In response to this, internet buddies and paper-based orders were offered as the main option for placing an order rather than an alternative to the online order – a fact that was admitted to have helped bypass the possible stigma associated with ICT use. As described by a local food stakeholder in Preston:

> 'well it [the online platform] is very valuable, the difficult bit is getting people to get their heads round the technology…the idea is that they can order the food without having to go online … that we will be creating an opportunity for them to submit a paper form

> at the community centre' (Interview with local food hub network representative 2, Preston 2017)

In many ways, the OFN online platform appeared pivotal in helping both maintain and challenge dominant discourses of deservingness and undeservingness associated with the ownership of mobile phones and computers in conditions of food poverty. It has encouraged stakeholders to go beyond the dominant symbolic meanings of specific commodities – for example, the middle class associations of a mobile phone or an expensive car. It has helped them realise that food poverty is not a static condition, but a dynamic process that can affect anybody. It has thus, encouraged them to consider the heterogeneous and inclusive character of the 'food poor', and thus consider the wider socio-economic and political economic context that can bring people in conditions of deprivation that can appear even amongst the most unexpected parts of the population – such as the owners of iPhones and Mercedes cars described in the following quote:

> 'Yeah but we still feed people in D[…] H[…], J[…] and G[…] and they're coming with a Mercedes and an iPhone…What you don't see is that they've lost their job six months beforehand. They are in serious bother. The Mercedes is worth less than the credit they owe on it and they are just waiting for the bailiff to come and take it away. So you see food poverty across social barriers.' (Local Food Hub representative, Newcastle Workshop 2017)

Summary

Our analysis demonstrates that the 'local food hubs' of our research employ various strategies in order to develop an alternative food access model that would overcome the stigma associated with the use of food banks. By encouraging a more inclusive use of the hubs, they have attempted to challenge stigmatising assumptions associated with the use of certain physical spaces where food banks are commonly found (e.g. churches). By digitising processes of food access, they attempted to displace stigma from those physical spaces, but also replace those spatially situated relations of exchange in which social relations of stigma are (re)produced. By economising relations of exchange, they aspired to help users overcome feelings of shame associated with their inability to pay for their own food and exercise "choice" in what they eat and how they collect their food. By skilling people around cooking and the online platform, they were attempting to address internalised feelings of shame associated with their inability to know how to use specific commodities of cultural capital. By encouraging a more inclusive understanding of the social category of the 'food poor', they have attempted to

challenge certain external stereotypes of undeservingness associated with the ownership of such commodities while in food poverty.

However, our analysis highlights the limitations of local food hubs to overcome stigma associated with food bank use. First, as revealed above, in many occasions, while attempting to address stigma, the model appeared to appropriate and reproduce existing narratives of stigmatisation, or even enable new processes of stigmatisation through discourses and practices. The latter has been evident in most of the above cases of destigmatisation, which, at the same time, have also been central in the reproduction of the very same stigmatising assumptions that local food hubs wanted to address. For example, by attempting to overcome stigma associated with the use of certain spaces where food banks are commonly found (e.g. churches, community centres), they were also appropriating certain stigmatising assumptions about these spaces, as well as reproducing existing social divides between 'the rich' and 'the poor'. By digitising the market place, they were opening up to new narratives of undeservingness associated with the ownership and use of certain commodities of cultural capital (e.g. phones). By enhancing people's cooking and ICT skills, they have been implicitly appropriating or even reproducing the stereotypes of knowledge deficit attributed to recipients of food aid.

Second, in all above occasions, local food hubs appeared to be based on very narrow individual-focused stigma-management strategies for addressing food poverty. Through such strategies, stigma was approached as the property or the problem of an individual, rather than the product of the wider societal relations of power and inequality. It was the "mark" that needed to be covered or concealed, primarily by encouraging "the stigmatised" to change practices or behaviour. For example, training programmes have been key for de-stigmatising individuals by helping them to change practices and thus manage the stigma associated with their inability to cook or use ICT. The online platform was pivotal for concealing or displacing stigma through the individuals' participation in digitised relations of exchange. Monetising relations of exchange was also framing stigma as the problem of certain individuals who could overcome stigma by integrating themselves into the socially accepted norms of economic behaviour and practices of market exchange. However, by primarily employing individual-based stigma-management strategies, the hubs were failing to approach stigma as a wider societal problem and, thus, identify and address the broader structural conditions and relations of

power that not only produce stigma, but also the conditions of poverty and inequality within which stigma is (re)produced.

Conclusions

Our purpose in this paper has been to explore the potential of 'local food hubs' to address issues of stigma associated with food bank use. In doing so, we also looked into the potential of 'local food hubs' to constitute an 'Alternative Agro-Food Network' not only to the conventional agro-food distribution system, but also to the conventional ways of addressing food poverty. Drawing on research conducted for the HEFCE-funded N8 AgriFood Resilience programme, we specifically focused on local food hubs that were piloted in urban deprived areas. We identified diverse ways through which these hubs attempt to address issues of stigma associated with food bank use. However, we also highlighted that, in their attempt to de-stigmatise food poverty, 'local food hubs' appeared to reproduce existing, or even enable new, discourses and practices of stigmatisation.

Such observations encourage us to problematize the concept of 'stigma' in relation to food hubs and food poverty. In most cases, 'local food hubs' were based on narrow individual-based stigma-management strategies, through which stigma was primarily approached and addressed as the problem, or the property of an individual. It was "the mark" that needed to be displaced or concealed through a change in those individuals' practices or behaviours. However, through such an approach, the local food hub model ignores the wider societal and structural conditions of power and inequality within which stigma has been (re)produced, and that also needed to be addressed.

Such observations also encourage us to problematise the concept of 'destigmatisation' in relation to 'local food hubs' and food poverty. They help us understand the blurred boundaries between stigmatisation and destigmatisation, and thus consider the limitations of 'destigmatisation' itself with regard to addressing issues of food poverty. As discussed above, in many occasions, the hubs' strategies of destigmatisation appeared to not only be built around certain stigmatising assumptions and stereotypes of food poverty, but also reproduce or enact old and new discourses and practices of stigmatisation that the food hubs aspired to overcome. In this way, local food hubs and their strategies of destigmatisation seemed to become part of the same power structures and relations that created the conditions of stigma and food poverty.

From the above analysis, we conclude that, as they currently stand, 'local food hubs' appear unable to constitute a viable alternative that can address issues of stigma in relation to accessing food in conditions of food poverty. We suggest that this is due to their above-described narrow understandings and approaches to stigma. However, it is also due to the wider underlying political economic conditions of poverty and inequality that may produce stigma and which local food hubs are unable to address by themselves. We suggest that local food hubs need to move beyond individual-based de-stigmatisation strategies, through which stigma will be problematized and addressed as a structural and societal phenomenon rather than a problem of an individual. However, can local food hubs move outside (or even challenge) the wider political economy of poverty and inequality? Only if the broader structural conditions that cause and reproduce stigma in food poverty are addressed, will 'local food hubs' be able to constitute an AAFN for all.

Acknowledgements

This paper draws on research conducted for the project "Exploring the potential of local food hubs in deprived areas" as part of theN8 Agrifood Resilience programme, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE). The authors would like to extend their gratitude to all the people who shared their time and insights by taking part in this research. They would also like to thank their four non-academic research partners (OFN UK, The Larder, Meadow Well Community Centre and Myatts Field), as well as other organisations that have been involved in the project. They are also grateful for the valuable feedback of Dr Krueger and the two anonymous referees, as well as their research colleagues: Professor Waterton and Dr Marnerides from Lancaster University, Dr Wrieden from the University of Newcastle and Professor Jackson and Dr Blake from the University of Sheffield.

References

Ballamingie, P. and Walker, S.M.L., 2013. Field of dreams: just food's proposal to create a community food and sustainable agriculture hub in Ottawa, Ontario. *Local Environment*, 18(5), 529-542.

Barham, J., Tropp, D., Enterline, K., Farman, J., Fisk, J. and Kiraly, S., 2012. Regional food hub resource guide, USDA report, Washington, DC: Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Regional%20Food%20Hub%20Resource%20Guide.pdf (accessed on 10 February 2018).

Blay-Palmer, A; Landman, K; Knezevic. I; Hayhurst, R. 2013. Constructing resilient, transformative communities through sustainable "food hubs", *Local Environment*, 18(5), 521-528.

Caplan, P., 2016. Big society or broken society? Food banks in the UK. *Anthropology Today*, 32 (1), 5-9.

Carmichael, S; Hamilton, C.V. 1967. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America.* New York: Vintage Books.

Cleveland, D. A., Müller, N. M., Tranovich, A. C., Mazaroli, D. N, Hinson, K., 2014. Local food hubs for alternative food systems: A case study from Santa Barbara County, California. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 35, 26 – 36.

Cooper, N. and Dumpleton, S., 2013. Walking the Breadline. *The Scandal of Poverty in the 21st Century Britain*. London: Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam.

Crocker J; Major B; Steele C. 1998. Social stigma. In DT Gilbert, ST Fiske (eds.) *The Handbook of Social Psychology,* Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, pp. 504–53.

Douglas, F., Sapko, J., Kiezebring, K. & Kyle, J., 2015. Resourcefulness, Desperation, Shame, Gratitude and Powerlessness: Common Themes Emerging from A Study of Food Bank Use in Northeast Scotland. *Public Health, 2(3)*, 297 – 317.

Dowler, E., 2014. A living wage – not food aid – is answer to issue of food poverty, *The Conversation*. Available Online at https://theconversation.com/a-living-wage-not-food-aid-is-answer-to-issue-of-food-poverty-26139.

Dowler, E. A. and O'Connor, D., 2011. Rights-based approaches to addressing food poverty and food insecurity in Ireland and UK. *Social Science & Medicine,* 74, 44 - 51

Franklin, A; Newton, J; McEntee, J.C. 2011. Moving beyond the alternative: sustainable communities, rural resilience and the mainstreaming of local food. *Local Environment*, 16(8), 771-788.

Garthwaite, K., 2016a. Stigma, shame and 'people like us': an ethnographic study of foodbank use in the UK. *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 24 (3), 277–89.

Garthwaite, K., 2016b. Hunger Pains: Life inside foodbank Britain. [e-book]. Policy Press.

Gibson-Graham, J.K., 2006. *A postcapitalist politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Goffman, E. 1986. *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster (Original work published 1963).

Hannem, S; Bruckert, C. (Eds.). 2012. *Stigma revisited: Implications of the mark*. Ottawa, Canada: University of Ottawa Press.

Hunt, P. (ed.) (1966) Stigma: the Experience of Disability. London: Chapman.
Jones N.R.V., Conklin A.I., Suhrcke M. and Monsivais P., 2014. The Growing Price Gap between More and Less Healthy Foods: Analysis of a Novel Longitudinal UK Dataset. *PLoS ONE*, 9 (10), e109343.

Kindon, S; Pain, R; and Kesby, M. 2007. Participatory action research: origins, approaches and methods. In S. Kindon; R. Pain; M. Kesby (eds.) *Participatory action research approaches and methods: connection people, participation and place*. London: Routledge, pp. 7–9.

Kneafsy, M. 2010. The region of food – important or irrelevant? *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 3 (2), 177–190.

Lancashire County Council, 2014. Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). Available online at http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancashire-insight/jsna-publications.aspx.

Lambie-Mumford, H., 2013. 'Every Town Should Have One': Emergency Food Banking in the UK. *Journal of Social Policy*, 42 (1), 73 – 89.

Lambie-Mumford, H. (2015) Addressing Food Poverty in the UK: Charity, Rights and Welfare. *SPERI Paper No. 18. Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute*. Available online at: http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SPERI-Paper-18-food-poverty-in-the-UK.pdf (Accessed 13 December 2017)

Le Blanc, J. R., Conner, D., McRae, G., & Darby, H., 2014. Building resilience in nonprofitfood hubs. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 4(3), 1- 15.

Levkoe, C. Z; Hammelman, C; Craven, L; Dandy, G; Farbman, J; Harrison, J; Mount, P., 2018. Building sustainable food systems through food hubs: Practitioner and academic perspectives. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development,* 8(2), 107–122.

Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. Annual Review of Sociology, 27, 363–385.

Loopstra, R; Reeves, A; Taylor-Robinson, D; Barr, B; McKee, M; Stuckler, D., 2015. Austerity, sanctions, and the rise of food banks in the UK. *BMJ* (Clinical research ed), 350.

Morley, A., Morgan, S., and Morgan, K., 2008. Food hubs: the "missing middle" of the local food infrastructure? . Business, Responsibility, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS) Centre, Cardiff University. Available online at

http://www.ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-database/knowledge/Food_HubKM0908.pdf (accessed 2 February 2018)

Munro, E. 2016. Illuminating the practice of Knowledge Exchange as a 'pathway to impact' within an Arts and Humanities Research Council 'Creative Economy Knowledge Exchange' project. *Geoforum*, 71: 44-51.

Murdoch, J., Marsden, T. & Banks, J., 2000. Quality, nature and embeddedness: some theoretical considerations in the context of the food sector, *Economic Geography* 76(2), 107-125.

Office for National Statistics, 2015. Preston Statistics, available online at www.ons.gov.uk (accessed 15 December 2017)

Open Food Network (OFN), 2017. OFN Official Website, available online at https://openfoodnetwork.org.uk/ (accessed 2 February 2018).

Parker, R; Aggleton, P. 2003. HIV and AIDS-related stigma and discrimination: A conceptual framework and implications for action. *Social Science & Medicine*, 57, 13–24.

Pescosolido, B; Martin, J. 2015. The stigma complex. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 87–116.

Psarikidou, K., 2015. Re-thinking innovation through a moral economy lens: the case of alternative agro-food and mobility practices. *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization,* 15(1): 67-93.

Psarikidou, K. and Szerszynski, B., 2012a. The Moral Economy of Civic Food Networks in Manchester. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture & Food*, 19 (3), 309 – 327.

Psarikidou, K. and Szerszynski, B., 2012b. Growing the Social: alternative agro-food networks and social sustainability in the urban ethical foodscape. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy (SSPP),* 8(1): 30- 39.

Purdam, K., Garrat, E. A., Esmail, A., 2016. Hungry? Food Insecurity, Social Stigma and Embarrassment in the UK. *Sociology*, 50 (6), 1072 – 1088.

Reason, P. 2003. Pragmatist philosophy and action research: reading and conservation with Richard Rorty, Action Research 1 (1), 103–123.

Renting, H., Marsden, T. and Banks, J., 2003. 'Understanding alternative food networks: Exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development'. *Environment and Planning A*, 35 (3), 393 - 411.

Sayer, A. (2003) De-commodification, consumer culture and the moral economy, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21(3), 341-357.

Sonnino, R. and Marsden, T. K., 2006. Beyond the Divide: Rethinking Relations Between Alternative and Conventional Food Networks in Europe. *Journal of Economic, Geography* 6(2), 181-199.

Stroink, M.L. and Nelson, C.H., 2013. Complexity and food hubs: five case studies from Northern Ontario, *Local Environment*, 18:5, 620-635.

Stroudco Foodhub, 2015. Stroudco Review. Available online at : http://www.stroudco.org.uk/Wce0df83d86ac8.htm (Accessed 08 August 2017)

The Trussell Trust, 2015. *Food Bank Stats*. Salisbury: The Trussell Trust.

Tyler, I., 2013. *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London & New York: Zed Books.

Tyler, I. 2018. Resituating Ervin Goffman: from stigma power to black power. The Sociological Review Monographs, 66(4) 744–765.

van der Horst, H., Pascucci, S. & Bol, W. 2014. The “dark side” of food banks? Exploring emotional responses of food bank receivers in the Netherlands. *British Food Journal,* 116 (9), 1506 – 1520.