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# Reimagining Food: Readdressing and Respecting Values

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**Abstract:** The values associated with food are framed and constructed by market-based systems that assign attributes to different foods across the marketplace. The aim of the paper was to conceptualize the range of non-financial aspects associated with food in the literature examined and a typology was introduced to position a new set of non-financial food values, the alter-values, which support the creation of a more holistic approach to visualize and reimagine a more sustainable, resilient food system that readdresses and respects such values. The four alter-values of interest, intrinsic, production-related, supply chain related, and emotio-cultural values, were discussed in the context of changing food environments, and a visualization of the typology was presented to explain them. By focusing especially on intrinsic and emotio-cultural values, an adaptation of the current food environment beyond pecuniary-based emphasis was possible. Such an approach helps to challenge the structure of the conventional food system towards a more citizen-driven sustainable model, altering priorities, with a drive towards embedding values and going beyond perceiving food only in terms of exchange value, to considering food as a vital aspect of life.

**Keywords:** food; alter-values; non-financial; value; typology; intrinsic; production-related; supply chain; emotio-cultural



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## 1. Introduction

Food is essential to humankind and yet food is ‘lost’ and wasted along the whole supply chain from production to consumption: knowledge of food products is limited and a relationship with, and an understanding of, food is not commonplace [1]. Many food products are ultra-processed, and as a result lose their nutrients and identifiability, and in some cases this leads to food scares and misrepresentation [2,3]. Much of the food production system and supply chain is linear and unsustainable, reliant on fossil fuels for energy, artificial fertilizers and transport, and nutrients are being lost from the food system due to the lack of circularity [4,5]. Farming and food production is often perceived as being in conflict with environmental sustainability especially as the global human population continues to rise [6]. Socially, time constraints fuel the fast and ultra-processed food industry and further diverge people from the connection with and understanding of food [7,8]. Increasingly, food is perceived as a socio-political market-based resource rather than as a human right [9]. In such contexts, the food system has been described simply as being brittle, lacking resilience, even ‘broken’ [10].

A food system encompasses “the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded.” ([11] p. 1). The food system is formed of multiple sub-systems, e.g., the farming system and the waste management system, and interacts with other systems

such as the energy system and the health system where a structural change in these can significantly impact the food system [11]. Food environments have been defined as the “physical, economic, political and socio-cultural context in which consumers engage with the food system to make their decisions about acquiring, preparing and consuming food” ([12] p. 28). Food environments are the context in which foods are produced, purchased, and consumed. As the interface between the food system and our consumption choices, food environments, by extension, affect the value ascribed to food, how this value might change in different physical and socio-politico-economic contexts, how it might change with time, and what can be inferred about a food, in terms of both its pecuniary (financial) and non-financial value. Thus, a food environment is a complex mix of contextual factors, where the importance of those factors changes between individuals and evolves within an individual’s continued interaction with the dynamic food environment around them.

The ‘Discovering the role of food environments for sustainable food systems’ report (2021) discussed the seven dimensions of a food environment and how they may enable the development of sustainable food systems [13]. These drivers are economic (economic and commercial), socio-technical (demographic, local and community based, social and cultural, physical infrastructures, trade, and technological), and environmental. Further factors include environmental foci such as sustainability goals and measuring food waste, health factors, e.g., nutritional balances and defining healthy food, through to social factors such as motivations for eating patterns and reconnection of producers with consumers, and the many types of financial value creation within the food system such as value-addition, and food tourism [4,14–21]. However existing literature does not address the interaction of financial value and non-financial values and there is a lack of synthesis of existing literature into a more formalized alternative values or ‘alter-values’ typology. In light of this research gap, the consideration of value and non-financial food values set out within this paper is timely and contributes to greater understanding of the influence of both non-financial values and financial value within a sustainable food environment.

The aim of this paper was therefore two-fold: firstly, to conceptualize the range of non-financial aspects associated with food in the literature examined; and secondly, to introduce a typology to position a new set of non-financial food values, the alter-values, which support the creation of a more holistic approach to sustainable, resilient food systems (and associated food environments) that readdress and respect such values. The research question that arises from this positioning is:

How can alternative values (alter-values) be conceptualized (reimagined) in order to frame future research on the sustainability of food systems and food environments?

To answer this research question, this paper developed a typology of values (the alter-values) that are both consciously and unconsciously assigned to food by individuals, communities, and their perceived importance through a non-financial lens. The paper starts by considering the context in which value is attributed to food, notably the food environment, as a way to situate contemporary food production and consumption practices.

## 2. Literature Review

Contemporary food systems are rooted within a market-based capitalist economic system. It is a powerful hegemonic system, where choice and general affordability of food for consumers are heralded by advocates as strong benefits. The emphasis on profit arguably makes food system actors answerable to the consumer, thereby ostensibly providing the opportunity to give the consumer power over the food system and the markets. In this neoliberal performance logic, markets provide the governance solution for pretty much everything and anything, including sustainability [22]. Others, like Sandel, argue that some things have an innate value which cannot be supported by the current market system of purchasing and receiving, the what ‘I get for what I give’ dynamic [23]. This viewpoint is supported here, as, for a sustainable food system and food environment, a non-financial valuation of food is also required. Markets cannot capture this as, despite food businesses

using the idea of, for instance, cultural or healthy foods as a niche within the market, the purchase of this food is still transactional and based primarily on financial value.

Problems associated with the food system are linked to global economic and political instability, environmental degradation, climate change, and social inequality: the so-called ‘multiple crises of capitalism’ [24]. Whilst a debate into the merits of this association is beyond the scope of this paper, there is general consensus that “the defining feature of capitalism is its constant de-linking of the economic from the social” ([25] p. 19). This de-linking or ‘un-coupling’ is because markets value things in monetary terms, according to market priorities, rendering non-financial values simply inconsequential [26]. Utility-based value (i.e., calorie or nutrition provision to reduce food insecurity) is thus not as important in the capitalist context as the exchange value of food, i.e., providing food for money [27]. Therefore, the current money-exchange value cannot capture alone the varying non-financial values different actors place on food-related characteristics [28]; instead, exchange value alone only provides a 2D vision of the holistic worth of food.

Sandel goes further, arguing that markets taint the goods they exchange; therefore, markets can change the ‘character and meaning of a social practice’ ([23] p. 132) as they corrupt any moral, social, or cultural pre-existing beliefs by assigning a currency value to them. As a result, people become more interested in a product’s economic currency value than its cultural worth. Indeed, this ‘commercialization effect’ was described [29] as how something changes as a result of supplying it on commercial terms instead of on other basis such as mutual obligation, altruism, or love. Additionally, agricultural products, particularly commodity foods, are continually used as a bartering tool to secure other trade benefits in international trade deals, so politically, the image of food can be relegated to its value as a traded ‘commodity.’ How food is presented and portrayed, essentially its image, appears to be ‘the main currency of informational capitalism’ ([30] p. 329). Gabriel and Lang described ‘cathedrals’ of consumption (e.g., shopping centers or malls), all part of a consumption-driven entertainment spectacle [30]. With this obsession with commodification and commercialization, intrinsic product quality can decay within food environments; the aestheticization of everyday life becomes its own end, and value is instead dictated ultimately only by cost.

What some have described as the ‘supermarketization’ of food markets [31] has accelerated over the last half century, with very little intervention to reduce the commercialization of food on an international governance scale. Supermarketization is described as the expansion of modern food retailers and their mode of business operation [32], delivering better food safety [33,34] and using market mechanisms rather than regulation to improve food safety standards in supply chains [32]. Supermarketization has also been linked to other structural changes of the food system and the food environment, globalization, urbanization [35], and urban modernization [36]. Additionally, the neoliberal restructuring of food systems with corporate agribusiness and retailers (another positioning on supermarketization) [37] supports physical, logistical, technical, and transport infrastructure, scale and capacity [38] and private agri-food governance structures such as third-party certification [39]. This ability to reduce infrastructural barriers and information asymmetry has led to cost reduction [38] and the ability to compete and thrive in an aggressive, commoditized retail market [40]. Indeed, Peddi [39] argued that foreign direct investment-induced, multinational corporation-led retail models need to be re-imagined as “a single global movement spearheaded by a handful of powerful corporations”, where the debate has focused on the negative consequences for more traditional (pre-existing) retail models; however as highlighted, the largely urban consumer has seen significant benefits in terms of assurance of food safety and a strong focus on cost [32,38,40].

Beginning at a broader level, there have been many attempts to visualize and pictorialize the food system, especially with reference to sustainability. The Sustainable Development Commission [41] suggested five domains to ensure sustainability of the food system (quality, social value, environment, health, and economy) which require an associated framework of good governance to be successfully integrated into a food system.

In the Van Berkum et al. model [42], drivers of the food system were depicted as environmental or socio-economic, with no consideration of non-financial values, even when they relate to culture or values/beliefs. Their discussion of the wider food environment related purely to economics, and their outcomes focused mostly on policy rather than encouraging local-scale community action and collaboration. Similarly with the Sustainable Development Commission definition, there is a lack of reference to the importance of developing a food community and culture around food to aid resilience of all kinds, but also a lack of awareness that food must be valued intrinsically rather than as a commodity. Ultimately, supermarkets exist to make money, but to market food they promote certain ‘values,’ such as Fair Trade or organic food. Here, it is important to differentiate between trading fairly across the food system with notions of what is fair or just, and the Fair Trade global movement where branding and associated commercial trading networks creates distinction in the marketplace for some foods [43].

Fairness, along with social values and diets, and economic diversification are key principles of agroecological approaches and social movements are re-imagining alternative patterns of food supply and food provision [43]. As posited by Grunert, there is a discrepancy between citizen preferences/values and their ability to become consumer preferences [44], i.e., unless these concerns are very strong, the ‘channeling’ (p. 158) of concerns often stays at the citizen level of cognition rather than translating into consumer purchasing behavior. Introducing food products aligned with values of sustainable development arguably strengthens consumer support for them, but in the market context commercializes them simultaneously. As the different value and values consumers assign to food have been capitalized and commercialized, this has driven food fashions and niche food products (e.g., the rise of some vegan food products and brands [45,46]) and within the wider food environment there are both associations with and disassociations between health and food. Indeed, high-fat, high-sugar, ultra-processed products contribute to public health problems and obesity-related issues such as diabetes (hospital use value of which in the United Kingdom (UK) was £10.2 bn in 2018/19) [47].

In summary, the different value and values consumers assign to food have been capitalized and monetized, with a focus on exchange value. This leaves food itself undervalued in terms of its environmental and social worth, where negative outcomes are outsourced to the wider food environment in terms of health costs and environmental degradation. The expectation that food should be ‘cheap’ results in the undervaluing of both food and life [1]. Despite this focus on food being cheap, the poorest 10% of UK households would still have to spend 76% of their disposable income to meet the UK Government’s recommended Eatwell Guide, significantly more as a proportion than those on higher incomes [48]. The current economic model for food systems, focused primarily on monetary exchange value, is at the center of a food environment that is unsustainable in the face of global population rises, resource scarcity, and the conversion of natural capital into monetary capital [49].

Multiple alternative economic theories to capitalism are being mooted, such as ecological economics and ethnoecological economics [50], the latter framing economics as part of a wider human system, including learning from indigenous tribes who produce and exchange food without money. Indeed, the values-based model reconnects quality of life and society as essential elements of the economy [51]. This does not necessitate the overhauling of the entire economic system; as Martinez-Alier et al. [52] posited, values are difficult to compare. This does not mean either that they are completely incomparable, but merely that instead of different values being compared by the same common metric, a multi-criteria evaluation for ecological economics should be used instead. Such ideas support the recent work of Tim Lang and his call for omni-standards/multi-criteria assessment of food chains and the genesis of the OmniAction campaign (incorporating simultaneously the environment, land sovereignty, labor rights, food safety, and nutrition considerations), and also with the work of the EU-funded GLAMUR project on the multidimensionality of food systems [53,54]. Integrating these criteria into concrete actions would make them much more effective and fairer by recognizing the various values these actions have for

different actors [55], but a discourse on these economic models is beyond the scope of this paper.

Globalization has led to global connectedness, but also segmentation, relocation of production away from urban markets and whilst globalization has delivered benefits to consumers, the integration and centralization has made it difficult to access those markets if a business (farm, manufacturer) cannot align with the *modus operandi* [49]. Within the current economic system however, there are various existing and developing mechanisms enabling products encompassing specific values to gain access to the market. These have been described in the literature as ‘Alternative Food Networks’ (AFNs). AFNs seek to redress the dual dichotomy of money and society, and economic value and values. Gritzas and Kavoulakos, for example, described AFNs as ‘food related circuits of value’ ([56] p. 927) which gives the concept of value a very broad meaning as it may relate to financial, social, cultural, environmental, or ethical values. Indeed, the financial value and non-financial values that consumers and producers assign to food differ for each individual and/or community, and the values consumers assign to purchasing goods from different forms of AFN may also vary. For instance, from a European research perspective, the value customers assign to purchasing goods at farmers’ markets is more aimed at social issues, such as supporting local farmers, strengthening local food systems or other ethical, responsible or green values [57–59]. However, in Pokorná et al.’s research [60], consumer focus at farmers’ markets was mostly based on personal values such as feeling good for buying high quality food, protecting one’s own family, learning something, and spending one’s free time ‘profitably’.

These AFNs are creating and maintaining niches in the food environment, both supporting and supported by a different set of values that extend beyond monetary exchange. Analysis of the literature reveals a typology of non-financial values, termed ‘alter-values’ in this research. As a result, this research contributes to the body of literature researching the non-financial values associated with wider food environments by conceptualizing and framing these alter-values in order to inform future empirical research.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The methodological approach in this review is composed of two phases with phase 1 being the foundational structured literature search. Phase 2 was the analysis of the secondary data to develop a synthesized iterative discourse and in doing so a typology of alter-values was developed and presented in the results section and a conceptual model is presented in the discussion. The narrative associated with the structured literature review drew the research in phases 1 and 2 together to answer the research question:

How can alternative values (alter-values) be conceptualized (reimagined) in order to frame future research on the sustainability of food systems and food environments?

#### Phase 1

The following databases: Science Direct, Google Scholar, and Google (to include gray literature) were searched and the search terms were used in a series of combinations, i.e., through a structured literature review method. We initially used a keyword and keyphrase search. Table 1 lists some of the foundational search terms and emergent questions considered.

The structured literature review was grounded by a foundational snowball literature search using a series of iterative searches. In undertaking the searches for the various combinations of search terms, all relevant papers were collated from the first 5 pages of the search results and the titles and abstracts considered for relevancy and any duplication was removed [61,62]. The papers were then read in full, or where the sources were audio based listened to in full ( $n = 100$ ) and screened for relevance and appropriateness in supporting the discursive narrative, the development of the typology, and underpinning of the argument in this paper.



### Phase 2

Analysis and synthesis of the secondary data combined with iterative collaborative discussions between the authors informed the construction of the typology and the reimagining of the construct of non-financial food values (alter-values). This methodological approach is in line with other work that seeks to develop frameworks based on an imagined reality of “an as yet undeveloped system.” [63]. This speculative worldbuilding allows research questions to be considered via plausible, tangible albeit fictional, concepts in the abstract to provide grounded insight into the question and then to inform future empirical study [63].

**Table 1.** Search terms used in the structured literature search.

Foundational Term (Keyword or Keyphrase)	Term Iterations or Emergent Questions Considered
‘Food values’	‘Food consumption value’ ‘values associated with food’ ‘non-financial food values’ ‘What is value?’ ‘Value creation’
‘How do consumers value food?’	‘consumer perceptions of value’ ‘emotions around food’
‘Social value of food’	‘community eating’ ‘conviviality’
‘Food culture’	‘How strong is food culture in the UK?’ ‘Emotions in food culture’ ‘Multigenerational cooking’ ‘Multigenerational food preparation’ ‘Food memories’
‘Alternative food networks—food values’	‘Is food valued differently in alternative food networks?’ ‘Do people have connection with food?’ ‘Linking producers and consumers’ ‘Perceptions in food markets’ ‘Growing own food’ ‘Local food’ ‘Food in community’ ‘Short food supply chains’
‘Do people value food differently in the UK compared to Mediterranean countries?’	‘Cultural value of food’ ‘Conviviality and food culture’
‘Fads and fashions in UK food’	‘Do people in the UK follow fads/fashions more than people in Mediterranean countries?’
‘Supermarketisation’	‘Food as convenience’ ‘Food as value for money’
‘Food environments’	‘Food environments and food value’ ‘Food environments and non-financial values’
‘Intrinsic value of food’	‘Do people value food intrinsically?’ ‘Respect of food’ ‘Growing own food- respect’ ‘Growing own food- taste’ ‘Trust and knowledge of local food’
‘Authenticity of food’	‘Authenticity in food’ ‘Authenticity in AFNs’
‘Food democracy’	‘Food citizenship’
‘Younger generations and cultural food consumption’	‘Younger generations’ ‘Cultural food consumption’

To seek answers to the primary research question posed, it was pertinent to consider the creation of a typology of the values (alternative values) assigned to food by individuals (including both producers and consumers, something lacking in previous classifications), communities, and within governance structures and especially their importance as perceived through a non-financial lens. The four alter-values proposed here are intrinsic value, emotio-cultural value, production-related value, and supply related value. Other studies also create iterative typologies of this kind [64,65], but here the focus was specific to alter-values.

#### 4. Results

The consideration of food environments allows us to evaluate the food system from an alternative perspective to purely financial and market value. The reasoning or consideration behind what food people buy and what influences their choice over and above cost is important [66]. The literature presents value in terms of the ‘transaction’, i.e., value as low price, value in terms of *what I want* (convenience, easy to prepare, consistent, little waste), *what I get* in quality for what I pay and what I get for what I give, i.e., its utility [67–69]. This leads to notions of ‘value that is added in the supply chain’ in terms of preparation, processing, increased functionality, and the service, direct to door, delivery times or store opening times. This consideration of value suggests that monetary exchange transactions include other values such as intrinsic aspects of the food, but only to the extent of their value-added contribution, rather than full/unqualified appreciation and any added social or environmental value that arguably cannot be fully appreciated/valued in monetary ‘value-added’ transactions. The aim here was thus to concentrate on non-financial values on their own, without being part of a wider pecuniary value. Their relevance is wide, applying also to consumers who have not actually consumed a particular food before, but they ‘respect’ it because of its associated social or cultural importance. These considerations are described as values and include health, taste, convenience and managing relationships [70] and pleasure and tradition [71].

Sheth et al. [72] listed values as *functional* (price, utilitarian and physical performance considerations), *conditional* (choices depending on situation), *social* (social class and/symbolic quality), *emotional* (capacity to arouse feelings), and *epistemic* (capacity to arouse curiosity, provide novelty or satisfy desire for knowledge) influencing consumer choices, although not specifically in a food context. Here they use the term values as a plural of value, rather than the alternative definition of values. These values are independent but can work together. Later, Dagevos, and van Ophem [73] created a typology of food consumption value: *product value* economically focused value-for-money, characteristics of the food itself (nutritional value or sensory properties), and price-quality relationship value; *process value* (consumer concerns about ecological and societal matters); *location value* (much of food budgets is spent out of home—considers physical setting, variety of food products, and experience characteristics, such as entertainment; can include opening hours, cleanness and cleanness of the presentation of food products, possibilities to shop quickly); and *emotional value* (experience, entertainment, (self)indulgence, identity or the story behind products or brands, ‘evocative meanings of food products and food production processes and producers’ reputation as well as the emotive appeal of places of consumption and points-of-purchase situations’). Whilst these typologies are of interest, there are some weaknesses. Firstly, they all present consumer-centered values, whereas there is a need to include both the non-financial values of all players within the food system, the omission in most typologies being values of producers, and to place food as the focus. Next, these typologies, as with broader food systems visualizations, exclude the intrinsic value of the food itself, the first of the alter-values presented herein: intrinsic value, emotio-cultural value, production-related value, and supply related value.

##### Intrinsic value

Food may be respected for its intrinsic worth: not in terms of its function alone (i.e., utilitarian and physical performance [72], shelf life, ease of preparation, or functionality),



but more fully for its intrinsic flavor, taste, freshness, smell etc. [69]. Taste and freshness are also considered to be of social value in a sustainable food system [41]. Dagevos and van Ophem [73] described this in part as product value, but it is positioned here that intrinsic value recognizes a food for what it is, rather than its economic considerations. Intrinsic value extends beyond instrumental value, but economic value can be derived from the intrinsic value [74]. Intrinsic value can be considered with three sub-elements:

**Intrinsic aspects**—where the composition of the food means it can be defined, such as a healthy, tasty product; or, conversely, unhealthy or unpalatable;

**Intrinsic health-related aspects**—where health claims are made and it is the health claims related to the food rather than the food itself that is valued; and

**Intrinsic respect aspects**—where the food is valued for what it is in its own right irrespective of any health attributes.

The intrinsic value of a food is not always articulated as a value because it will immediately demonize other foods that do not contain that attribute. For example, food businesses and regulators talk about healthy diets rather than healthy foods. The intrinsic value of food produced from animals extends to the need to respect and value the animal. Intrinsic value within food, or the natural world from which it is derived, is recognized from generation to generation within communities and is non-substitutable, non-reproducible, and can be linked with cultural heritage [74], or indeed religious belief. For instance, the Mediterranean diet is a ‘lifestyle model characterized by a healthy dietary pattern’ ([75] p. 130), thereby incorporating food, the way it is produced and supplied, into a way of life, where eating well encompasses not only the intrinsic value of food, but also aligns this with value that is social and cultural. Indeed, by having such a visceral understanding and approach to ‘more than food’ [76], this indeterminism may provide opportunity for greater deep-rooted intrinsic appreciation of food, but also for difference and acceptance. The possibility of intrinsic respect value or visceral value associated with food is open to producers, consumers, food supply chain workers, and politicians alike, and addresses the physical and socio-cultural aspects of the food environments especially. This visceral engagement with food and its meaning is at a juxtaposition with capitalist, political food economies based on monetary exchange value. The possibility of visceral value extends beyond the binaries of good or bad food, healthy or unhealthy food, and animal-derived or plant-derived food [77]. Thus, intrinsic value overlaps with emotio-cultural value.

#### **Emotio-cultural value**

When people grow, make, or prepare food themselves or with others it has an embedded emotio-cultural value, and they may appreciate the flavor, freshness, experience or memory-making of such food and as a result value it more than food from other sources. Indeed, studies have shown that if children are exposed to the growing process of vegetables and are involved in gardening at home, in the community or in school, their ability to identify vegetables increases as does their preference for them [7,78,79]. Emotio-cultural value is in part linked to the visceral nature of eating, combining feelings with roots, and how this affects the perception of the food itself.

Simply describing ‘emotional value’ associated with food as ‘feel goods’ [73] is consumer-centric and is limiting, with businesses playing to the whims of what consumers feel and how that might link to the branding or trying to enhance their self-image. Social identity theory suggests that the social category or affiliation which an individual believes they belong to provides a sense of who they are in that the defining characteristics of the group enable self-definition, i.e., it is the nature of belonging to a group which provides self-identity [80]. This self-image or self-identity can be linked to food. Market orientated self-identity acts as a personal cue to purchase a given product, and this can be framed by social norms forming an external pressure on purchasing decisions, mediated by price and notions of prestige, driving consumers to purchase such products [81].

Additionally, research suggests people often seek out food outlets “aligned with their self-perceived socioeconomic status” [66,82], i.e., ‘social value’ describes the social status reinforced by the consumption of specific foods [21], in specific locations. Yet, emotio-

cultural value is different as emotio-cultural value explains the values bringing individuals together as communities irrespective of their social status, i.e., a mechanism for social inclusion not social exclusion through defined boundaries of self-identity and association. It is also relevant to producers and consumers-citizens rather than specific societal groups. Examples of the exploration of emotio-cultural value, which contains an experiential value element has been considering food festivals and farmers' markets [83,84]. To explore cultural value further, social value may incorporate changing aspects that are of social importance, whereas cultural value remains constant in terms of values that represent as a more deeply-rooted worth. Whilst other typologies in the literature reflect the relevance of preserving eating habits with social significance in different communities, they do not expand on this construct further. However, emotio-cultural value may include value derived from the preservation of a food or the continuation of a food tradition, often encapsulated in a mainstream food product, but also from amalgamating new traditions within food cultures which allows for the continual developing of interactions between food and inclusive community identity, forming another component of a sustainable food system [41]. In the UK, The Long Table for instance is a non-market-based response, encapsulating community values and developing new community identity with inter-demographic eating and sharing of food; this and examples such as Riverford Organics where the workers are the owners of the organization, safeguarding emotio-cultural values, provide food-associated values that extend beyond monetary exchange.

The remit of emotio-cultural value is arguably extended in areas of the Mediterranean, where people in Greece or Italy, for example, may assign a greater importance to sharing, sociability, cooking, conviviality, and the imparting of food knowledge to the next generation when thinking about food and food culture; 'eating well' for some communities occurs only when quality food is shared as 'a social affair' [85–88], embedding emotio-cultural respect of food very deeply within local cultures and traditions. This multi-generational and inter-demographic conviviality and social support and food exchange, between individuals, families and villages is so intrinsic to their sociocultural heritage that it cannot be separated from their lifestyles [89,90]. Indeed, Fischler [86] extended this, positing that as 'you are what you eat', those sharing the same food become more like each other, and they bond through commensality [91,92]. Any foods associated with any of these practices, therefore, will hold an emotio-cultural value to those with these experiences even if no longer eaten with the same experience (for instance, eating spanakopita in London may bring back memories of eating spanakopita in rural Greece; therefore, the food has an emotio-cultural value to the consumer). Ergo, the value of food consumption is as much symbolic as it is real [73], and emotio-cultural value has been defined here to include how foods make us feel, the memories they create, the relationships they build (incorporating pleasure and identity, factors within the social value of a Sustainable Food System [41]). It therefore encompasses experiences or past incidents when food is used to bring people together, such as intergenerational food preparation, the handing down of traditions (creating food memories), or the assemblage of villagers in the square after work. Thus, it can include Dagevos and van Ophem's [73] locational value within it. In this regard, emotio-cultural value may be less influenced by the media of the time, self-image, and opinions, choices of others (which may be classed within social value) and more by cultural ties and community feelings. In summary, emotio-cultural value describes citizen and community-related responses to food rather than market-orientated consumer-related responses.

#### **Production-related value**

Thirdly, in addition to the previous two fundamental alter-values, there can be production-related value, i.e., food may be respected because of the way in which it was produced, for example ethically, sustainably, or with high animal welfare and as a result combining into a food production system respect for the producer, the methods of production they use, and how this has been undertaken on behalf of the consumer who ascribes to, or identifies with, these production standards. It therefore develops the process value characteristic of Dagevos and van Ophem [73] and especially addresses

the environmental and socio-cultural aspects of food environments. Sustainable diets are those diets with “low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations” ([93] p. 1). Alternatively, sustainable diets have been described as “protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources” ([94] p. 7). What it is to have a sustainable diet therefore in part relates to the production standards employed. The food supply chain has an important role in delivering sustainable performance for the whole food system [49] and different drivers operate at each step of the chain influencing the resilience and sustainability of the system. Green capitalism highlights a supermarket/agri-food-led creation of food networks where foods are characterized as regional, local, specialty [49], etc., but this does not mean they are supporting an alternative, alter-values based food system. Green capitalism fuels green consumerism, i.e., the ability of ‘consumer power to deliver more sustainable patterns of resource use’ ([95] p. 5). As such, green consumerism sits within wider ethical consumerism and production-related value in the context of the alter-values described herein and extends beyond simple market notions of efficiency and return on resources employed in order to reduce environmental impact (carbon or water footprint) of a given food product.

Ethical consumerism, often promoted in market-driven food supply chains, has been highlighted as the “political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motivations for choosing one product [or production method] over another.” [96]. More simply, ethical consumption requires consumers to take into account the effects of their food choice on the “reduction of [greenhouse gases] GHGs, protection of the tropical rainforest, or prevention of child labour ... fair prices to farmers ... animal welfare, preservation of biodiversity” ([97] p. 495). Thus, whatever the intrinsic value, the ‘origin’ of the food is an integral part of its ‘value’ [98]. Origin in this context is not intended to mean provenance, i.e., country of origin, locality or the emotio-cultural aspects of food, rather how the food is produced, and the associated ‘footprint’ derives its own innate value, extending the ‘quality’ domain of a sustainable food system [41].

Production-related value can have an exchange value associated with it, namely that higher welfare, or higher environmental standards for food production may be more expensive. This is linked to the consumer willingness to pay for such foods, but does this reflect social value as previously described rather than the location-based meaning explored herein? Scales [95] utilized treadmill theory to argue that this approach still involves extraction of natural resources and linking the processes of production to consumption without considering the values that drive the actors in the food system where workers (people, livestock, wildlife etc.) and the social relations that bind them to the object, in this case food, are not considered sufficiently when the priority is commodification and optimizing the exchange value associated with a sustainability label or claim. Here we consider production-related value to encompass aspects such as respect, fairness, and equity in the production of food.

#### **Supply related value**

Supply related value is the last alter-value. Supply related value relates to the structure of the supply chain, its specific attributes and how that might create non-financial value (e.g., retail centralized distribution logistics versus a local milk round from farm to village) via alterity of distribution, thus addressing economic, political, and socio-cultural aspects of the food environment. This means that the structure of supply has its own innate value. Renting et al. [99] identified three types of alternative or short food-supply-chains (SFSCs), namely direct selling (what would now be described as direct to consumer or DTC supply chains), organic farming, and quality production, suggesting that these types of chains allow primary producers (farmers) to retain more of the value within the product. Aubry and Kebir [100] considered SFSCs as being characterized as DTCs or having a small number of intermediaries between the farmer and the consumer and thus, according to [101], creating a ‘thickening’ of producer-consumer relationships via reduced social and

geographic proximity. Taking organic food production as an example, supply related value stems from both legal standards set by the EU Organic Regulation and furthered by the Soil Association in the UK, and from certification standards of the Organic Guarantee System defined by IFOAM [102,103] and their principles of organic agriculture: health, ecology, fairness, and care [104]. Organic production thus creates supply related value for producers and consumers, although organic supply chains may not always be considered SFSCs due to many stages within the chain, and so supply related value is not necessarily dependent on the length of the supply chain as it can be strengthened by production-related value. Within SFSCs, buying a similar food product from a SFSC rather than a supermarket may lead to value(s) being attributed to that food because of its place of acquisition, possibly due to the relationships and trust created between producer and consumer [105]. It is important to recognize that supply related value differs from production-related value in that it relates to the means by which the food reaches the consumer in terms of space, place and trust-based relationships.

Overlap occurs between supply related value and production-related value when considering the environmental footprint of the product and the idea of *terroir*, which are relevant to both. In addition to the alterity of product and the network that AFNs provide, alternative economic practices may also develop [24]; for instance, *Ökonauten eG* is an Agricultural Land Purchasing Cooperative in Berlin–Brandenburg: it provides production-related value due to soil conservation and organic practices, sustainable agriculture, being diverse and small-scale, and because it provides secure access to local land thus protecting a common good, and it provides supply related value due to the relationships created and solidarity between producers and consumers and providing local food. Supply related value can also lead to production-related value by facilitating epistemic value and interest in/appreciation for production through exposure to farmers. There is also overlap with aspects of emotio-cultural value. Production-related value and supply related value are perhaps the easiest alter-values to visualize (imagine) when considering food supply, the types of food networks currently in place, and consumer-driven aspects of producing food sustainably. The difference would be consideration within production-related value of effective resource use, and the juxtaposition between farm animals as production units and sentient beings. To create greater complexity still, and to reinforce the nature of alter values as systemic and part of enabling food environments, production-related value and supply related value can and in many cases do overlap with emotio-cultural value and intrinsic value considerations.

## 5. Discussion

Values can also be associated with food and our relationship with food. Values can be described as

“... abstract ideals such as freedom, equality and sustainability. Values define or direct us to goals, frame our attitudes, and provide standards against which the behavior of individuals and societies can be judged” ([106] p. 414).

Emotions influence food choice [107] and can impact the value we assign to food at different times. Production-related value and supply related value are potentially more susceptible to this than intrinsic value and emotio-cultural value which may change less with knowledge, mood, policy or fashions. Emotio-cultural value especially, as mentioned previously, can be deep-rooted. However, Connors et al., [70] found examples of consumers who were limiting their consumption of traditional ethnic/cultural foods because they now deemed them unhealthy, whilst other examples demonstrated differences between generations in what constituted a proper meal, with many cultural foods at odds with more westernized ones either preferred by a younger generation or merely more practical for a younger busier generation with less affinity toward the ‘domestic housewife’ role [108]. Younger generations also tend to prepare and consume a wider selection of cuisines, beyond the dishes their forebears wanted or knew how to cook [109]. Therefore, concepts like ‘culture’ can change and are not impermeable [110]. Whilst developing food cultures

can be desirable, the potential for food emotio-cultural value to reduce increases as it is replaced with production-related value or supply related value and certain types of intrinsic value [111]; for instance, research has found that whilst consumers fit into different categories, taste, nutrition/health, and price are generally the primary factors of importance in food choice [112–114], with tradition/culture and emotion being absent from studies which do not focus solely on these factors. Understanding and appreciating the original value of the food may help us to conserve the traditions associated with the food as well as recognizing food resources are valuable and adopting practices and behaviors that reduce food waste; campaigns to value food intrinsically appear untested as a means to reduce food waste, with most campaigns concentrating on food labelling and packaging (and some on household management); however, there is evidence that older generations tend to use food leftovers, both a cultural norm and a matter of frugality [115,116]. Multi-generational preparation and eating of a given traditional food together may be a custom in a family and the food as a result has intrinsic value and emotio-cultural value attached to it, but if younger family members start reducing their emotio-cultural value for the food and no longer wish to grow, prepare, or consume it with other family members [117], part of their culture may diminish. Inter-generational discourse about traditional foods could prevent this occurring and find ways of producing healthier or an alternative contemporary version of the food together. Emotio-cultural value may also be newly created: the growing bonds between adults and youth in community gardening brings different parts of the community together [118], creating food memories and cultural enhancement. The aspect here is the inclusive nature of emotio-cultural value rather than the more ego-centric aspects of promoting self-identity and status through the types of foods that are purchased and consumed.

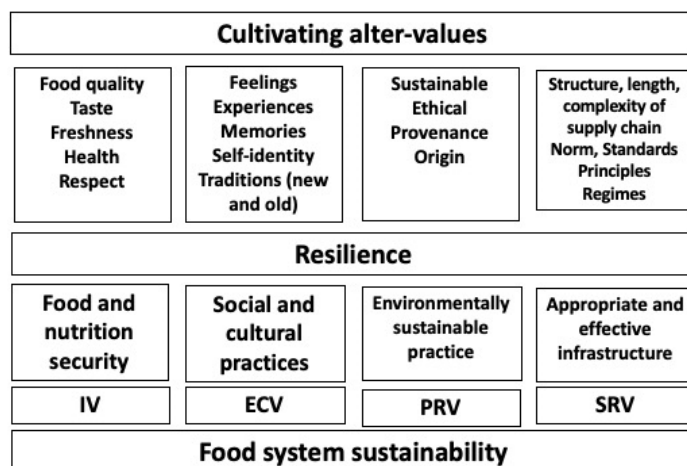
Many examples of alter-values can be witnessed within AFNs/SFSCs. AFNs can support the development of alter-values and begin creating new food environments, particularly adapting their physical and socio-cultural contexts where this is a particular intended outcome of growing, preparing, purchasing, and consuming food. Emotio-cultural value related to a food creates a connection with the food by means of memory or experience. The challenge, or perhaps the opportunity, is that intrinsic value and emotio-cultural value are more likely to be developed with the availability of time. The lack of time people in the UK have to commit to food, whether that be eating a healthy diet, sharing food with others, expanding their knowledge, time to shop, or even wishing to spend their time in other ways challenges the development of alter-values based food networks and the reimagining of food beyond its exchange value [119–121]. AFNs allow for new places within the food environment to develop, with different values associated with them, both financial and non-financial. AFNs create new possibilities of food discovery, acquisition, and consumption, whilst many also have the potential to develop community and an idea of citizenship around food. People meet around food; they share it and talk about it. They make connections and create new food memories. The COVID-19 pandemic may have caused people to reevaluate their priorities and provided a break from the normal working patterns and may result in long-term change in our food systems—part of the idea of ‘bouncing forward’ [122].

The dominant market approach to food supply involves an emphasis on creating choice and convenience for consumers, whilst providing healthy or more sustainable food products and in the end putting responsibility back onto consumers to do the right thing. Focus, in this context, is on production and supply related value and associated structural values for how to achieve sustainability, etc.; however, here we step back and consider the food itself and the connected emotio-cultural relationships with, rather than the design of, the system itself. This allows a food-orientated viewpoint that goes beyond food systems to consider the food environment.

Figure 1 presents the alter-values and their interconnection with food system sustainability. The overall systems values described for intrinsic value, emotion-cultural value, production-related value, and supply related value are summarized in this table. These



combined values create resilience in the food system which in turn leads to its sustainability long-term. The window design of the visual represents of the typology demonstrates the requirement for appropriate framing of governance structures and the need for transparency throughout a sustainable food system and in the connections with the wider food environment.



**Figure 1.** Summary figure of alter-values typology. Key: IV—intrinsic value, ECV—emotion-cultural value, PRV production-related value, and SRV—supply related value.

The alter-values typology allows for wider discussion and debate, and also specific focus on smaller-scale relationships and values in AFNs. Translating from a focus on production and supply related values to intrinsic and emotio-cultural value requires the establishment of new models of food citizenship that could support the shift from consumer to citizen-based consumption practices. Through understanding the context of the food environment, we can support a shift away from the dominant exchange value market system and promote alter-values as a means to engage and promote healthy and sustainable food choices. Education may be one way to do this and creating multi-generational and multi-demographic links within communities and between AFNs may be another. By focusing on the development of alter-values, consumers can be encouraged to nurture a relationship with food and increase their food knowledge, the development of trust between consumers, producers, those involved in AFNs, and in communities generally, and supporting change which is bottom-up and appropriate for those communities. The alter-values therefore aid us in working towards a ‘moralization’ and ‘civilization’ of food economies, towards a food citizenship that surpasses merely economic and goods exchange ([123] p. 304) towards ‘ethical foodscapes’ [77] and moving from being consumers to citizen driven. Renting et al. suggested that such Civic Food Networks (CFNs) have the ability to ‘produce relational goods, by allowing the exchange of meanings and values and sharing the enjoyment of food production and consumption as social and identity-reinforcing activities’ ([123] p. 300). In other words, CFNs are constructed from and provide a space to develop alter-values. They could help evolve greater food democracy by readdressing and reimagining the food environment currently in place as ‘people can and should be actively participating in shaping the food system, rather than remaining passive spectators on the sidelines’ ([124] p. 79). By developing the alter-values and reimagining our food environment, we see food as more than a transactional good, we see it as life, we can understand how it has helped develop cultures throughout the centuries, brought other cultures together, and has the potential to become the bedrock of a healthy physical, social, mental and psychologically healthy society if only time and socio-economic factors allowed it to be.



## 6. Conclusions

In order to value life, of humans and other creatures, we must value food [1]. Living within a financial exchange-dominant world, the financial value of food to farmers, producers, those in the food system, and consumers is important. The financial value impacts each of these groups of people, whether beneficially or negatively, individually. Financial focus, except in some areas where practices such as cooperatives are more common, does not encourage communities or people to work together, support each other, or concentrate on aspects of the food itself beyond what will sell well, what people get for their money, and keeping the prices of food as low as possible. For instance, wanting to keep food prices low not only reduces peoples' appreciation/respect of the food, but also of the farmer/producer. By not valuing their product, we do not value those who produce it either. The research question this paper sought to address is:

How can alternative values (alter-values) be conceptualized (reimagined) in order to frame future research on sustainable food systems and food environments?

The alter-values presented herein updated previous approaches to defining non-financial values in food systems and the wider food environment. These provide a framework from which to conceptualize where non-financial values can be captured and opportunities for reframing in order to truly appreciate food, and therefore life, and to increase resilience in the food system. Having an intrinsic value of food beyond the health benefits it provides, and emotio-cultural connections with different foods and dishes, creates food-related value that directly aligns with communities within a heterogeneous society.

This paper contributes to the existing literature by positioning the alter-value typologies and describing, comparing and contrasting the four alter-values. This allows for the updating and evolving of the conversation around typologies assigned to the non-financial value of food and how these align with definitions of the food system and the food environment. The breadth or depth of food environments is difficult to comprehend but defining food systems is insufficient to start reimagining the supply chains and food networks within these food environments. The creation, especially of intrinsic value and emotio-cultural value, are new concepts which allow for the analysis of food's most basic worth to us, upon which other value criteria and values should be based.

AFNs are contemporary examples of where alter-values are embedded in product development, marketing production, and distribution to create niches within the current food environment. However, focusing on cultivating these intrinsic value and emotio-cultural values could enable the adaptation of the current food environment beyond this pecuniary-based concentration on production-related value and supply related value, and thus begin to challenge the structure of the conventional system towards a more citizen-driven basis, altering priorities, with a drive to value not only food, but also to increase resilience in the food system and therefore its sustainability. The alter-values typology will thus be of value to academics, policymakers, and those working in the food sector as they consider how to reimagine supply chains to be more sustainable and resilient and also provide demonstrable added value (pecuniary and non-financial) to consumers and producers. Expectations of transparency and trust related to purchasing in retail and food services will require multiple actors to consider the values that extend beyond monetary exchange. However, the possibility also arises to develop more direct food supply chains which are embedded within communities, 'bouncing forward' to aid local resilience and food security and additionally to developing trust-based local food cultures and communities.

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