Eat4Climate

Network article #1

Change citizen diet to cut city carbon emissions

URBACT

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Eat4Climate: the European cities changing citizen diet to cut carbon emissions

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"In Mouans-Sartoux, people are surrounded by sustainable food"

In the French Riviera town of Mouans-Sartoux, schoolchildren eat organic vegetables harvested a few kilometres away, disadvantaged families pick up subsidised produce from a municipal grocery, and cooking workshops are as common as sports clubs. Sustainable food is not hidden in specialist stores or reserved for environmental enthusiasts. It is woven into everyday life.

"For people here, sustainable food is everywhere," says Gilles Pérole, deputy mayor for food policy. "People are surrounded by it."

That deceptively simple idea has become the foundation of Eat4Climate, a new URBACT Transfer Network bringing together six European territories determined to cut their climate impact by changing how people eat.

The Good Practice and why it was selected

The premise is startlingly pragmatic. Food accounts for roughly a quarter of citizens' climate footprint, more than many realise. And while cities often focus on transport, buildings or energy systems, Mouans-Sartoux has spent the last 25 years proving that local food policy can become a powerful climate tool.

The municipality of 11,200 inhabitants did not begin with radical slogans. Instead, it quietly redesigned its food ecosystem. In 2012, it became one of the first European towns to serve 100% organic meals in school canteens without increasing costs, largely by slashing food waste. It purchased farmland and created a six-hectare municipal organic farm that now supplies most vegetables for local schools. It established the MEAD – Maison d'Éducation à l'Alimentation Durable – a sustainable food education centre organizing cooking classes, gardening activities, farm visits and family food challenges.

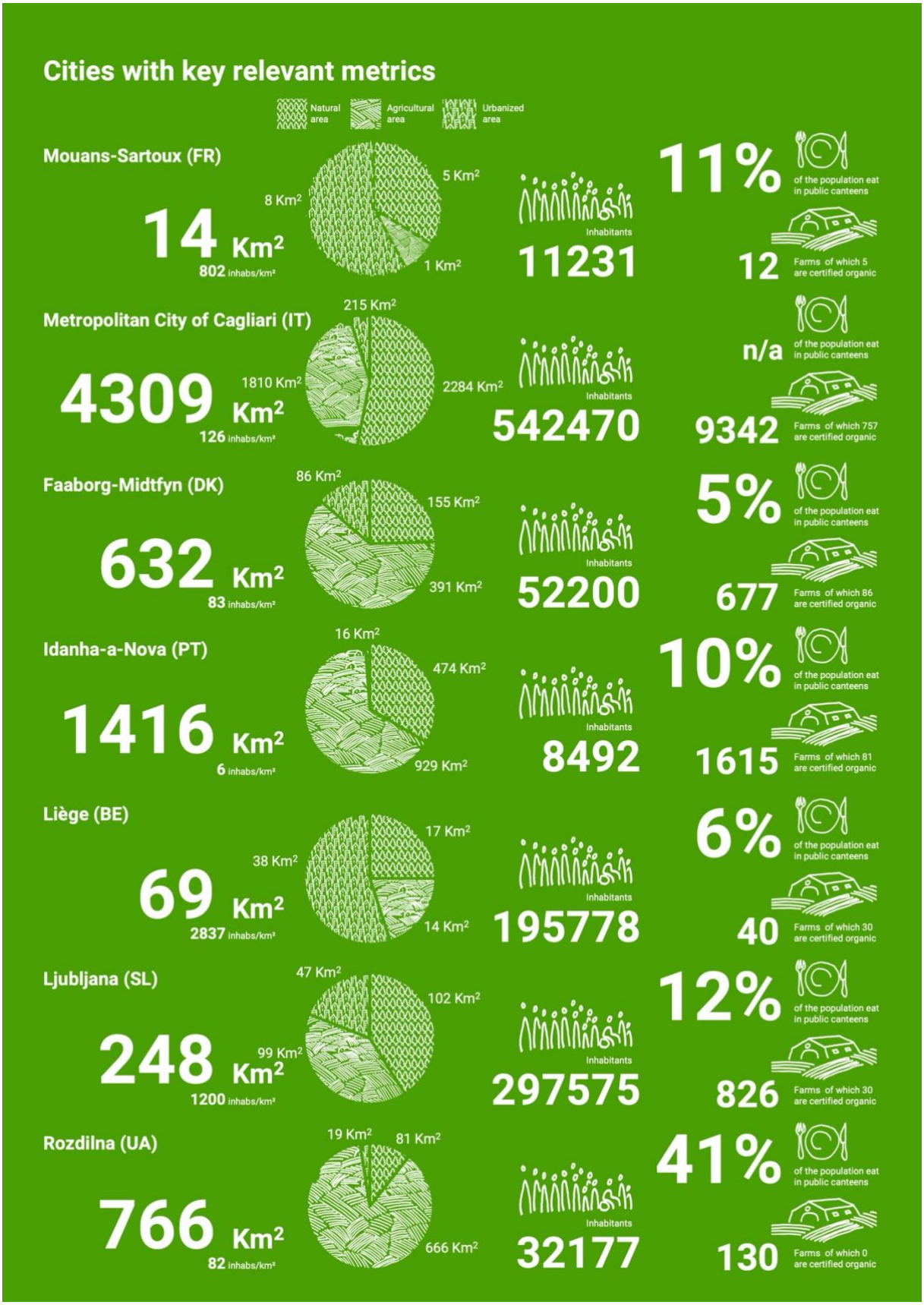
The results have been measurable. Researchers using Territorial Life Cycle Assessment estimated that the town reduced the carbon footprint of residents' food consumption by 26%. Meat consumption dropped, ultra-processed food and food waste declined sharply, and purchases of organic food increased.

But the real innovation may lie elsewhere: Mouans-Sartoux understood that food behaviour changes only when sustainable choices become normal, accessible and socially reinforced.

Behavioural scientists call this an "installation" – an environment where materials, competences and meanings align. In practice, that means citizens need access to sustainable food, the skills to prepare it, and a culture that values it.

Mouans-Sartoux did not simply tell people to eat differently. It changed the context in which decisions are made.

The partner cities and their motivations for joining the network



Now six very different European territories are asking whether the model can work for them too.

The partners of Eat4Climate stretch from the Mediterranean to Scandinavia, from post-industrial Belgium to rural Portugal and wartime Ukraine. Each arrives with different political powers, food cultures and economic realities. Yet all face the same dilemma: climate neutrality will remain impossible without changing diets.

In the **Metropolitan City of Cagliari**, Sardinia's expanding metropolitan authority sees food policy as a way to reconnect fragmented territories. The region retains strong Mediterranean traditions, but processed foods and supermarket dependency are rising fast, while obesity rates are increasing among children and adults alike.

Cagliari's answer is ambitious. Five former markets are being transformed into multifunctional food hubs under the "Cittadella del Cibo" project, blending food education, social access and community activity. Metropolitan authorities hope these hubs can become living laboratories for climate-friendly eating.

The challenge is political as much as cultural. Cagliari does not directly control school catering, which is outsourced and fragmented across municipalities. Yet officials believe food can become a unifying issue linking public health, agriculture and social cohesion across the South Island territory.

Further north, Denmark's **Faaborg-Midtfyn** municipality confronts a different reality. Here, meat-heavy diets remain deeply embedded in rural culture, shaped by generations of pig farming and agricultural identity.

The municipality has no formal food strategy. Children typically bring sandwiches to school rather than eat hot meals, and climate-friendly diets are often perceived as urban or elitist concerns.

Yet beneath the surface, small openings are appearing. Across the municipality, 65 volunteer-led community dinners already gather residents around shared meals. Regenerative farmers are experimenting with low-impact production. And a former industrial site – the Butchery Building – is being converted into a future food hub combining businesses, public services and citizen initiatives.

For local organisers, the project offers a way to reconnect climate policy with everyday pleasures rather than sacrifice. "Eat4Climate inspired us," say community organisers Rikke Dyrgaard Kapersen and Karin Lykkegaard. "We could create recipes people actually want to cook at home."

In Portugal's **Idanha-a-Nova**, the paradox is almost the opposite. The municipality has become internationally recognised as a bio-region and boasts more than 17,000 hectares of certified organic farmland. Yet much of that production is exported or sold into premium markets, while local food habits remain relatively unchanged.

Officials describe a lingering cultural contradiction. Traditional plant-based diets once associated with poverty were abandoned during decades of modernisation. Meat-heavy consumption became associated with prosperity.

Eat4Climate offers the municipality an opportunity to rebuild what local actors call "food literacy": reconnecting citizens with local organic production through schools, cooking education and community events. The city plans to create a Sustainable Food Education Centre inspired by Mouans-Sartoux's MEAD model, while expanding organic public canteens already serving schools and elderly care facilities.

Liège, meanwhile, may be the network's most politically complex partner. The Belgian city already possesses one of Europe's most vibrant food-transition ecosystems, built over more than a decade through citizen movements such as the Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liégeoise, or Food Belt and the recently launched Food Policy Strategy.

Organic school meals, food cooperatives, anti-waste programmes and urban food festivals already exist. Yet officials acknowledge that these initiatives remain fragmented and struggle to compete against the city's overwhelming fast-food environment.

"If in Mouans-Sartoux people are surrounded by sustainable food, here in Liège we are surrounded by junk food," says Émile Farcy, one of the city's food policy coordinators.

The city strongly counts on Eat4Climate to help connect its many scattered initiatives into something more systemic – not isolated projects, but a visible ecosystem capable of influencing daily habits across the wider population.

Ljubljana may be the partner closest to Mouans-Sartoux in spirit. Slovenia's capital combines a strong food heritage with an extensive network of school food programmes, farmers' markets and local producers.

Yet, as elsewhere in Europe, meat-heavy diets remain the norm and many sustainable food initiatives operate in isolation. City leaders see Eat4Climate as an opportunity to connect these efforts into a more coherent system that reaches beyond public institutions and influences everyday household choices.

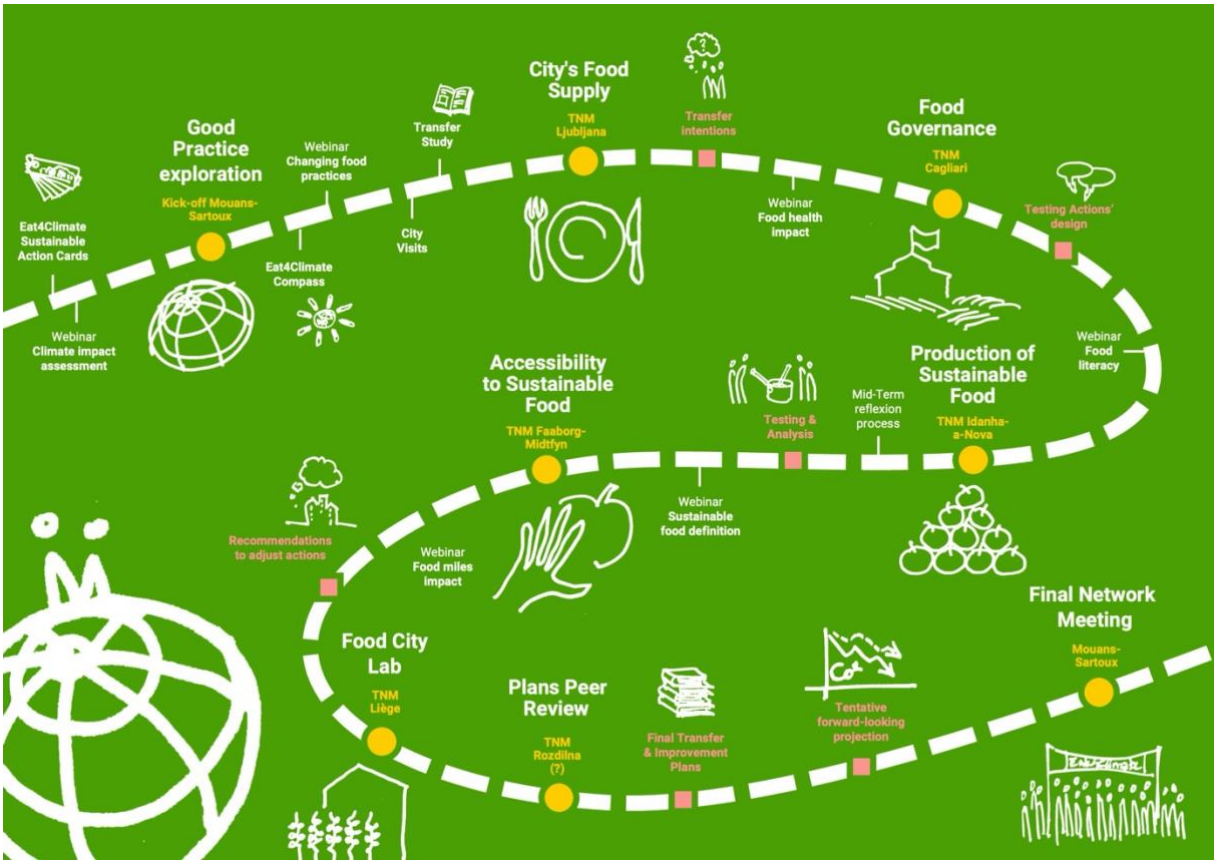
By linking food education, local sourcing, urban agriculture and community engagement, Ljubljana hopes to reach 45% food self-sufficiency and to create an environment where sustainable eating becomes a natural part of daily life.

For **Rozdilna**, in southern Ukraine, sustainable food is closely linked to resilience. Despite the challenges created by the war, the municipality remains committed to improving food security, public health and climate action.

The city already serves thousands of meals daily through schools and social services, giving it a valuable starting point for change.

While home cooking and local food traditions remain strong, organic production is limited and processed foods are becoming more common. Through Eat4Climate, Rozdilna aims to develop its first comprehensive food strategy, using schools, local producers and community initiatives to encourage healthier and more sustainable eating habits.

How the transfer will take place and adapt to different local contexts



Eat4Climate Transfer Journey

The transfer itself will not involve simply copying French policies into different territories. URBACT's methodology instead treats Mouans-Sartoux as a modular system that cities can adapt to local conditions.

The network is structured around six transfer modules covering food governance, public catering, food education, social access, sustainable production and behavioural change. Rather than importing a single model, cities will combine and adapt actions according to their own powers and constraints.

A Danish municipality without school canteens will not replicate the French approach directly. A Portuguese bio-region with abundant organic production faces different barriers than a dense Belgian city dominated by supermarkets. Cagliari's metropolitan governance requires coordination across 70 municipalities, while smaller territories can move more directly.

To navigate these differences, partners will create local "Food City Labs" bringing together public authorities, schools, producers, NGOs, retailers and citizens. The aim is not only to test policies but to create what Mouans-Sartoux calls a "default ecosystem" for sustainable food.

The network also intends to avoid one of the common weaknesses of urban sustainability projects: the absence of measurable impact. Alongside practical experimentation, cities will use simplified assessment tools – including the Eat4Climate Compass – to evaluate how actions influence climate emissions, health, food justice and social cohesion.

Eat4Climate Compass, an orientation climate impact rough assessment tool for action (photo credits: François Jégou)

Expectations for the journey ahead and main objectives of the network

No one involved pretends the transformation will be easy. Mouans-Sartoux itself took decades to build its ecosystem. Budget constraints, political resistance, industrial agriculture and deeply rooted food habits remain formidable obstacles across Europe.

But the project's underlying argument is increasingly difficult to ignore.

For years, climate policy has largely treated food as a secondary issue, overshadowed by energy and mobility. Eat4Climate reverses that hierarchy. It assumes that what citizens eat every day may prove as important as how they heat their homes or drive their cars.

The ambition is not to moralise diets or impose technocratic solutions. It is to make sustainable food visible, accessible and ordinary enough that people choose it almost without noticing.

In other words, to surround people with sustainable food until change becomes the easiest option available.

Across Europe, a growing number of cities now want to see whether that quiet revolution can travel.