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A people-centred approach to food policy making: Lessons from Canada's People's Food Policy project

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on a major public engagement process that was established to develop a Pan-Canadian food policy based on the principles of food sovereignty. We present an account of the People's Food Policy (PFP) as a social and political experiment that mobilized a diversity of civil society networks and Indigenous people to establish transformative spaces and processes for (re)claiming control of the food system. We argue that the PFP process was a successful, yet imperfect model of a people-centred, counter-hegemonic policy-making process enacted through food movement networks that provided important lessons for advancing public participation in decision making and action.

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Introduction

The dominant food system is primarily focused on increasing profits and control for corporate elites while ignoring the fundamental needs of the broader population.¹⁻³ This has had a devastating impact on ecosystems⁴ and contributed to social unrest and economic crisis around the globe.⁵ Despite public efforts to regulate the ways that food comes to our plates, policy frameworks that enable and constrain food-related practices are typically scattered among a variety of government jurisdictions, departments and agencies that often have contradicting objectives.^{6,7} Recognizing these challenges, many analysts have called for increased democracy within policy-making processes to ensure greater accessibility and accountability to address structural problems within the dominant food system.⁸⁻¹⁰

This paper reflects on a major public engagement process that was established to develop a Pan-Canadian, people-centred food policy process based on the principles of food sovereignty – the concept that people should have the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and to define their own food systems.¹¹ Between 2008 and 2011, the People's Food Policy (PFP) project mobilized and engaged over 3,500 Canadians and Indigenous people in

conversations about policy priorities required to transform the dominant food system. The cumulative report, *Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada*,¹² was launched in April 2011 in the midst of a federal election campaign, receiving the support of two major political parties and recognition from a vast array of civil society organizations and social movements across the globe.

We present an account of the PFP as a social and political experiment that mobilized a diversity of civil society networks and established a series of transformative spaces and processes for (re)claiming control of the food system. Our analysis draws primarily on a collective autoethnography of the two authors who participated in the PFP project, triangulated with an analysis of publicly accessible archival materials. We point to a number of factors that contributed to the PFP, including the governance and leadership, the Kitchen Table Talk (KTT) engagement process, the collaborative writing process and commitments to engaging the tensions that emerged from working across diverse cultural, geographic and ideological communities. Our discussion highlights key successes and limitations of the PFP processes and learnings about the power of public participation in food policy making and social movement building. We conclude that the PFP process was a successful, yet imperfect model of a people-centred, counter-hegemonic policy-making process enacted through a network of networks. The primary strength was its ability to foster transformational experiences that did far more than develop a Pan-Canadian policy platform. Ultimately, the PFP contributed to building the strength of Canada's food movements, operationalizing a food sovereignty discourse and envisioning new possibilities for civil society engagement in moving forward a democratic agenda.

A people-centred approach to food policy making

Food policy in Canada

Food systems can be described as the various processes and infrastructures involved in feeding a population, including growing and harvesting, processing, distribution, marketing, wholesaling, retailing, consumption and the disposal of waste. Analysts conceptualize the food system as an interactive, interdependent web of activities and relationships that influence the “how and why and what we eat”.^{13(p1)} Food policy is the intersection of multiple competing issues including trade, labour, consumption, nutrition and health, environment, science and technology, and culture. Coordinated and enforced by the state and other governing institutions, most policy is intended to guide planning and action towards a specific set of goals or outcomes. Lang et al. suggest a definition of food policy as the “complex webs of interaction and, centrally, about how policies – deliberate and unintended – affect food and

its outcomes: who eats, what, when and how”.^{9(p22)} In an ideal scenario, Lang et al. argue that food policy must address the whole system and not just specific sectors of concern. Further, their research shows that contemporary policy making faces considerable complexity and as a result should be open to ongoing debate through engaging the diverse groups that are most impacted.

In Canada, food policy making processes are often perceived to be top down, ignoring the root causes of food systems challenges.¹⁴ A small number of food corporations, from seed and chemical companies to retail conglomerates, have dominated key segments of the food system, placing a disproportionate amount of economic and political power in a few hands that are regulated primarily through voluntary compliance.^{15,16} Unfettered faith in free markets have led many nation states to relinquish much of their decision-making power to multilateral and bilateral organizations regulated through trade agreements. Further, neoliberal austerity measures driven by increased privatization and deregulation limit the state’s ability to define the rules of conduct.¹⁷ As a result, most harvesters and producers, workers, and eaters are marginalized from the decision-making structures of the dominant food system and have limited input into the policies that regulate their activities.

Like most countries in the global north, Canada has no comprehensive or integrated national food policy or government body that considers the interactions of the multiple elements of the food system.¹⁸ Instead, food policy is fragmented among a range of jurisdictions, government departments and agencies. For example, the federal government has jurisdiction over most social welfare programs and national health care planning, while the provinces have administrative power over most food-related departments such as health, agriculture, education, labour, and some social services. Further, municipal governments are responsible for public health (including food inspection and health education), water supply, urban and regional planning, housing, recreation, transportation, and most social programs. Each of these government responsibilities weigh into decision making in the food system, as well as the impacts on health and the environment. This fragmented approach to food “hinders rational analysis of problems and the development of effective policy”.^{19(p570)}

Several Canadian organizations have produced their own visions of a national food strategy, including the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (2010), the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute (2011), and the Conference Board of Canada (2014). While in opposition in 2010, two of Canada’s major political parties (the Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party) also considered what a national food strategy might look like, and in 2016, the governing Liberal Party announced plans to develop a national food policy through the Ministry of Agriculture. While these efforts all contribute

to an ongoing national conversation, none of these take a food systems approach, and all have failed to engage the broader public. As a result, advocates have called for an integrated food policy making process that establishes opportunities for meaningful and democratic participation.²⁰

A people-centred approach

Spurred by skepticism of government and a disquiet with representative democracy, many people are seeking more meaningful ways to engage in policy making and governance. One of the core principles of a democracy is that people should have the ability to participate in civic life and an opportunity to provide input into matters that affect the broader public.²¹ Drawing on theories of deliberative democracy, many argue that legitimate decisions must be preceded by an authentic process of discussion and negotiation. Beyond voting for representative leaders, this entails supporting active and critical citizen engagement.²² These approaches have been put into practice through frameworks of public engagement, which “values the right of citizens to have an informed say in the decisions that affect their lives”.^{23(p4)} Through these frameworks, public decision-making through deliberation is considered a goal of governance while recognizing that there are measures governments can take to engage with the public to inform decision making.

Central to these ideal models of engaged governance is the notion that those most affected by a situation possess important knowledge necessary for developing solutions. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion argues that health is improved when people have control over the means of producing health.²⁴ For example, those living with food insecurity offer lived experiences and perspectives into the way that food systems work (and could work differently).^{25,26} Creating food policy that is rooted in principles of equity and ecological sustainability requires meaningful engagement from civil society, and specifically the people that produce, harvest, gather, process, distribute and eat food.^{14,27}

As part of engaged governance, Korten describes a people-centred approach as “the need to strengthen institutional and social capacity supportive of greater local control, accountability, initiative, and self-reliance ... [with] a high priority placed on a process of democratization”.^{28(p145–6)} Similarly, Samuel argues for a people-centred approach as an organized set of actions targeting public policies and socio-political processes that engage diversity within the broader public. Its ultimate goal is social transformation rooted in a desire to “challenge and change unjust power relations at all levels”.^{29 (p617)} Further, a people-centred approach goes beyond only state relations to engage citizens as well as undocumented and disenfranchised people who are active members of society. Thus, a people-centred approach “is about mobilizing the politics of the people to ensure that the politics of

the state is accountable, transparent, ethical, and democratic”.³⁰ As we will argue in the proceeding sections, the PFP was an example of a people-centred, counter-hegemonic policy-making process enacted through food movement networks that provided key lessons for advancing public participation in decision making and action.

Food movements in Canada

Canadian food movements can be conceived of as a “network of networks” made up of a range of initiatives connected across sectors, scales and places.³¹ These networks are constituted by individuals and organizations that have diverse objectives from making small reforms within the existing system to complete transformation.^{32,33} Accordingly, there is no singular entity that is *the* movement but rather, it is made up of heterogeneous, decentralized and deeply connected networks engaged in a range of actions and critical reflections about existing and possible future food systems.^{34,35}

While there had been many historical accounts of sector specific organizing around food systems issues (e.g., Indigenous rights, labour, fishing and farming, health and the environment), it was not until the late 1970s that Canada experienced the first large-scale multi-sector mobilization.³¹ The People’s Food Commission (PFC), the forerunner to the PFP, ran from 1977–1980 and was developed in response to the early impacts of neoliberal restructuring, including rising inflation and unemployment, increasing fuel, housing and food prices and deteriorating working conditions in food and farming industries. It “began with the assumption that everyday experience is a valuable source of information, and that people’s stories about how things work and fit together have an important validity”.^{36(p7)} Designed as a people-centred Pan-Canadian effort, the PFC held over 70 public hearings and documented thousands of stories rooted in people’s personal and professional experiences. *The Land of Milk and Money*, the final report of the PFC, adopted a comprehensive food systems lens and presented an analysis of the industrial food system along with a critical view of corporate power. Limited resources and lack of political will to address the PFC’s recommendations stalled its efforts; however, the process of mobilizing people around the country to contribute to a collective understanding and analysis of the food system cultivated a diverse group of food initiatives over the preceding three decades.

In 2007, a small group of civil society leaders attended the International Forum for Food Sovereignty in Nyéléni, Mali. Inspired by the PFC and the expanding global movement to advance food sovereignty, the group worked to obtain support and funding to establish the PFP. The project had an explicit goal of creating a people-centred, national food policy platform rooted in food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is a collective action frame

adopted by food movements that has gained popularity in Canada and around the world.^{37,38} It is the belief that food is a basic human right and that democratic engagement is fundamental to its realization. Food sovereignty was developed through collaborative dialogue between global peasant organizations to challenge political and economic power in the dominant food system. Originally proposed by La Via Campesina, food sovereignty “puts the aspirations, needs and livelihoods of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations”.³⁹

Food sovereignty is premised on seven pillars, the first six (food for people, build knowledge and skills, works with nature, values food providers, localizes food systems and puts control locally) were developed at the 2007 International Forum for Food Sovereignty and the seventh pillar (food is sacred) was added by members of the Indigenous Circle as part of the PFP process. This additional pillar recognizes that food is an integral part of cultural livelihoods, a gift of life and that it cannot be commodified.

Methodology

This paper builds on the personal experiences of the authors and a review of archival materials to reconstruct the story of the PFP and reflect on its successes, limitations and impacts. We took a paradigmatic approach to this study by employing a methodology congruent with the philosophical orientation of the research framework.⁴⁰ This influenced our choice of methods, and how we gathered, analyzed and interpreted the data. Specifically, we used collective autoethnography, a form of embedded participation and observation. Building on traditional forms of autoethnography that involve self-reflection to explore the sociocultural meanings of experiences,⁴¹ collective autoethnography puts two or more independent experiences into conversation through inter-subjective analysis. Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez write, “the combination of multiple voices to interrogate a social phenomenon creates a unique synergy and harmony that autoethnographers cannot attain in isolation”.^{42(p24)} The two authors were active members of the PFP; Amanda Sheedy was the paid coordinator of the PFP from 2008–2011 and Charles Levkoe was part of a policy writing team that analyzed the contributions, drafted, distributed and edited the final discussion papers. As part of the research for this paper, we reviewed field notes and other personal documentation recorded during the PFP project. We used these to critically reflect on our experiences in writing. These writings were then shared, negotiated and synthesized to collectively recount a narrative of the PFP.

We also triangulated our personal reflections through a review and analysis of publicly accessible archival materials. This involved a detailed review

of hundreds of documents and participant contributions, event summaries, and feedback surveys from participants collected between September 2009 and February 2011. The review consisted of both authors reading through the different documents and identifying patterns as well as highlighting common and divergent perspectives. One of the primary sources of data came from a detailed report conducted for Heifer International Canada (the primary funder of the PFP project). This report was based on reflective evaluations with volunteer leaders during the final months of the project in February 2011. Public documents were also analyzed including promotional materials, attendee lists, summary papers and published materials. Details from these analyses were integrated into our collective narrative of the PFP and helped to fill gaps in these narratives to identify (and correct) inconsistencies in our accounts.

One of the challenges in reconstructing the PFP story is that there was limited tracking of who participated beyond the volunteer leaders and the analysis/writing teams. At the time, this was a deliberate decision to reduce the administrative burden, lessen reporting requirements and avoid further marginalizing participants (e.g., people living in poverty, racialized and Indigenous peoples). For each event, volunteer hosts reported on numbers and estimated the different groups represented at community meetings. Based on these reports, it was concluded that approximately 3,500 people participated in the PFP process and that a range of groups were involved including farmers, fishers, business people, public health workers, food workers, civil society organizers, teachers, parents, students, low-income and Indigenous people. These reports also identified that food related retailers, processors and transporters largely missing from the process.

Recounting the people's food policy process

The PFP effectively began in 2008, when a team of animators embedded in local communities were recruited to host and facilitate KTTs around the country. Similar to a Community Conversations approach,⁴³ KTTs were designed as community-driven, semi-structured meetings that took place in a range of spaces including homes, public parks, non-profit organizations, community centers, public schools and universities. Their goal was to create a welcoming and inclusive space unique to each community that would deepen existing networks and enable collaborative dialogue to explore key food systems' challenges while putting forth recommendations for change. Writing teams made up of volunteers from the academic and non-profit sectors were recruited to gather and synthesize the recommendations. They prepared ten discussion papers that were circulated back to communities for review and comment (available at <https://foodsecurecanada.org/resources-news/newsletters/discus>

Table 1. A timeline of the People's Food Policy project.

November 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established animator team • Launched PFP at FSC's biennial assembly in Ottawa, Ontario
January–February 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secured funding from Heifer International Canada • Hired project coordinator • Established steering committee and management team
March–June 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed KTT approach for public engagement • Established the Indigenous Circle
May–July 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established policy writing teams and communications team • Developed pamphlet series outlining core principles of food sovereignty
September–November 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiated first round of KTTs • Established senior editorial team
January–March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafted ten policy discussion papers • Held retreat to host in-depth dialogue on discussion papers and agree on process going forward in the Laurentian Mountains, Quebec
April–June 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redrafted discussion papers • Developed approach for expanded public engagement including development of handbook for hosting KTT
September–November 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with community leaders and animators to host second round of KTTs to provide feedback on discussion papers • Identified top policy priorities at FSC's biennial assembly in Montreal, Quebec
November–March 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafted and edited <i>Resetting the Table</i>, based on policy priorities • Edited discussion papers to incorporate additional feedback
April 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched <i>Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada</i> during federal election campaign in Ottawa, Ontario
June 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of <i>Resetting the Table</i> by FSC as its platform for ongoing work to advance a Pan-Canadian food policy and food sovereignty

sion-papers-peoples-food-policy). Launched in April 2011, and rooted in the principles of food sovereignty, the PFP proposed a radical and democratic vision for just and sustainable food system that would provide enough healthy, equitable and ecologically sustainable food for all Canadians. The PFP was intended to be a living document (i.e., open for further revision and expansion) and was eventually adopted as a policy platform by Food Secure Canada (FSC), a Pan-Canadian alliance of organizations and individuals working together to advance food sovereignty (see Table 1 for a timeline of the PFP project). The following subsections recount the key aspects of the PFP's history by focusing on leadership and governance, engagement with civil society, and the collaborative writing and review processes.

Leadership and governance

It was clear from the reports and documents we reviewed that the PFP project was heterogeneous and decentralized but also intensely coordinated and interconnected. The process was deliberately designed to work within local communities and to link different places together through the existing networks.

This was possible because then chair of FSC, Cathleen Kneen, had a firm grasp of the nascent network of networks built in large part through FSC's assemblies and broad-scale engagement of organizations and individuals across the country. In her own words, Kneen was the spider who wove together the disparate pieces of the food movements.⁴⁴ The community leaders that joined the PFP teams provided access and legitimacy to participating communities. They created an essential link between local food movements, enabling thousands of people to engage in a national food policy conversation.

Drawing on existing relationships within diverse Canadian food movement networks, community leaders from non-profit organizations, associations, unions and postsecondary institutions were invited to join collaborative teams that sustained various elements of the PFP project. The animator team was established first and played a crucial role in the project due to an intimate knowledge of and leadership within the local, regional and provincial networks. Importantly, these individuals had the skills to inform, mobilize and engage these networks throughout the PFP project. A management team made up of senior organizational staff representing key food movement sectors was established to oversee the details of the project, develop an overall strategy, facilitate training of the project volunteers and support the paid coordinator. A steering committee functioned as a support structure that created a measure of accountability for the management team. In addition, the Indigenous Circle provided guidance and leadership on addressing issues of colonialism and social justice within the project and supported writing the first of the ten discussion papers on Indigenous Food Sovereignty. The communications team supported the development of a website and print materials, media relations and social media strategies. Analysis/writing teams produced multiple drafts of the policy discussion papers, each headed by a chair. The chairs met at key moments to discuss methodology, format and ways to engage in a collective writing process. A senior editorial team made up of experienced researchers and writers was also established to provide oversight and additional feedback on the policy discussion papers as a whole, identifying where there were gaps, overlap and/or contradictions. Overall, well over one hundred volunteers gave countless hours sitting on committees to develop and support the PFP process.

Decision making was done by consensus, although when consensus failed, groups resorted to 2/3 majority vote. Because participants came from diverse sectors and experiences, at times, there were disagreements on particular issues and approaches. As much as possible, each team made collective decisions about how to work together and how to implement their mandates (e.g., the animators were responsible for engaging and mobilizing participants in their particular region, the policy analysis/writing teams summarized the ideas from KTTs into policy discussion papers, etc.). This decision-making approach was rooted in a sense of trust that

the people around the table were committed to the processes. All teams were also invited to participate in providing guidance and reviewing project documents, including the pamphlets, discussion papers and the final report, *Resetting the Table*.

Engagement processes

During the fall of 2009, animators held almost 100 KTTs consisting of conversations with people about the challenges and proposals to build a more healthy, equitable and sustainable food system. The goals of the first round of KTTs were to introduce the concept of food sovereignty and to generate policy recommendations based on the barriers that communities faced. Together, the animators developed the KTTs, including a set of tools for hosting (e.g., pamphlets, posters, a suggested process). Through monthly teleconference meetings, animators discussed different ideas about how to host and facilitate these conversations and requested support from each other and the coordinator where needed.

The second round of KTTs were held in the fall of 2010, when a broad call was launched for communities to host their own events. This enabled the PFP to extend beyond the existing networks. A participation guide was developed to support KTT hosts based on the animators' experiences. KTT trainings were offered via teleconference and the coordinator offered guidance and support by email and phone. During this round of KTTs, participants were invited to comment on the third draft of the policy discussion papers, to generate new policy ideas that they perceived were missing or simply discuss food sovereignty and what it meant to them. Over 150 KTTs were held during this second round.

It is difficult to summarize the details of the KTTs because they were all very different depending on the participants and the location where they were held. The following are examples from round two, ranging from urban, to rural, to remote locations:

- In an Iqaluit hotel room, three Inuit leaders and hunters discussed Indigenous food sovereignty with a Haudenosaunee environmental scientist from Ontario, who was a member of the PFP steering committee.
- In northern Alberta, an organic farmer met with her neighbours and friends to talk about agricultural policy in her kitchen.
- In Halifax, a KTT was hosted by the Food Action Committee of a leading environmental organization.
- In Nelson, British Columbia, an animator hosted a KTT with a high school class.

- In downtown Toronto, over 100 people gathered in a well-known food organization to hear presentations from community leaders and discuss policy ideas.
- On Manitoulin Island, Ontario, a public health worker gathered teachers, Indigenous elders, and community leaders for a conversation and a feast.

Central to the engagement process, these spaces established through KTTs were all based on the specific contexts of the communities in which they were held.

Two important moments in the PFP's engagement process were face-to-face meetings held in March 2010 in the Laurentian Mountains of Quebec and in November in Montreal, Quebec. For teams that met almost exclusively by teleconference, these gatherings were essential to establish and deepen relationships of trust and to work through tensions and challenges. The Laurentians meeting brought together forty representatives from the different teams for a three-day retreat to scrutinize the second drafts of the discussion papers and to plan the next steps. The Montreal meetings took place at an FSC biennial assembly through collaborative workshops where participants were asked to prioritize the top policy proposals from each discussion paper.

Collaborative writing and review processes

Policy writing teams were formed around emergent themes that eventually became the ten policy discussion papers. Teams consisted of academics and a number of community-practitioners that worked autonomously under the leadership of a chair. Together, they received a wide range of input from KTTs – from one-sentence recommendations to twenty-page reports. The input from both phases of KTTs were submitted through the PFP's website and made available to all the policy writing teams to review and analyze. This process used an early form of cloud technology as a tool for decentralized information sharing, knowledge generation and translation. The teams analyzed the contributions and translated them into policy recommendations relevant to the federal level. In the discussion papers, authors connected experiential/traditional knowledge with scientific knowledge from peer reviewed literature).

Each analysis/writing team had a great deal of autonomy and ultimately created their own collaborative process. Alignment between the discussion papers was created through meetings with the chairs of the writing teams, who would share formats and methods for how they were dealing with various issues, and made decisions about the issues to include in each paper. Each of the five discussion paper drafts were subjected to a collective

review that reflected the particular stage of the process. The first and fourth reviews were held by teleconference with all teams, and the second was held at the face-to-face three-day meeting in 2010. A web-based system was designed to capture people's comments that were not able to attend the KTTs. The third draft was written over the spring and summer of 2010, and posted on the PFP's website in draft form for public comment during the second round of KTTs. The fifth draft was shared with the public during FSC's assembly in 2010.

At the 2010 FSC assembly, ten working sessions were held to reflect on each of the policy discussion papers. During these concurrent sessions, the analysis/writing teams presented an overview of the policy papers, and animators facilitated a discussion about the content. The intention was to solicit input on selecting the policy priorities from each of the papers to be included in the summary document. Three to six policy priorities that emerged from each workshop were collected, and another teleconference call was held to make sure there were no gaps in the identified priorities. Finally, a professional writer was hired to draft a final report – *Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada*. Drafts of this final document were also subjected to the collective review process before being finalized.

Indigenous engagement and leadership

Indigenous communities, who are among those most marginalized by the dominant food system, played an important role in the PFP from its inception and provided an ongoing reminder of the value and tensions of working in an inclusive and participatory manner. Indigenous leaders were involved on almost all of the teams discussed above. The Indigenous Circle, established within the first three months of the PFP aimed to “explore how the PFP might work with Aboriginal Nations, communities and individuals towards food sovereignty and a federal people's food policy” (from the minutes of the Indigenous Circle, April 24, 2009). The Indigenous Circle had a dramatic influence in the PFP process and became a space where critical reflection could take place outside of, and between the other teams. At their first meeting, the group created a protocol in order to offer guidance to all PFP participants focused on how to work respectfully and collaboratively across cultures, by addressing a long history of mistrust. The Indigenous Circle also shepherded the writing of the formative discussion paper on Indigenous Food Sovereignty and created a reflexive culture within the PFP, challenging everyone to confront their assumptions about how the project functioned.

During the Laurentians meeting, Indigenous Circle members actively expressed discomfort with the rushed pace of the project and that they

were concerned that there needed to be more time taken to listen to each other and acknowledge differences. While participants initially acknowledged these concerns, on the final day the meeting was halted because it became apparent they had not been adequately addressed. It was at this moment that a difficult conversation ensued, and it was decided to shift the remainder of the agenda to more fully embrace the Indigenous Circle's analysis, needs and concerns. A similar thing happened at the one-day meeting in Montreal, when concerns about the process reemerged from the Indigenous Circle and the agenda was again revised. These were important moments that highlighted the tensions and opportunities of Indigenous-settler alliances within food movements.

Discussion

The PFP used a people-centred approach to policy making, building on the existing strengths of Canadian food movement networks. For the organizations and individuals involved, this began with a critical and contextualized dialogue that enabled participants to propose alternatives and consider structural barriers from a food systems perspective. Through the PFP, spaces were established to hold conversations about the way that policy shapes and is shaped by the food system. The KTTs were hosted in communities, allowing for a diverse range of people to gather in settings that were familiar, comfortable and accessible. Predicated on food sovereignty, local knowledge and experiences were woven together in an effort to affect broader power structures and to connect to global social movements. At its core, the PFP process was rooted in a desire for food systems policy based on the experience and knowledge of the people most impacted by the dominant food system. In this section, we focus on the key insights that emerged from our analysis in respect to the PFP's successes (e.g., introducing a food sovereignty discourse to Canadian food movements, strengthening food movement networks, and moving forward a democratic agenda), limitations (e.g., difficulty reaching an audience beyond existing food movement networks, limited diversity among participants, and tensions working across settler and Indigenous cultures), and overall lessons learned (e.g., the politicizing effects of participation in the PFP, recognizing the need to confront power inequity in food movement networks, and the impact on civil society efforts to transform the food system and food movements more broadly).

Successes

A primary accomplishment was the PFP's impact on the food movements' discourse. Prior to the PFP process, the concept of food sovereignty was rarely used among many Canadian networks. Through the PFP, many

organizations and community groups began to engage more directly with the concept, its pillars and with social movements at the global scale. The PFP played an important role introducing food sovereignty and the role that civil society can play in shaping food policy. When FSC adopted the PFP as its policy platform, the national social movement organization began to shift its discourse from food security (which focuses primarily on the goal of food access) to food sovereignty's rights-based, democratic, systems approach. The food sovereignty framework challenged food movements' analysis and connected local and regional initiatives at the national and global levels.

The PFP strengthened food movement networks across Canada and wove them together into a coherent voice at the national level committed to policy change. The PFP acted as a catalyst that brought together diverse networks involved in a range of issues including: poverty and food security, agriculture and fishing, waste reduction, environmental issues, capitalism and neocolonialism, to name only a few. Connecting these groups was only possible because of the existing networks, which allowed the PFP to extend across the country's vast geography. In this way, the PFP was more than simply another policy platform, it created a common progressive vision that mobilized a diversity of groups within Canada's food movements. Strengthening food movement networks in this way led to a shift in the kinds of initiatives being developed and the forms of collaboration. Beyond new organizations associating themselves with food movements, many of the existing initiatives began addressing a broader range of political issues including a stronger focus on ways that race, class, gender and colonialism function within food systems. The PFP also provided a renewed mandate for FSC and an overall strengthening of the "knowledge power" of food movement organizations.⁴⁵

Other impacts included an expansion of food systems initiatives such as food policy councils, municipal food strategies and task forces to engage in policy conversations with various levels of government. Many food movement actors gained voice beyond the local level and in some cases a seat at the government table. For example, FSC obtained a seat at the consumer roundtable of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and participated in numerous other roundtables and conferences on national food policy, leveraging this legitimacy to present to parliamentary and Senate committees. Further, during the 2011 federal election campaign, all five major political parties had a food policy or strategy as part of their platforms for the first time in Canadian history, some of which reflected the priorities of the PFP. While the PFP cannot lay claim to this outcome directly, it points to the strength of large-scale mobilization in bringing a marginal discourse into the mainstream.

Beyond the policy discussion papers and *Resetting the Table*, one of the most important accomplishments was the creation of spaces through the KTTs that enabled participants to see themselves as legitimate contributors

to, and creators of food policy. The majority of volunteers reported that they appreciated the relationships that emerged from their involvement with the PFP. Many people working on food issues do so in isolation in small communities scattered across the country. For many, the PFP connected them to others with similar and sometimes diverging viewpoints. Volunteers reported that they established networks that put them in contact with others working on related issues across the country they did not know previously. Other benefits listed by participants included meeting and collaborating with new people, engaging with others who share goals of food sovereignty, and being part of a broader social movement.

Limitations

While there were many successes, there were also a number of challenges that limited the reach and impact of the PFP. One of these limitations was the inability of the PFP to significantly broaden food movements and to reach an audience beyond the existing networks. Most people engaged in the PFP process were interested in broad-scale social change, reflected by the input from the KTTs and reflections from the animators. Volunteer comments noted that despite their best efforts, people outside the food movements' primary networks were still unfamiliar with food sovereignty and did not know about the PFP. A common recommendation was that the PFP should have focused more strategic energy aligning itself with other, related struggles and social movement networks (e.g., labour, anti-racism, and Indigenous movements).

Another observation was that despite the participation of many diverse groups, the majority of the PFP leaders were white and middle class. The exception was the involvement of several lower-income participants (e.g., urban activists, farmers and people living in remote communities) and Indigenous people. While this problem was identified early on, it was an ongoing tension throughout the project. It was clear that there were many voices missing from the PFP leadership including people of colour, food system workers and new Canadians. While these challenges are not unique to the PFP, they highlight a broader social problem that could have been addressed more directly in the construction of the PFP process.

The realities of working across Indigenous and settler cultures created notable tensions, something that was new for many participants. These cross-cultural tensions were most profound during the 2010 face-to-face meetings. Much of the participant feedback pointed to this moment and the unanticipated tensions that emerged during the meeting. Despite these challenges, participants commented that this was one of the most important and defining moments of the PFP project. Participants recognized that because the groups were willing to listen each other, reflect, negotiate and adapt, the

tensions were ultimately a vital source of learning. Despite this positive outcome, the conflict pointed to a prominent challenge within food movements more broadly and the immense amount of work that lays ahead.

Lessons learned

Our discussion in this paper explains how the PFP served as an imperfect counter-hegemonic, people-centred policy-making process that engaged a diversity of individuals and organizations rooted in food sovereignty principles. Reflecting on this process, we point to three intersecting learnings that emerged from our analysis.

First, our analysis revealed that participation in the PFP process had a politicizing effect on those involved. The PFP reflected the broader food movements' long history of a "do-it-yourself" (DIY) culture where communities develop solutions to food systems challenges both inside and outside of formal institutions. This is reflected in countless historical examples such as the development of food cooperatives, community shared agriculture projects, regional networking organizations providing support to local and regional groups, and collaborations between Indigenous and settler communities. It was out of this cultural soil that the PFP grew. Many food movement participants understood their activities as political but had never engaged in formal political activity such as meeting with Members of Parliament or sitting on government committees. The PFP ploughed new ground by connecting the movement's DIY approach to more formal political structures and processes. However, the legitimacy and widespread engagement in the project was due primarily to the deep connections and trust that existed between individuals and organizations involved in the participating food movement networks.

A second learning that emerged was a recognition of the value of difference within food movement networks and the need to confront power inequity. As noted, the PFP was actualized through the mobilization of networks towards a common goal of creating a national-scale food policy platform rooted in principles of food sovereignty. The legitimacy of the process was, in part, due to the strategic decision to work with embedded leaders that ensured people without a direct connection to the project had confidence in the process. These decentralized networks were key to the success of the PFP, but they were also a limiting factor in achieving broad public participation. Despite efforts to include a diverse representation, PFP participants reflected the social composition of most North American social movements – white, educated and middle class.⁴⁶ Bourdieu's theory of practice points out that the educated middle-class are often the ones most likely to participate in the public sphere.⁴⁷ This is largely due to the greater

degree of “cultural capital” and their possession of the resources necessary to participate meaningfully including education and time.

While the PFP was one of Canada’s most diverse food movement initiatives in respect to the people, geographies and sectors represented, there was still significant room for improvement. The PFP did an admirable job but faced barriers because it was limited in its ability to reach outside of the existing food movement networks. Further, the Indigenous Circle opened the group to feelings of discomfort, which many both welcomed and struggled with simultaneously. White asserts that, “[i]f participation means that the voiceless gain a voice, we should expect this to bring some conflict”.^{48(p15)} Moments of tension brought power dynamics to the surface within the PFP and were also a reflection of the power dynamics within the larger society. These moments were made transformational because power holders within the PFP project (e.g., the management team members) were willing to listen, reflect and change in response. Nevertheless, there is no simple solution to these problems. While efforts were made to render power within the food system visible, it remains an ongoing challenge to create new forms of organization that embody the values of equity both in words but, more importantly, in practice.

Third, the PFP had a major impact on civil society efforts to transform the dominant Canadian food system and food movements more broadly. In this sense, the PFP might be understood as a transformative process within the social movement field that changed participants’ practice of engagement across difference. While values of equity have existed for some time in social movements, it is the practice of these values where the embodied realities of the society we inhabit manifest. It is here that new practices are created and confronted, worked and reworked, in the hopes that new norms may be produced and taken up and accepted by the wider society.

It appears that the PFP may indeed be symptomatic of a larger shift in the role of civil society. Traditionally, social movements tend to be either oppositional or propositional. Propositional initiatives work closely with government to provide policy and program proposals, while oppositional initiatives tend to be interventionist with a goal to transform political and economic structures. The PFP does not fit either of these categories comfortably. Instead it is better described as a “weaver” initiative that was able to develop strategic and conceptual linkages within and between various groups and perspectives. Stevenson et al. describe the role of weaver initiatives as establishing horizontal linkages “based on space and locality by facilitating alliances across agri-food work and complimentary social change efforts within a bounded area,” and vertical linkages involving “strategic connections between structural, geographic, or analytical levels”.^{49(p47)} When challenges arise, it is apparent that the process of getting to a solution, and the intention behind it are equally as important as the results, especially when it comes to

gaining legitimacy. Perhaps a new and emerging role for civil society is to demonstrate more democratic alternatives by establishing new ways of engaging people in policy and program development. More than the formal outputs, the PFP as a weaver initiative offers a model for moving the democratic agenda forward.

Conclusion

The PFP was a transformational process that has been integral to catalyzing and building the Pan-Canadian food movement and people-centred power within the food policy landscape. Learning from the experience of the PFP and weaving together diverse food movements set the stage for a number of subsequent policy-related activities. For example, the PFP became the foundation for FSC's lead role coordinating the 2012 Canadian mission of the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food;⁵⁰ FSC's 2015 Eat, Think Vote Campaign which put food on the agenda of the Federal election through hosting 68 events across Canada that included over 164 candidates and 4461 participants as well as an active media presence; and FSC's coordination of civil society engagement in the 2017 National Food Policy for Canada.⁵¹ Above all, it was the empowering processes within the various elements of the PFP that led communities to the realization that together, they could reimagine the food system and impact the policy making process. This process was complex and messy, but rather than something to be avoided, the tensions that emerged may indeed be the very source of transformation that forced movements to confront assumptions about collaborating with those at the margins of the food system and society more broadly.

Future research could document the experiences and learnings of PFP participants and how those experiences translated into new projects. It would also be valuable to track the implications of the PFP more directly to know how it is being used within civil society, social movements, and the government. In addition, there are other countries that have expressed interest in learning from the PFP experience, and we offer this paper as part of this sharing. We also hope that it will be part of an ongoing dialogue with other people-centred food policy processes in other places and help understand its success and challenges as a way to continue to build Canada's food movements and the global food sovereignty movement.

The PFP succeeded in creating a vision for a national people-centred food policy for Canada and also in building food movements. This was made possible because of the transformative processes embedded within the structure of the PFP. The PFP also shows that food movements must struggle to address the power differences in their networks while at the same time continue to address inequalities in society more broadly.

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