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Journal of Planning Education and Research 2004 23: 378
DOI: 10.1177/0739456X04264886

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Policy, Planning, and Networks

Gerda R. Wekerle

Abstract

This article examines the emergence of food justice movements through the lens of social movement theories, which emphasize the politics of place as a resource and strategies of networked movements operating across scales. It examines the creation of a political space for food justice from three perspectives: first, food security from below—the projects and initiatives that serve as alternative practices and precedents for policy change; second, the ways in which agencies of the local state develop policy and change planning; and third, the emergence of food networks at local and regional scales. Food justice movements provide grounded case studies of resistance to globalization through delinking strategies, citizen planning in relation to Toronto's official plan, and new forms of democratic practice.

Keywords: *food justice movements; Toronto Food Policy Council; Foodshare; official plans; citizen planning*

Gerda R. Wekerle is a professor in the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University. Her recent research focuses on the political ecology of exurbia and environmentalist movements against sprawl and place-based urban movements; women in the neoliberal city; and urban agriculture and planning. Recent books include *Women and the Canadian Welfare State* (1997), *Local Places in the Age of the Global City* (1996), and *Safe Cities* (1995).

While community food security activists frequently refer to themselves as a movement, the implications have not been addressed in either the food systems or the social movement literature. Amory Starr (2000), author of a recent book on anticorporate movements, is one of the few exceptions to this rule. It is not a coincidence that she also holds a degree in city planning. From this vantage point, Starr portrays community food security movements as generating alternative models that relocalize food systems and de-link them from the corporate global food system. In this article, I want to explore further some of the implications of focusing on food security as a social movement and the relevance for planning and urban theory. By focusing on Toronto, one of the most advanced cities in North America with respect to food security, I examine some of the processes and shifts in social movement formation and the strategies they employ.

Various writers (e.g., Buttel 1997) have recently argued that community food security initiatives should not limit themselves to the local and community scale but pay greater attention to regulatory and policy changes in the food system that involve the state. Toronto's food security movement, over the past few years, has achieved strategic policy commitments from local government, including the adoption by City Council of Toronto's Food Charter in 2001. In the article, I focus briefly on the roles played by two key agencies, FoodShare's contribution to urban and regional sustainability and the Toronto Food Policy Council's (TFPC) role in supporting food networks and effecting policy change. I examine the emergence of a networked movement in which new committees, taskforces, and coalitions have formed interlocking networks that link small and large food agencies, social justice groups, community garden advocates, agencies and staff of local government, and municipal politicians. The article raises questions about how food movements construct policy from positions in civil society and outside the state and the contradictions of working with and through the state to implement food security policies.

Over time, food security movements have matured and shifted in their critique and strategies (Allen 1999, 11). While originating in community responses to economic downturns in the mid-1980s, with a focus on emergency food services, there has been a transition to a focus on the right to food as a component of a more democratic and just society and, most recently, a reframing as food justice movements. This involves an

Journal of Planning Education and Research 23:378-386
DOI: 10.1177/0739456X04264886
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explicit critique of the global food system and a theoretical framing of local initiatives as both the practice of democracy and as means of de-linking[1] from the corporate global food system. Reframing food security as food justice is more than a name change. As Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999, 220) have noted, antihunger efforts have not been successful in mobilizing a broad constituency or involving diverse food system stakeholders. The food justice frame highlights the focus on systemic change and the necessity for engaging in political and policy processes as well as consciously addressing issues of movement mobilization and strategies. Theoretically, the food justice frame opens up linkages to a wider range of conceptual frameworks drawn from the literature on democracy, citizenship, social movements, and social and environmental justice. This exploration is only just beginning (Welsh and MacRae 1998; Hassanein 2003), and this article can only sketch some of the directions that such an inquiry might take.

The links between planning and food systems have only recently begun to be examined. In two pioneering articles, Kami Pothukuchi and Jerome Kaufman (1999, 2000) have identified reasons for the low visibility of urban food systems in general and how municipal institutions could offer more comprehensive supports to urban food systems planning. They have found that city planning agencies' interest in food systems tends to be expressed fairly narrowly as a concern with the location of food services or their design, community gardens, food production in the local economy, and farmers markets. Planners have not paid much attention to food security as a social movement, in Toronto or elsewhere. They have not viewed food justice movements either as examples of citizen-initiated policy making and new forms of governance or as cases of citizen planning and grassroots democracy. Yet city-based food justice movements make these contributions and also much more. Food justice movements provide insights into several critical debates in the planning and urban literatures: the role of civil society and urban movements, particularly those focused on social and environmental justice; the subaltern strategies of resistance to globalization; the social construction of scale and "glocal" movements that bridge the dichotomy of local-global; and the transformations of urban governance. Food justice movements, as place-based movements engaged in local organizing and community development, represent an engaged citizenry that should be of interest to urban planners focused on various forms of citizen planning. Food justice movements are also exemplars of networked movements, incorporating everyday resistances, oppositional practices, and state agencies, which shape policy processes and outcomes at various scales.

► Civil Society, Place, and Democracy

Much of the recent theoretical literature on cities has focused on globalization and its impacts (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Sassen 1994, 1999). As a counterpoint, some planning theorists have focused anew on the role of civil society as "a collective actor in the construction of our cities and regions" (Friedmann 1998, 21). Civil society has been defined by political theorists Laclau and Mouffe (1985) as the space for political mobilization and active resistance. A concept that has captured the imagination of planning students and practitioners is "insurgent planning." James Holston (1998) initially outlined what he calls "the spaces of insurgent citizenship," created through grassroots mobilizations and everyday practices. Leonie Sandercock's (1998) documentation of case studies of insurgent planning focused primarily on marginalized communities and social movements that use planning as a tool in their arsenal of resistance strategies and in generating alternative ways of living, governance, and sustainability. According to these authors, civil society initiatives to engage in planning often emerge at the margins, in the spaces that are unnoticed or seen as insignificant by powerful state or corporate actors.

And yet this conceptualization of civil society is partial. By focusing on subaltern groups and "the hidden forms of everyday acts of resistance," which development scholar Fantu Cheru (1997) has identified as forms of "soft opposition" to the globalization of the economy, there is an implicit association with the local and the particular waged in a David and Goliath battle with the forces of globalization and corporate capitalism. Yet urban residents manage to disrupt the script of globalization not just in local resistance but in bridging the local and the global. And not only the most marginalized in society but also NGOs actively engage in the creation of alternatives to corporate globalization. Several recent books on antiglobalization movements have coined the phrase "globalization from below" to describe the self-organization of groups in civil society, which includes the formation of global alliances, international campaigns, and collaboration of different movements across North and South (Starr 2000, 83; Brecher, Costello, and Smith 2000).

Urban theorists introduce the concept of scale to the globalization debate. Swyngedouw (1997) and others (e.g., Marston 2000) argue that scale is not fixed but constructed and that social movements in particular frequently operate at a "glocal" scale (Swyngedouw 1997). According to Neil Smith (1993), within a globalized environment, they "jump scales" creating networks that operate at the local and transnational levels and those in between.

This conceptual framework directs us not only to document local projects of resistance and self-provisioning but also to focus on the formation and reformation of networks and alliances that bridge issues and scales. Therefore, focusing on the ways in which food justice movements are new translocal, transnational movements raises questions about issue formation, strategies, and outcomes. It also raises critical questions about the role of the state—national, regional, and local. By focusing on how food justice movements initiate policy change, this forces us to pay particular attention to NGO-state partnerships and the role of the state in facilitating or hindering policy changes.

In recent essays, two critical development scholars, Arturo Escobar (2001) and Arjun Appadurai (2001) develop theoretical frameworks for understanding how movements rooted in place and culture, and drawing upon everyday practices and local knowledge, create networks that engage simultaneously at the level of policy change, democratic practices, and everyday life. Escobar's contribution is in reconceptualizing the importance of place-based movements in creating counternarratives to those of capital and modernity. In his analysis of place and the resource that place and culture form in Afro-Colombian communities, Escobar argues the need to differentiate "place" from "the local" (p. 152). He argues that the local and global are scales, processes, or levels of analysis not places or locations. According to Escobar, "place refers to the experience of, and from, a particular location with some sense of boundaries, grounds, and links to every day practices" (p. 152). He urges us to pay closer attention to "emancipatory projects linked to the construction of places and regions" (p. 150).

Based on his research, Escobar (2001, 147) concludes that social movements may strategically defend place-based identities and practices through their participation in transnational networks. Instead of polarizing the local and the global or denigrating the defense of place as parochial and self-serving, Escobar argues that social movements often engage in two forms of "subaltern strategies of localization": "place-based strategies that rely on the attachment to territory and culture" and "global strategies through meshworks [Escobar's term for networks] that enable social movements to engage in the production of locality by enacting a politics of scale from below" (p. 161).

Another critical development scholar, Arjun Appadurai (2001), focuses on themes similar to those introduced by Escobar—subaltern struggles, everyday practices, and local knowledge as soft opposition to globalization and the ways in which place-based movements engage in transnational networks. Based on his in-depth study of an alliance of slum dwellers in the city of Mumbai, India, Appadurai demonstrates how the poorest of the poor develop urban informal sectors based on local knowledge and skills. He argues that these actually existing projects serve to leverage state resources, attract allies from the NGO community, and effect policy change. According to Appadurai, the poor "claim, refine and define certain ways of doing things in spaces they already control, and then use these practices to show donors, city officials and other activists that their 'precedents' are good ones" (p. 33). Appadurai argues that neoliberal restructuring by nation states has created the conditions for the emergence of new forms of governmentality, particularly in countries like India, where "activist NGOs and citizens' movements have appropriated significant parts of the means of governance" (p. 26). He argues that the development of alternative locally defined responses to the needs of poor people both challenges globalization and, more important, challenges existing forms of governmentality as poor people engage in developing their own knowledge base and solutions to better the lives of the poor. Furthermore, he shows that these local NGO organizations have developed a translocal reach through participation in international networks of slum dwellers. Appadurai argues that this cross-national diffusion of ideas and social movement strategies results in "new horizontal modes for articulating the deep democratic politics of the locality" (p. 26).

Appadurai's (2001) and Escobar's (2001) emerging conceptual frameworks for the study of social movements, based on case studies of place-based movements, suggest the possibility of focusing simultaneously on place and translocal networks, on civil society and partnerships with the state, and on a politics of scale from below enacted through global strategies that challenge globalization. In contrast, urban and planning theory remains skeptical of the emancipatory possibilities of movements grounded in a place-based politics. Urban theorists, according to Kirby (1993, 35), have often been opposed to localism as a site of "self-interest, bigotry and intolerance." Thus, place-based movements are dismissed or ignored by urban and planning theorists because they are largely portrayed as defensive movements or movements directed solely to meeting consumption needs, with limited potential for a transformative politics (Fainstein and Hirst 1995). Recent edited books by Beauregard and Body-Gendrot (1999) and Merrifield and Swyndgedouw (1997) call for urban theorists to pay greater attention to issues of justice and visions of the good city and society. But they tend to dismiss current urban movements, particularly those in defense of place, as too rooted in locality and self-interest to engage in resistance to globalization across scales. Antiglobalization movements, in their view, more closely approximate the challenge to globalization from the standpoint of justice.

Closer attention to food justice movements might enrich urban and planning theories, as well as social movement

theories and practices. Food justice movements are active in transnational networks that challenge the global food system at various scales and create locally grounded alternatives to global food systems based on visions of a more just society. They draw upon the experience of daily life and engage in de-linking strategies that create local food alternatives, at the same time as they attempt to address issues of democratic practice through their own coalitions.

Amory Starr (2000) and others link these local, place-based movements to antiglobalization movements more generally. Growing food in the city, developing a regional food system, buy-local campaigns, or microenterprises may be seen as de-linking strategies, small initiatives that de-link local economies from the corporate-controlled global food system. More important, perhaps, they exemplify what Appadurai (2001) refers to as "precedents"—alternative practices and experiments that may elicit policy change. They may also be "instruments of deep democracy," validating local knowledge and the active participation of marginalized communities in major cities.

► Creating a New Political Space for Food Justice

Over the past ten years, community agencies and the local state have worked together to create a new political space for food justice issues in Toronto. At first glance, Toronto's planning for community food security looks fragmented, ad hoc, decentralized, and some might even say, chaotic. New configurations of interests often labeled as taskforces, advisory groups, or coalitions emerge, disband, and reconfigure. On closer examination, we gain a picture of dense, interlocking networks of community agencies, advocacy groups, place-based movements, municipal agencies, and staff that collaborate on policy innovations, education, and specific projects. The process is complex, diffused among many actors and interests, networked rather than institutionalized. It describes an approach to citizens' engagement in planning processes that is bottom up, initiated by community agencies, advocacy groups, and networks, which contrasts with the routinized public meetings and public participation initiated by planning departments or city staff.

In this article, drawing upon experiences in Toronto as examples, I will focus on three aspects of mobilizing for food justice: first, civil society networks and de-linking strategies that support food security from below; second, the process by which food justice networks engage in policy making and planning processes; and third, the attempts to create a networked food justice movement.

► Food Security from Below

Amory Starr (2000, 118) articulates the links between the relocalization and de-linking strategies of community food security movements and the development of alternative political economies. In her discussion of urban sustainability movements, she lists local food production, edible urban landscapes, urban composting, urban farms, farmers markets, and new food links between farmers, consumers, and food–serving institutions. In seeking to achieve sustainable urban food systems, she argues that food security movements have incorporated local and regional food production that challenges the global food system. Furthermore, they have used food as the basis for local economic development and the focus of popular education campaigns directed at youth to demystify the global and corporate domination of food systems. In Starr's view, these movements "to reclaim communities' relationship with food are precious for firstworlders" because they provide us with the techniques "to reverse the corporatization of the whole food system, not only technically but in terms of institutions, policies and social organization" (p. 125).

The food security movement that has developed in Toronto has gained widespread attention due to the range of agencies and initiatives that have evolved over time and their success in developing both policies and programs. FoodShare, a Toronto-based nonprofit agency, is an umbrella organization focused on access to affordable, nutritious food, which operates at multiple scales—the neighborhood, city, region, and nation—and at the policy level, as well as direct service provision. Since its founding in 1985, and initial funding by the city, FoodShare has evolved from an agency coordinating emergency food services to a broader focus on the convergence of issues, including the global food system, food justice, local hunger and poverty alleviation, urban sustainability, and urban agriculture (FoodShare 1998). Over time, the mandate expanded from emergency food provision to encompass broader goals such as job training, employment skills development, work with marginalized youth, local economic development, and community gardens. Ongoing local projects include the Field to Table program and warehouse, initially started by farmers and antipoverty activists to provide farmers with new markets and low-income urban residents with high-quality food (Welsh and MacRae 1998). The warehouse is the site for the Good Food Box, a community-based nonprofit business that distributes fresh produce obtained directly from the food terminal and bypassing supermarkets, primarily to low-income people, on a weekly basis. A microenterprise, a catering service, is an offshoot of the Focus on Food employment and life-skills training program for youth at risk and low-income immigrant women. The Toronto Kitchen Incubator,

located in FoodShare's Field to Table warehouse, makes a commercial kitchen available at low rent to microenterprises. A community gardens coordinator provides support to community gardens at public sites, such as a library, and in housing projects in the core area and in the suburbs. An urban agriculture coordinator trains garden interns in commercial vegetable and herb production on the roof of the Field to Table Warehouse and at a commercial farm operation set up on the grounds of a regional mental health center in the downtown core. The produce is sold at a farmers market and provided to the Good Fox Box program.

These various initiatives, including many more by other food agencies and organizations across the city and suburbs, address urban sustainability by focusing on demonstrations of the possibilities for local food production, by linking directly with farmers in the region, by providing city dwellers and youth with education in growing food and eating healthy food, and by inventing new services such as community kitchens that meet multiple needs. Through actual, visible projects scattered throughout the city, educational programs, and media campaigns, they challenge the prevailing corporate globalized food system by engaging in de-linking strategies, which show by example and precedents that alternatives are possible.

▶ Policy from the Ground Up

The food security movement in Toronto also exemplifies an approach to planning from within civil society, which incorporates work within the regulatory and policy environment, including policy change, and links with the local state as partner rather than supplicant. While local food agencies and advocates have often found themselves in opposition to the cutbacks and downloading of social programs by the neoliberal state, they are also in the contradictory position of being called upon to do the work of the state in meeting the increasing needs for food banks and food-related programs.[2] While challenging this role, food security agencies in Toronto have not abandoned the possibility of making claims on the local state both for resources and for participation in policy making and opportunities to institutionalize social movement agendas.[3] Local government continues to be seen as a key actor, providing leadership, staffing for joint initiatives, funding, and policy implementation at the scale of the city and beyond.

Toronto's Food Policy Council (TFPC) has been written about extensively in the literature on food security and is the only food policy council in Canada and the United States that is part of a city department rather than an advisory body (Welsh and MacRae 1998; Hassanein 2003). The TFPC was founded in 1990 as a subcommittee of the city's Board of Health, a standing committee of the city council. Over the past decade, it has brought together agencies dealing with hunger, community development, consumers, health, community gardening, urban sustainable agriculture, and faith communities. As Welsh and MacRae (1998, 239) note, the TFPC was formed with the objective of seeking long-term solutions to the problems of hunger and the sustainability of the food system. To link communities with the political process, TFPC cochairs were a community representative and a city councilor. As an agency of the local state, the TFPC has also been instrumental in maintaining a consistent focus on food security and urban agriculture within various agencies and departments of the city. For example, an Interdepartmental Technical Working Group on Urban Food Production produced a report in 1993 outlining the ways in which the city could provide supports (Interdepartmental Technical Working Group on Urban Food Production 1993). The Healthy City Office funded a report on community gardens in 1995, and the Department of Parks and Recreation adopted a Community Garden Action Plan in 1998 and developed a children's gardens program. A key resource has been a city-funded food access grant fund, administered by the TFPC, which has financed hundreds of projects and supported the creation of many new networks (Welsh and MacRae 1998).

In recent years, one of the most important achievements has been the passage of the Toronto Food Charter by a unanimous vote of city council in May 2000. Invoking Canada's signing, in 1976, of the UN Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, which includes "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger," the Toronto city council committed itself to promote food security. This included directives to city departments to serve as a model in food-purchasing decisions, to develop partnerships to increase access to healthy foods, to promote composting, and to work with the food industry to reduce food packaging and promote reuse and recycling. As we shall see later, the Food Charter also became a bridge to greater attention to food security within the planning process.

The Food Charter resulted from food security networks and the city's working together to create a new plan of action. How did this come about? In 1996, food activists in the city formed Hunger Watch and convinced the city council to establish a committee of five city councilors, the Food and Hunger Action Committee (FAHAC), which developed the first comprehensive multisectoral food security plan created by a municipality in Toronto (Food and Hunger Action Committee 2001). This report articulated a new approach for the city, which involved working together with other agencies and a range of concrete initiatives including support for urban

agriculture, working with food banks to compost food waste, and the city's advocacy role to senior levels of government. Through the formation of a staff working group, the FAHAC got various city departments talking to each other about food issues. A key element was the request for the establishment of a permanent food security grants program at the level of $1.0 million to support community gardens, community markets, and community cooking, as well as four community food animators. These would organize in parts of the city where groups had less knowledge of how the city bureaucracy works and how to obtain resources and funding. Coming at a time when the city's budget was under severe pressures to cutback on programs, this funding request was held in abeyance, although it will be considered in the future. However, funding of $250,000 was obtained from a provincial program for Food and Hunger Action community-based projects. Funding of $2.5 million is also being requested through the Board of Health for a student nutrition program.

Despite the political success of food security advocates in affecting city policies, there was limited contact with the Planning and Development Department, even though food security issues intersected with planning around issues such as zoning, local economic development, public open space, and community services. The next section addresses one way in which planning and food security were linked in the development of a new official plan for the amalgamated city of Toronto.

► A Political Opportunity: Food, Urban Agriculture, and the Official Plan

While a new political space has been carved out for food justice issues within city government in Toronto, the city's Planning and Development Department has been involved only minimally. In the spring of 1999, the city began the process of developing a new official plan—the document that outlines the long-term strategic vision for the newly amalgamated (in 1998) city of downtown core and six suburban municipalities (City of Toronto 2000). This provided a political opportunity for food justice activists to intervene and gain greater visibility for food security issues in the planning process. When the draft Official Plan was released in May 2002 (City of Toronto 2002), it contained only one reference to food-related issues: the need to preserve agricultural land by containing urban sprawl. The formal public-participation process that was limited to several large public meetings and a daylong consultation for invited, and primarily elite professional and business, stakeholders had also not raised food-related concerns.

In attempts to influence the planning process from within the municipal government, the Toronto Food Policy council, as an agency of the city, submitted two policy documents outlining in detail how planning could contribute to food security in the city. An initial report, *Feeding the City from the Back 40: A Commercial Food Production Plan for the City of Toronto* (Toronto Food Policy Council 1999), proposed various new initiatives and programs. These recommendations included that the City adopt an urban agriculture development strategy, zone for and recognize food production as an urban land use, pilot urban agriculture on brownfields, develop a food eco-industrial park, connect urban agriculture to the city's Energy Efficiency Office, and expand the community gardening program. While this report received attention within the food security community, there was no response from the planners.

Three years into the Official Plan process, the Toronto Food Policy Council submitted a second report, *The Way to a City's Heart is Through its Stomach* (2002), which also focused on new initiatives to support food security, including city support for food microprocessing as a critical economic growth sector, encouraging urban food production on brownfields sites and elsewhere, and protecting urban agriculture through zoning and farmers markets. Again, there was no response from the planning team preparing the Official Plan, and attempts to set up meetings with planning staff were unsuccessful.

As the Official Plan process was coming to a close, another approach was tried by the Toronto Food Policy Council's Regional Agriculture Subcommittee. It invited presentations from three academics on urban agriculture and the Official Plan. I was one of the academics. Rather than starting with principles and visions, or proposing new programs, I started with the plan itself,[4] the wording of various sections, and the gaps. I pointed out that the draft plan identified the need to designate, preserve, and enhance community infrastructure, open space, and natural heritage but totally ignored the contributions to these objectives made by the hundred or more community gardens and urban agriculture sites in the city. Inadvertently, the plan could also eliminate community gardens that already existed. For example, the draft plan identified landscaped open space around high-rise apartments as "underutilized sites" that could potentially provide opportunities for additional housing units. In Toronto's postwar suburbs, this is where low-income tenants, many of them recent immigrants, have established community gardens. In arguing for changes to the Official Plan, I also pointed to precedents in other cities, including Seattle, Berkeley, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., which had inserted clear language in comprehensive plans designating community gardens as a legitimate and permanent use of land that meets the city's long-term goals (Kirschbaum 2000; Kaufman and Bailkey 2000).

This presentation had two immediate outcomes. Opportunistic timing made it possible for me to publish a version of my

submission in the next issue of the *Ontario Planning Journal* (Wekerle 2002), a publication received by every registered planner in the province. Coincidentally, shortly after the publication date, the Toronto Food Policy Council received a phone call from planning staff requesting a meeting to discuss possible insertions to the Official Plan, as long as they were specific and fit with the flow of the original draft. My presentation also suggested a way forward for the TFPC and a point of entry to the Official Plan draft document. One of the members of the TFPC board, Janice Etter, volunteered to provide the Planning Department with specific detailed wording changes for insertions into the draft plan, arguing that this would recognize and integrate into the plan the contents of Toronto's Food Charter, passed by city council in June 2000. To weave elements of TFPC's food policy throughout five chapters of the plan, twenty-one specific changes were proposed and subsequently adopted.[5] As a result, the final version of the plan was also officially endorsed by the TFPC.

These insertions into the official plan of the city were breakthroughs in linking food security and community gardening to the city's vision and long-term planning processes. For example, in the initial vision statement, "Our future is one where," planners inserted the phrase "adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, culturally acceptable food are available to all." In sections on implementation, the plan was amended to include both the Food and Hunger Action Plan and the Food Charter. Sections on healthy neighborhoods identify "difficulty in accessing essentials such as healthy food," the links between access to food and public transit, and access to "everyday essentials such as food." References to community gardens, urban agriculture, and rooftop gardens were inserted into the vision statement and sections of the plan dealing with the quality of the urban realm, reurbanizing arterial roads, functions of green space and the waterfront, community services, and park policies.

This encounter with the Official Plan process was instructive. On one hand, the Official Plan process ignored the history of a city agency, the TFPC, and the community food security networks that had successfully initiated policy innovations, including the adoption by council of Toronto's Food Charter. Conversely, the relative lack of understanding of planning processes limited the influence of the community food security network on the Official Plan as a vision and blueprint for land-use change in the city, despite the interests of the food justice movement in a range of issues addressed in the plan, including economic development, neighborhood vitality, public open space, and community services. However, this process also reveals how a movement able to draw upon resources from universities, community agencies, and city staff and agencies can mount multiple strategies to effect change.

▶ Networked Movements for Food Justice

In a recent article reflecting on the contribution of the TFPC to food justice movements in the city of Toronto, Welsh and MacRae (1998, 252) describe the abundance of new projects and new networks that have emerged from the collaboration of a city agency and a wide range of community agencies focused on food security and urban agriculture. They conclude, "That these networks exist is tangible evidence of the rooting of a food citizenship and community food security agenda in Toronto." Together, FoodShare and the Toronto Food Policy Council have taken the lead in initiating public debates on food policy and in bringing together networks that represent diverse interests. For example, FoodShare has organized workshops and conferences that bring together people from various levels of government, antipoverty agencies, and the food industry (Field and Mendiratta 1999). Welsh and MacRae describe the networks that have developed: "These networks are organized both regionally and thematically. The regional networks focus on specific neighborhoods of the city and deliver a variety of projects. They share experiences of the neighborhood and attempt to link people in need with each other's initiatives. The thematic networks focus on a specific kind of food security project, such as student nutrition projects or food box programs, and gather people from all over the regional municipality" (p. 252).

This process has also drawn upon community resources to support city agencies and politicians. For instance, a Food and Hunger Action Advisory Committee of food agencies and social justice advocates met regularly to provide advice, research, and backup support to city staff and politicians. This group formed the backbone of the Food Justice Coalition, a coalition formed in 2001 to advocate for food justice, bringing together agencies focused on food, health, social services, and community gardens. Working groups focus on networking, education, training, and advocacy. In the past year, the coalition developed a forum that addressed the links between income security for farmers and farmland preservation. The coalition meets with and lobbies city councilors to implement the recommendations of council reports on food security, as well as assisting in the creation of a province-wide Food Security Coalition. It is also actively involved in a national food coalition and in international food networks.

A key feature of these initiatives is the fluid, amorphous networked characteristic of this movement that comes together for a particular purpose, makes recommendations, disbands, or reconfigures under another name. It encompasses small volunteer-based groups, such as the Community Gardens Network, and large institutionalized agencies, such as the Red Cross. It makes possible cross-sectoral linkages with a

minimum of structure and long-term funding. It accommodates dedicated public officials and key staff from city agencies in ad hoc arrangements and provides a mechanism by which the city bureaucracy can tap the expert knowledge and years of accumulated experience of staff working in food-related agencies.

Working together, FoodShare and the Toronto Food Policy Council, and the coalitions and networks that have formed in Toronto, have created a new political space that operates at a multiplicity of scales—the global, national, and regional scales of networks and flows of information that incorporate the Global Food Summit in Rome and community gardens and bake ovens at the neighborhood level. Debbie Field, Executive Director of FoodShare, makes the link between community-based organizing and wider policy work: "You contest and change things at a grassroots level and eventually get strong enough to manifest a shift at the community level, and then communities get strong enough that they force changes in policy at a governmental level and elect people to do so" (Mendiratta 1999, 109).

Food justice movements provide a grounding for the elaboration of theoretical frameworks in the urban and planning and social movements literature that seek to understand resistance to globalization, de-linking strategies, citizen planning in civil society, new forms of governmentality based on partnership between the state and NGO sectors, place-based subaltern struggles connected through global networks, and the emergence of movements that jump scales and exemplify glocality. Urban theorists and social movement researchers have not paid much attention to community food security and food justice movements, nor have these movements drawn upon the extensive and rich body of theoretical work that has accumulated in these fields. A closer connection might generate more theoretically informed research on food justice movements and more grounded urban and social movement theorizing.

Food justice movements raise new questions: If new policy initiatives come from civil society, in an environment of state downsizing, what is the role of the local state in this transformation of governance? How do food justice movements operate simultaneously on place-based projects, at the policy level, and at the national and international scales? How do everyday acts of resistance, involving the social construction of place and the reconstruction of urban landscapes for food production, relate to social movements focused on policy and societal change? A closer examination of food justice movements might revise some of our views of planning in civil society as occurring largely at the margins and at the local scale. Urban theorists might redirect their gaze to place-based movements as a potential for a transformative politics. Food justice movements may be multisectoral, creating new spaces of governmentality; they may partner with the state and, building on place as a resource, act politically through translocal networks. This enlarges our vision of the ways in which citizens engage in planning to forward their visions of a just city.

Author's Note: *I want to thank Jerome Kaufman for his initiative in organizing this special issue and his support and encouragement. I appreciate the positive, helpful, and challenging comments from the three reviewers, although my own emergent understanding may not have made it possible to fully address all of them. Over the years, graduate students in planning, food security, and social movements in the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES), York University, have challenged me to think across fields. Conversations with Lauren Baker, a Ph.D. student in FES, initially piqued my interest in some of the questions raised in the article, although this ultimately took a very different turn. Many and varied contacts over the years with FoodShare and the Toronto Food Policy Council provided me with opportunities to reflect on, and sometimes participate in, the processes of policy setting and movement mobilization.*

► Notes

1. In her book on anticorporate movements that confront globalization, Amory Starr (2000, 111) argues that one approach is to engage in strategies of relocalization and in de-linking the local economy from corporate-controlled national and international economies.

2. For a wider discussion of the pressures on NGOs to provide low-cost services in response to the downsizing of the neoliberal state and social safety net, see Shields and Evans (1998).

3. Social movement scholar Allan Scott (1990, 135) argues that the push to create ongoing linkages with the state and to institutionalize previously excluded issues are criteria for evaluation of the success of new social movements.

4. This was based on my experience ten years earlier in working with a special committee of city council, the Safe City committee, to insert women's concerns about urban safety into the city's Official Plan (Wekerle 2000).

5. Personal communication, Janice Etter, Chair, Toronto Food Policy Council, November 20, 2003.

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