



Book Review

Civil society and social movements in food system governance

Edited by Peter Andrée, Jill K. Clark, Charles Z. Levkoe, and Kristen Lowitt

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Review by Mindy Jewell Price*

It is easy to be discouraged by the ecological damages and social inequities caused by the contemporary food regime. Yet editors Peter Andrée, Jill Clark, Charles Levkoe and Kristen Lowitt resist this temptation. While many scholars focus on critiques of food systems, this collection draws attention to co-governance arrangements that contribute to greater equity and sustainability in food systems. Governance, as the editors define it, refers to the multiplicity of relationships, structures, and processes through which power is exercised and decisions are executed. Toward this end, the collection usefully highlights that alternative and transformative food systems are rooted in a variety of scales and work within a variety of governance arrangements. Following Karl Polanyi's (1944) concept of the "double movement," which describes how political-economic systems swing between periods of market liberalization and corrective social protections, *Civil Society and Social Movements in Food Governance* finds new opportunities in food system neoliberalization for civil engagement and social resistance. Through case studies exploring a number of social movements and governance innovations, this book offers insight—and hope—to those looking to influence and transform food systems.

Navigating the murky waters of social change, Andrée et al.'s (2019) edited volume struggles to address two pressing, interrelated questions: Do we support food movements' radical social and ecological goals of agroecology and food sovereignty? Or, for the chance to influence policy and drive large-scale institutional change, do we participate in governance processes that may risk the co-optation or tempering of our change agenda? The authors' answers fall somewhere in the middle, their cases providing a continuum of engagement and negotiation.

*Corresponding author: mindy_price@berkeley.edu

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The book is comprised of eight case studies from around the Global North—or, in Shahidul Alam’s formulation, the Minority World¹—and explores a variety of strategies for exercising governance in the food system. The editors offer the framework of a governance engagement continuum to frame the position of food movements between multi-stakeholderism (weak engagement) and self-governance/polycentrism (strong engagement). They draw on Clapp and Fuchs (2009) and Tourangeau (2017) to describe how civil society actors navigate and execute a variety of powers to gain footing in multi-scalar governance structures. Food movements draw on and work within instrumental power (influence through direct action), discursive power (writing narratives, establishing new norms), structural power (determining agendas and the scope of influence), and constitutive power (defining legitimacy and influence of powers). About half of the cases presented operate at or near the multi-stakeholder end of the continuum, though many have goals of more influential governance. The other case studies fall primarily within a co-governance arrangement, a sort of middle-ground between typically hierarchical governmental processes and self-organizing social movements. The cases demonstrate that, while not always the case, innovative governance arrangements typically emerge at the local level.

Each chapter describes a civil society action or social movement in the food system and situates its engagement along the governance continuum. Case studies explore: NGOs influence in the Northwest Territories, Canada; local food system institutions in Dunedin, New Zealand; cooperative growers and distributors in Calgary, Canada; inclusive dialogues about a national food policy in Canada; civil society organizations addressing food insecurity and hunger at state and international scales; Indigenous fisheries governance in the Great Lakes region in Canada; and rural development through a local organic campaign in Correns, France.

Most closely approaching a self-governance arrangement, Lowitt et al. (Chapter 7) present two cases of Indigenous fisheries governance in the Batchewana First Nation of the Ojibways (BFN) and the Saugeen Ojibway First Nation (SON). The two First Nations approach negotiations with the settler state over fisheries management differently—one entering a co-governance arrangement with Canada as a means of holding the Crown accountable to their treaties, the other rejecting negotiations with Ontario’s regulatory body altogether and instead asserting its own practices and laws. Both BFN and SON are seen as exercising sovereignty and self-determination over their food systems. Lowitt et al. discuss, however, that the lack of true Nation-to-Nation relationship between the two sovereign First Nations and Canada hinders true polycentric governance. While exercises of Indigenous self-determination over fisheries management provides the clearest example of self-governance, this contribution is unique in *Civil Society and Social Movements*, given that BFN and SON are not social movements nor civil society organizations but two Nations exercising their sovereignty within a settler state.

¹Bangladeshi photographer and activist Shahidul Alam introduced the terms Majority World and Minority World, highlighting the fact that a majority of the world’s population resides in poorer countries typically referred to as “developing,” while a minority of global population lives in richer, “developed” countries.

In what is arguably the most promising work of civil society from within a co-governance arrangement, Levkoe and Wilson (Chapter 5) discuss the concept of prefiguration—modeling desired food futures in the present—as a way to advance food system transformation while engaging in discussions of policy development. According to the authors, prefiguration:

...challenges us to consider the space that can be created through these mechanisms not solely as a means to a predetermined end, but as a site of possibility and transformation beyond a specific policy outcome (p.108).

Prefiguration thus provides an avenue for change, even when larger state governance structures limit radical action discursively and in policy formation.

This volume is not beyond critique. Most notably, missing from the compendium are governance innovations and social movements of the Global South (or Majority World). What about, for example, food security innovations in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, created through arrangements between an influential civil society and state actors (Chappell, 2018)? Or the scaling of agroecology through peasant movements in India (Khadse et al., 2017)? I can't help but wonder: would the simplistic and linear governance engagement continuum appear more nuanced if the editors explored governance arrangements in a wider variety of contexts? As a critical scholar of food systems, I also find concerning the lack of attention to social and ecological damages provoked by neoliberalizing food systems. While the editors acknowledge critiques of the neoliberal turn, they largely present neoliberalism as an opportunity for civil society and social movements to “claim a seat at the governance table” (p. 7). A critical self-reflection of the impacts of NGOs and civil society actors as new governors of food systems is regrettably absent.

Notwithstanding its narrow geographical representation and understated critique of neoliberal governance in food systems, this book is a welcome contribution to food studies literature. Agroecology scholars and activists especially will find *Civil Society and Social Movements in Food Governance* an encouraging read and useful for thinking about the interstices of power within food governance. While the authors explore opportunities in food systems governance, they also address challenges translating their goals into governmental agendas, particularly at regional and national scales. Few publications offer such balanced discussions of civil society ‘wins,’ and this contribution offers useful civil society and social movement examples to assess, influence, and resist the dominant food regime.

Mindy is a PhD student in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research, based on on-going ethnographic fieldwork in the Northwest Territories, Canada, critically examines the circumpolar north as a new agrarian frontier. Interests include Arctic/Subarctic governance, Indigenous food sovereignty, and regenerative agriculture.

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