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Original Research Article

"Good healthy food for all": Examining FoodShare Toronto's approach to critical food guidance through a reflexivity lens

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Abstract

By building community-based food systems informed by transformative ideologies and principles, Community-Based Food Organisation (CBFOs) can be understood as agents of critical food guidance from the bottom-up. Framing food guidance as a socio-political process of co-construction of values and principles about food systems, this paper mobilises the notion of reflexivity as pivotal to the implementation of critical food guidance in CBFOs. Reflexivity is defined as the capacity of actors and organisations to establish as well as to reflect upon key food system principles and scale out these principles across communities. To examine reflexivity and its connection to critical food guidance, this paper retraces the story of FoodShare Toronto, a CBFO whose core mission is to foster "good healthy food for all". Going through different stages of its life course, this paper highlights the ways in which this organisation reframes core values and principles through time and how it attempts to scale out these principles through partnerships and programs. Learning from FoodShare´s trajectory, this paper highlights key lessons on how reflexivity can strengthen the capacity of food organisations to be vehicles for emancipatory and transformative food guidance.

Keywords: Community-based food organizations; critical food guidance; reflexivity; FoodShare Toronto

1. Introduction

The negative side effects of mainstream food systems on the health of people and the environment are well documented (iPES-Food, 2017). Critiques to mainstream food systems have highlighted how, far from solving the problem of hunger and food insecurity, profit-oriented food systems have contributed to perpetuate food insecurity conditions and to reproduce disparities in food access (De Schutter, 2017). Among others, these processes have led to the production of "obesogenic food environments", which are sociocultural and sociospatial contexts where unhealthy food choices, such as processed food, rich in salt, sugar and trans fats, have become the easiest and most accessible options, at the expenses of people´s health (Raja et al., 2017).

Providing alternative solutions to food systems´ failures and recognising the central role food plays in the life of communities, Community-Based Food Organizations (CBFOs) have emerged. These organisations arise from the grassroots level with the purpose of building community-based food systems shaped by values of food security, food sovereignty, and food justice (Holt Giménez, 2011). In many contexts, these initiatives are established to cope with conditions of food insecurity, as a consequence of state and market institutions failing to meet basic human needs, such as the need for fair and sustainable food (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). In their attempt to foster alternative principles and modes of organising food production, distribution, consumption, and disposal, CBFOs can be conceptualised as agents of "critical food guidance" from the bottom-up.

In this paper, we examine the evolution of one such organization, FoodShare Toronto,[1] and learn from its specific approach to critical food guidance. Particularly, this paper defines critical food guidance as a socio-political process, characterised by the co-construction of values, normative principles, and codes of behaviour among agents who seek to build a different food system (see section 2). We argue that the reflexivity of key actors and organisations—meaning their capacity to establish as well as reflect upon key food system´s values and principles as well as to scale out these principles across communities—is pivotal to the implementation of critical food guidance. After conceptualising critical food guidance from the bottom-up and connecting it to reflexivity in CBFOs (see section 2), this paper examines FoodShare's history and approach to critical food guidance (see section 3). This is done by analysing its transformative values and principles and observing the ways in which these principles are re-asserted or re-framed throughout the life course of the organisation. We unravel how, throughout its years of existence, FoodShare's key ideologies and transformative values inform its approach to critical food guidance, captured by the organizational mission of "good healthy food for all" (FoodShare,

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[1]Our focus is on FoodShare Toronto, referred to as FoodShare. It is worth mentioning that there are several organisations in North American cities are also called "FoodShare." Inspired by FoodShare Toronto´s pioneer example, these organisations have their own unique histories, goals, and activities.

2021). This vision, increasingly informed by a food justice lens, reflects a history of targeting power structures in FoodShare´s advocacy, partnerships, and programming, while working towards more sustainable, healthy, and resilient communities with equitable access to nutritious and culturally appropriate vegetables and fruits. Learning from FoodShare´s history, this paper concludes by discussing key lessons about how reflexivity can be a tool to strengthen the capacity of CBFOs to be vehicles of emancipatory and transformative food guidance (see section 4).

2. Community-based food organisations and critical food guidance from the bottom-up

Food guidance is generally associated with a set of normative principles or behavioural guidelines on food production, delivery, and consumption established from the top. Typically, players such as international organisations, state agencies, authoritative experts´ groups, or food companies, act as food regulatory bodies, setting parameters on sustainable food consumption and food security (Henderson et al., 2010; Sumner, 2015). In a similar vein, food safety agencies establish guidelines concerning food safety hazards, food contaminants, but also nutrition security, in order to inform food system´s regulators as well as to enhance trust and transparency about the food chain among citizen-consumers (Tritscher et al., 2013). Yet, besides this common understanding of food guidance, "critical" food guidance is a negotiated process that is initiated from the ground up. Relevant to this bottom-up characterisation of critical food guidance is the co-construction of values, normative principles, and codes of behaviour among agents who seek to build a different food system.

From this perspective, bottom-up initiatives such as CBFOs, encompassing food consumption-distribution networks, food hubs, food policy councils, etc., (Manganelli, 2018; Rossi & Brunori, 2010; RUAF, 2019; Blay-Palmer et al., 2013) are examples of organisations or networks seeking to mobilize alternative food guiding principles. These organisations arise from the grassroots level with the purpose of developing more locally-oriented supply networks, implementing alternative food infrastructures, and sensitising and educating inhabitants, communities and other actors of the food system (Levkoe, 2006). CBFOs are driven by transformative values or ideologies, the most common being community food security, food sovereignty, and food justice (Holt Giménez, 2011; Welsh & MacRae, 1998). Inspired by principles of community food security, grassroots organisations engage in critical food guidance by means of training, networking and coalition building to set up community food projects from the ground up.[2] Moving beyond a food security focus, food sovereignty asserts the right of people and communities to exercise control over the food system (Patel, 2009). In short, this

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[2] See for instance the mission statement of the Community Food Security Coalition, which has been one major network fostering community food security objectives in North America (http://foodsecurity.org/aboutcfsc/, accessed 14th February 2022).

ideology empowers communities and previously disadvantaged players in the food system by making them protagonists in setting the rules of the game on how food is produced and delivered. This is in line with the principles of critical food guidance. Food justice complements food sovereignty by addressing the wider structures of injustice that prevent certain groups from having control over access to means of production and adequate food (Moragues-Faus, 2017). Thus, critical food guidance is reflected in the reformation of dominant agri-food policies or state rules in the direction of removing structural forms of inequity affecting the most marginalised groups (Alkon & Guthman, 2017).

CBFOs have certainly met challenges in being vehicles of more just ways of organising food systems that is synonymous to critical food guidance. One of the key challenges is integrating the needs of a diverse range of actors, including citizen-consumers of different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, in order to build alternatives that are more democratic and accessible for many (Goodman & Goodman, 2016; Maye, 2013). Other challenges concern how to translate allegedly "pure" values such as "local", "organic", and "sustainable" into a reality in which these values are de facto highly contested and negotiated (Ilbery & Maye, 2015; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). Another connected element concerns ways of scaling out these values across diverse communities and territorial contexts (Corsi et al., 2018).

Overall, while recognising these challenges, the agro-food debate has highlighted how these grassroots initiatives hold transformative aspirations that are linked to fundamental critiques of the dominant food system (Holt Giménez, 2011). In many respects, the latter is considered unjust and unsustainable, failing to meet people´s right to food sovereignty, while simultaneously being jointly responsible for serious environmental side effects related to greenhouse gas emissions, food waste generation, land, energy, and resource exploitation. Therefore, critical food guidance should not only be considered in terms of knowledge building, or awareness raising. By scaling out and embedding normative principles across actors and practices, critical food guidance is also a matter of engendering a transformative process which allows for substantial and collective change (Kirwan et al., 2017).

This paper examines how key ideologies and transformative values inform CBFOs in the establishment of alternative guiding principles as well as in exporting these principles across communities and actors of the food system. However, it is essential to assess the capacity of these organizations to readjust and re-frame key values and principles as the organization evolves (Manganelli, 2022). Indeed, as the initiative develops and scales out, different factors, both internal and external to the organization, influence its modalities to scale out and to practically implement alternative food guiding principles. One example are challenges of ensuring access to operational resources (e.g., funding, human capital, material and immaterial infrastructures, etc.) (Blay-Palmer et al., 2013). These challenges may limit or at least affect the capacity of CBFOs to reach communities and embed alternative food principles within them. External factors related to changes in the political climate, socioeconomic crises and disruptions also play a role in how CBFOs (re)frame their role as agents of critical food guidance. Given this background, the concept of "reflexivity" is a useful tool to conceptualize the ways in which

CFBOs, by going through different stages of their life course, reflect upon their role and positionality, and, possibly, re-assess or re-adjust some of the guiding principles according to their changing contextual circumstances (Manganelli, 2018). Thus, the next section (*Defining reflexivity: a socio-political view*) defines reflexivity, characterizing it from a socio-political perspective, while the following section (*Examining reflexivity in community-based food organizations*) applies the concept to the study of CBFOs.

Defining reflexivity: a socio-political view

The concept of reflexivity has been variably defined, but overall it can be conceived as referring to the capacity of actors (e.g. individuals, organizations or movements engaged in collective processes) to self-reflect upon and reconsider underlying values and practices, as well as established guidelines and normative frameworks (De Schutter & Lenoble, 2010; Stirling, 2006). Originally, the notion of reflexivity was introduced in sociological debates about risks and uncertainties of the modern society by authors such as Beck et al., (1994). These authors have developed the concept of "reflexive modernity" and arguing that risks and unpredictable side effects, brought about by modernization processes (e.g., processes of economic and cultural globalization), mobilize a reflexive approach to modern societies. This reflexive attitude implies confronting and reconsidering the underlying foundations of modern growth and socioecological change (Lee, 2008). The notion of reflexivity has been mostly debated in scientific contributions on "reflexive governance" by the sustainability transition literature, and by governance approaches derived from this literature, such as adaptive governance and transition management (Feindt & Weiland, 2018; Hendriks & Grin, 2007; Voß et al., 2006). Overall, these normative perspectives link the notion of reflexivity to the stirring of societal transitions towards sustainable development (Feindt & Weiland, 2018). In these debates, reflexivity is understood as a mode of steering where actors and organizations are encouraged "to scrutinize and reconsider their underlying assumptions, institutional arrangements and practices" (Hendriks & Grin, 2007, p. 333).

In this respect, a useful distinction is the one between first order and second order reflexivity (Stirling, 2006). First order reflexivity involves a reactive attitude to unpredictable effects or shocks brought about by societal development. An example could be the Green Revolution, which has responded to crises and shocks related to food shortages through measures based on liberalised agriculture and global trade, without considering radical alternatives to the economic growth paradigm (De Schutter & Vanloqueren, 2011; Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Marsden, 2013). The same occurs when responses to climate change delivered through technological solutions do not lay the basis for a deep de-carbonisation of society. Instead, second order reflexivity is about questioning established normative frameworks and underlying institutions in which collective actors operate (De Schutter & Lenoble, 2010). Radical and transformative approaches to food system change such as food sovereignty or food as a

Commons reflect this second order reflexivity (De Schutter et al., 2018; Holt Giménez, 2011). Thus, deep reflexivity involves being critical about underlying norms that regulate collective action, including established paradigms that are at the basis of the organization of food systems (Sonnino et al., 2014).

Overall, what emerges from the above reflections is the importance of scrutinizing reflexivity in its socio-political dimension (Brousseau et al., 2012; Stirling, 2006). Reflexivity is not only a cognitive process whereby actors, by interacting with one another, gain new factual knowledge, or acquire alternative understandings of a problem. Reflexivity also involves negotiating and co-constructing values and normative frames among actors engaged in collective processes (Manganelli, 2022). Consequently, socio-institutional factors such as the political landscape, the institutional setting, as well as the dominance of certain normative and cultural frames around food, necessarily affect reflexive processes and outcomes, including the potential for triggering socio-political transformation. In this respect, it can be argued that "transformative learning" is an element that further qualifies reflexive dynamics. Relevant to this point is the contribution by De Schutter and Lenoble (2010) who introduce a "genetic" approach to reflexive governance. According to this approach, alternative futures are encouraged by "re-imagining ways to act collectively that are not constrained by the existing institutional frameworks and by the narrow range of possibilities such frameworks allow" (De Schutter & Lenoble, 2010, p. xxi).

To synthesize the literature, reflexivity can be defined as the collective capacity to be critical and open to self-reflection and learning. This also means being open to re-examine established positionalities and ways of doing, embedding transformative learning across actors and practices. Therefore, reflexive dynamics should be understood as negotiated and co-constructed collectively through the interaction among actors and organizations, taking into account the socio-political and socioeconomic realty in which collective agents are embedded.

Examining reflexivity in community-based food organizations

The concept of reflexivity in relation to CBFOs remains relatively understudied (Manganelli, 2018). Early references to reflexivity come from debates regarding the hybridization of alternative and conventional value systems and in studies on "localism" in community-based food initiatives (Goodman & Goodman, 2016; Ilbery & Maye, 2015; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006).

Overall, these scholarly contributions have underlined how, contrary to normative and idealistic perspectives attached to re-localisation, in practice the notion of "local" is neither pure, nor inherently more sustainable or just (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). On the contrary, in real-life local food networks, emancipatory values related to social justice, ethics of care, or environmental stewardship, can coexist with neoliberally oriented consumeristic types of behaviours (Hinrichs, 2000; Maye, 2013). As a result, agro-scholars have argued in favour of a more reflexive notion of localism, articulated through "'open,' continuous, 'reflexive' processes

which bring together a broadly representative group of people to explore and discuss ways of changing their society" (Dupuis & Goodman, 2005, p. 361).

Although not explicitly addressing reflexivity, further connections with this notion are visible in analyses on "value tensions" related to the upscaling of CBFOs carried out by Canadian scholars (Blay-Palmer et al., 2013; Knezevic et al., 2017; Mount, 2012). Some of these authors accentuate how CBFOs can be "important sites of transformative learning" (Levkoe, 2006, p. 97), thanks to their values and principles translated into practices that promote capacity building and community development. Conversely these authors also point to the different kinds of dilemmas that these initiatives go through as they scale out or up, increasing their material basis and involving a wider network of participating actors such as citizens, farmers, processors, etc. (Mount, 2012). First, not dissimilarly from debates on "conventionalism" versus "alterity," these authors ask how values related to transparency, accountability, community cohesion, food quality, etc., can be maintained if the initiatives scale up (Mount, 2012). Second, the literature focusses on how value tensions and dilemmas affect the organizational governance of these initiatives, provoking different types of reflexive outcomes. For instance, authors such as Levkoe and Wakefield (2013) and Levkoe (2015) point to certain reflexive dilemmas that these initiatives face in the governance of their networks. In particular, the authors highlight the trade-off between a more centralised and hierarchical governing structure and a more informal and decentralised type of organisational governance (Manganelli, 2022).

Thus, one insight from the above analysis is that CBFOs can be vehicles of reflexivity and learning by organizing in networks or assemblages and exporting transformative values across actors and initiatives, as exemplified in food policy councils. These initiatives are spaces in which reflexivity is encouraged by bridging knowledge between communities and state actors, as well as by stimulating a food system lens across city administrative structures (Blay-Palmer, 2010). However, reflexivity is also an expression of (value) tensions and dilemmas CBFOs go through as they develop and scale out, with the ambition to exercise transformative change across communities and actors of the food system.

On this basis, it is arguable that three elements of CBFOs deserve deeper attention. The first element relates to the analysis of socio-political factors triggering reflexive dynamics in CBFOs. As mentioned in the previous section (*Community-based food organisations and critical food guidance from the bottom-up*), these factors may be internal or external to the organization and are tightly connected to the socio-political environment in which the CBFOs navigate. The second element concerns unravelling the ways in which reflexive dynamics manifest in relation to critical food guidance. More precisely, analysing how the organization self-reflects upon its own guiding principles, by modifying or, rather, by further reasserting these principles, and what organizational strategies are adopted to export such principles across communities and actors through time. The third and final element relates to what can be learned about reflexivity as a tool or a strategy for improving the resilience of the organization through time and supporting its capacity to provide a solid foundation for emancipatory and transformative food guidance. By

scrutinizing reflexivity in different stages of FoodShare, sections 3 and 4, seek to illuminate these aspects.

2.1 Methodology

Empirical data on the genesis and development of FoodShare was collected in three phases. The first phase was carried out by the second author between 2011 and 2013. The fieldwork was based on the FoodShare History Project that was part of the larger Nourishing Ontario[3] participatory action research project funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Nourishing Ontario focussed on systematically documenting lessons learned from CBFOs working to build or enhance local food hubs, defined as "networks and intersections of grassroots, community-based organisations and individuals that work together to build increasingly socially just, economically robust and ecologically sound food systems that connect farmers with consumers as directly as possible." (Blay Palmer et al., 2013, p. 524). During this phase we conducted interviews with fourteen key informants. These key informants played an instrumental role in the evolution of FoodShare since its inception in 1985. The key informants were recruited using both convenience and snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted to carve out key contextual factors triggering the origins of FoodShare; the ways in which key pioneering actors framed the values and missions of the organisation; how these values and missions evolved through time and how FoodShare built alliances and activated networks and projects accordingly.

The second phase of data collection occurred in 2017 and was conducted the first author as part of a research project on the Hybrid Governance of Alternative Food Networks financed by the Flemish research foundation (FWO). This phase involved seventeen interviews conducted in Toronto. These interviews targeted the former FoodShare´s executive director, staff involved in the management of key programs within FoodShare as well as members of FoodShare´s board of directors. In addition, other actors of the Toronto food movement were interviewed (such as coordinators of the TFPC and grassroots organisations) which provided further contextual information. Complementing and updating the first phase, phase two was focussed on retracing the evolution of FoodShare from its inception in 1985 to 2017, identifying significant milestones and stages of its evolution, including key factors that triggered its reflexivity.

The third and final phases occurred in 2021, where the first author carried out eight online interviews with key informants (e.g., the former FoodShare´s executive director, managers of key programs, and other staff). The purpose was to update the previous fieldwork, to refine the stages of FoodShare´s evolution considering changes which occurred between 2018 and 2021.

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[3] Now known as Nourishing Communities.

In all the three phases, interviews were complemented with other methods of data collection. These methods involved analyzing key documentation, such as FoodShare strategic plans, yearly reports, policy statements, press documentation, peer-reviewed and grey literature (focussing on 1985 to 2021). Data on present-day activities were gathered from publicly available documents for additional context. Additionally, personal observations through site visits were carried out during phase one, which included two meetings at FoodShare, a tour by the former Executive Director and two former staff members, in addition to attending the 2013 Annual General Meeting. These activities helped to gain a deeper understanding of FoodShare and the organization's day-to-day activities.

3. Reflexivity and critical food guidance in FoodShare´s life course

The analysis of reflexivity and its articulation in critical food guiding principles in FoodShare´s trajectory is carried out in three phases. The first phase involves the genesis and early year (1985 to 1990s), when FoodShare begins to frame itself as a community food security organization. The second phase (1992 to 2017) involves a long period led by Debbie Field, the former executive director. In this phase, FoodShare begins to embrace a more holistic food system approach. The third and most recent phase (2017 to 2021) is characterized by new leadership and the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, coalescing with a greater concern towards socio-racial injustices in food systems.

FoodShare´s genesis and early stage (1985 to 1992)

Depicting the socio-political context in which FoodShare emerged is essential in understanding FoodShare's guiding values and reflexive positionality at the time of its establishment. FoodShare was established in the 1980s, amid growing rates of domestic poverty and hunger (Fisher, 2017). Food banks, food rescue, and other charitable food responses emerged as the "answer" to domestic food insecurity and became institutionalized to a degree not previously experienced (Riches & Silvasti, 2014). In Toronto, concerned civil society and policy actors mobilised to respond to this reality and developed civil society initiatives and policy networks seeking to respond to food insecurity.

One outcome of this enhanced social and political concern was a motion, launched by former Mayor Art Eggleton and the City of Toronto's Executive Committee in September 1985. This motion signified the official start of FoodShare as a charitable organisation with the policy mandate to help fight hunger in Toronto (City of Toronto, 1985). In line with this mandate, FoodShare´s pioneers were committed to addressing food insecurity by linking residents to emergency food resources, but also by exploring alternative solutions, such as community

gardens, novel food distribution and retailing systems,[4] and school food programs. Although emergency food organizations were becoming more institutionalized, a charitable approach to hunger was not the direction that the key players involved in the establishment of FoodShare wanted to pursue. In 1986, for instance, FoodShare received a donation of one million pounds of potatoes for distribution amongst local food banks, including the recently formed Daily Bread Food Bank (Ferguson, 1986). The so-called "Potato Drive" was an important piece of FoodShare's history because it was an early example of FoodShare's critique of food surplus being used as a response to hunger. More broadly, influenced by evolving food security and health promotion discourses, the reflexive positionality of FoodShare pioneers shifted from a charitable response to hunger, to a community food security approach.

This implied a shift of action from linking citizens to charitable food organizations, toward community development and capacity-building work, supported by a commitment to values of universal access to food, empowerment, and social change. As stated by one key informant, "health promotion and this notion of healthy public policy, which evolved in the 80s, legitimated looking at the social determinants of health" (quote from a former Toronto Food Policy Council associate, 2011). These emerging trends in understanding how to achieve food security and health provided support for FoodShare's implementation of critical food guidance by emphasizing the need to develop programs and engage in partnerships to facilitate community empowerment and socio-political change toward more just and sustainable food systems.

The type of programming that FoodShare began to develop in its early years formalized the emerging reflexivity of the organisation and of its approach to critical food guidance. FoodShare´s initial programming illustrates its will to shift away from charitable approaches, but also the challenges FoodShare faced in shaping its role as a community-based food security organisation with a focus on universality and health. In the 1990s, FoodShare began to expand its programming to include incubation space for food projects ranging from access to fresh produce,[5] to growing (urban agriculture), to cooking and catering.[6] During the early years, key informants observed a "tension" between charitable food organizations and FoodShare (former Toronto Food Policy Council associate and a former FoodShare staff, 2011). Another suggested that FoodShare had to cautiously remove itself from the charitable food model, especially since it was beginning to feel like it was "enabling food banks" and becoming "a fundraising arm of food banks" (former FoodShare executive director, 2011). This suggests that FoodShare's shift from a charitable approach to a community food organization was a negotiated and contested process in its early years and was indicative of the reflexive positionality of FoodShare—the struggle to

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[4] The *Hunger Hotline*, a call-in service linking Toronto's citizens to food banks, was FoodShare's first program and evolved into *FoodLink*, linking Torontonians to community food-security resources including community gardens, farmers' markets, bulk buying, and community kitchens (Johnston, 2003).

[5] Good Food Box, which continues to this day. See FoodShare (n.d.b) https://foodshare.net/program/goodfoodbox/, accessed 14th February 2022.

[6] Former Field to Table Catering program (FoodShare, 2009)

distinguish itself from dominant responses to hunger, by building an alternative model, together with communities across Toronto.

Furthermore, as reported by one key informant, the City funded FoodShare to "do some work on the issue of hunger in Toronto… It was all about the food injustice*"* (former FoodShare staff, 2011). These responses illustrate how FoodShare began to position itself as a vehicle of critical food guidance by embracing alternative values and principles and seeking to export these principles in communities through programming.

In summary, the need to address root causes of hunger and prioritize community development and engagement was central to FoodShare's founding values and mission, which were key pillars of critical food guidance that FoodShare intended to export to wider communities across Toronto.

FoodShare intermediary years (1992 to 2017)

A turning point in FoodShare´s history was 1992, when Debbie Field, a community food security activist and concerned citizen, became FoodShare's Executive Director. The role of FoodShare's leadership in framing and communicating core values and mission of the organisation in its intermediary stage was consistently emphasized by key informants. Overall, alongside major changes in FoodShare´s leadership, these core years of FoodShare´s life course are characterised by the development of its programming, as well as by a reinforced commitment to foster meaningful partnerships with communities and political actors. Programming and partnering are concrete ways in which FoodShare intended to scale out its food guiding principles.

FoodShare´s leadership and reinforced commitment to a public food system

FoodShare´s guiding vision "Good Healthy Food for All" (FoodShare, 2021) is exemplary of its core years. This vision derives from the genesis of FoodShare and the commitment of the funding members to find universal solutions to food insecurity. In this phase, FoodShare's new leadership promoted a reinforced commitment to universality in all aspects of program delivery, providing guidance for the orientation of its programs. Among others, this guiding vision also shows how principles of food justice underpins FoodShare's work (see section "*FoodShare current stage*"). FoodShare's commitment and engagement toward universal access to food is evident in programs such as "Field to Table7," Good Food Box8, and, later, Good Food Markets[9]. These programs emerged in the 1990s and were set up due to the executive director's leadership and the creative staff that continued to advocate for developing alternative approaches to food insecurity through universal programs (former FoodShare executive director, former

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[7] Field to Table. See FoodShare (n.d.f) https://foodshare.net/program/student/, accessed 14th February 2022.

[8] Good Food Box. See FoodShare (n.d.b) https://foodshare.net/program/goodfoodbox/, accessed 14th February 2022.

[9] Good Food Markets. See FoodShare (n.d.c) https://foodshare.net/program/markets/, accessed 14th February 2022.

FoodShare staff, current FoodShare staff, 2011). These programs empower communities and foster a food system approach "from field to table" (Esteron, 2013).

In addition to being aware of the persistence of food insecurity, there was the recognition that food insecurity is also the product of a food system that is "fundamentally broken when it comes to the kind of food [that] is distributed" (former FoodShare executive director, 2021). Thus, the need to develop a public, or common food system, became stronger in the values and missions of FoodShare and its leading actors during its intermediary years (Field, 2009).

FoodShare reached out to citizens and attempted to sensitize its values by cultivating leadership and commitment at the level of communities, volunteers, and dedicated staff. For example, CAMH's Sunshine Garden program, which is the first market garden on hospital grounds whereby CAMH patients tend to the garden and then sell their harvest at the Garden Market.[10] The coordinators of this program began their relationship with FoodShare as program participants, then became volunteers, and eventually gained skills leading to paid employment (former FoodShare staff, 2011). This program exemplifies FoodShare's programs' ability to scale out and up as it works alongside its community.

Scaling out food guiding principles through partnerships and programs

FoodShare scales out alternative food guiding principles and attempts to guarantee the sustainability and longevity of its programs through partnership-making. In reference to the Good Food Box program, "not a single box could go out the door without hundreds of partnerships. Each stop has a community coordinator, a volunteer in a neighbourhood or an agency staff member" as written by Debbie Field in the *Strategic Plan* (2009, p.3).

Thus, partnership-making involved establishing links with actors such as non-profit organisations, community leaders, community agencies, residents, schools, facilitating the deliveries of good food boxes, the establishment of good food markets in neighbourhoods, or the set-up of food nutrition programs in schools, and so on. It also encompassed maintaining solid relationships with food suppliers at the Ontario Food Terminal, involving both local growers from Southern Ontario, but also suppliers from the conventional food system (Field, 2014; Manganelli, 2022). Furthermore, partnership-making also concretised in maintaining relationships with funding agents, such as individuals, donors, private foundations, state agencies, to safeguard the financial viability of FoodShare´s programs.

Overall, FoodShare connected to partners and engaged in partnership-making by targeting actors and organisations aligning with FoodShare´s values. Among others, promoting access to "good healthy food" across Toronto's inhabitants, particularly those living with food insecurity, remains prominent in the way in which FoodShare positioned itself and its mission in

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[10] The Sunshine Garden is a partnership between FoodShare and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). See FoodShare (n.d.e) https://foodshare.net/program/sunshine/, accessed 14 February 2022

the intermediary stage. Prioritizing access to food for (and in) communities means mediating different values attached to food. FoodShare's commitment to purchasing locally grown produce whenever feasible facilitated market opportunities for local farmers and its role as a food hub enabled novel partnerships with actors along the supply chain (former Toronto Food Policy Council coordinator, a former FoodShare staff, and a current FoodShare staff, 2013). Fostering these partnerships has meant supporting local family farm livelihoods in advance of widespread societal interest in local food. Yet, FoodShare's commitment to universality to avoid stigmatization and contribute to a more just and sustainable food system also came with inherent tensions. Giving priority to accessibility has consequently meant prioritising financially and culturally accessible food—often coming from the conventional sector—over "local" or "organic." Specifically, the Good Food Box program aims to keep box prices the same throughout the year by modifying its contents based on the growing season—it can either be locally sourced or imported items (FoodShare staff, 2021). FoodShare recognizes that culturally appropriate foods are staple foods in one's diet, whether these are sourced locally or not, and ensures that program members receive them (FoodShare staff, 2021).

Our fieldwork also suggests that community programming promotes secondary outcomes, beyond food accessibility, and reveals the multidimensionality of food. One example is the Mobile Good Food Market which are "travelling community food markets filled with fresh, quality vegetables and fruits" (FoodShare, n.d. a, para. 1)". This program aims to increase access to fresh produce *and* concurrently promotes community cohesiveness and capacity. The School Grown program represents another example of leveraging a multitude of benefits from a strategic partnership. Involving farming on school rooftops and yards, this program has contributed to both youth employment opportunities and food literacy (FoodShare, n.d. b, para. 1). A key informant explains, "It is not just about making sure that kids eat healthy…it is about educating kids…with [food] …trying to keep food affordable and…buying directly to support the local economy whenever you can…buying from diverse small family farms not mono-culture corporate farms." (FoodShare staff, 2011).

Furthermore, FoodShare also fostered partnerships with several donors, from smaller foundations to larger corporate funders. As societal interest in food increased, a greater number of funding partners emerged, "Because of the obesity epidemic and diabetes epidemic that's rising, especially in kids, people are getting that we've done something wrong here and we need to address it. So, there's definitely a huge shift in available funding and foundations and organizations that are willing to step up and…address these health issues that are affecting society, especially kids… We think also the environmental movement is so strong right now" (former FoodShare staff, 2011).

Funding availability is subject to shifting societal discussions and priorities of funding agents. This means that financial stability and steady growth of key programs causes tension for FoodShare´s staff. More precisely, if few of the programs can rely on consistent funding, others are more unstable and can run the risk of being dismantled or remain underfinanced, "Right now our program [i.e., Field to Table School and School Grown] is in a good financial position, but

this is cyclical: funders decide what their priorities are and sometimes we fit well, sometimes not" (FoodShare staff, 2017).

In addition, a key informant declared, "To compete in a non-profit, it's really hard. People come in, put their heart and soul into stuff, and that doesn't matter—it's not necessarily about the quality of their work or the amount that they care. If you don't have the funding, you don't have the funding for them" (former FoodShare staff, 2011).

Furthermore, FoodShare built networks with state actors to sensitize state authorities toward a public food system which needs supportive policies for systemic change. The organization has created and fostered relationships with the municipal, provincial, and to a lesser extent, the federal government.[11]

Informants highlighted the importance of FoodShare's partnerships with the municipal government and key actors at the city level. From its inception, the City of Toronto provided physical space for FoodShare's operations, including free space in several different city buildings. When FoodShare started the Good Food Box, it was allowed to use a city building once a month. After outgrowing that location, the city, in partnership with the Ontario Realty Corporation, provided access to 200 Eastern Avenue, which became FoodShare's produce warehouse. The new space enabled FoodShare to pack and distribute the Good Food Box weekly, as opposed to monthly.

The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC), founded in the early 1990s, has also been a key partner.[12] The city provided the TFPC with funds to conduct a feasibility study which, in turn, led to Field to Table, one of FoodShare's earliest programs. The Field to Table program was the foundation for FoodShare's Good Food Box, Student Nutrition Program, Urban Agriculture, and Incubator Kitchen programs (communication with a former TFPC coordinator, 2011). The TFPC's institutional home was Toronto Public Health (TPH) and the missing connection between City resources and local non-profit organizations. The TFPC´s formation provided "an advocacy group housed within the City's administration with direct access to the politicians" (former TFPC coordinator, 2011). One key informant suggested that the attainment of physical space from the city would not have been possible without the support of a key political figure and the TFPC.

FoodShare's alignment with political environments was seen as a resource by a few informants, who observed a lot of "political undercurrents involved with really starting these programs" (former FoodShare staff, 2011). Working with state actors and obtaining consensus means having clear and communicable guiding principles, while, concurrently speaking to "everyone's political agenda" (former FoodShare staff, 2011).

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[11] Relations with the federal government are currently stronger regarding the advocacy for the establishment of a School Food Program in Canada. Organisations such as the Coalition for Healthy School Food and Food Secure Canada, close to FoodShare, are protagonists of this engagement.

[12] The TFPC is a hybrid type of organisation, housed in the Board of Health while representing the voices of community partners (Fridman & Lenters, 2013). Since 2019, the TFPC has been undergoing a profound revision of structure and organisation, the contours of which are not yet clear.

In sum, partnership making and program delivery are ways in which FoodShare engaged with diverse actors to build capacity and export its values and principles across communities. Translating its principles into concrete action has also meant prioritising certain values while leaving aside others which resulted in key tensions. Indeed, while a variety of government and funding agency partnerships served to build a degree of resilience, threats of financial instability and changing political priorities were also critical factors undermining the durability and effectiveness of certain programs.

FoodShare current stage (2017 to present)

The latest years of FoodShare´s life-course are characterized by a profound shift in how the organization frames itself and its role as a CBFO. While the focus on building a public food system remains strong, an emphasis on promoting food justice and Indigenous food sovereignty emerges and reshapes FoodShare's organizational governance. The revived reflexivity on food justice also influences the ways in which FoodShare creates alliances and shapes its programs, thus further mobilizing critical food guiding principles. Two key factors have played a role in this revived commitment to food justice: First, its current executive director Paul Taylor, promotes a clear orientation towards food justice. Second, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic include a sharp increase in food insecurity and revives the need for racial justice across disadvantaged communities in Toronto.

New FoodShare leadership and enhanced reflexivity on food justice

Like the intermediate stage, the introduction of a new leader at the head of FoodShare signifies a shift in the organisation´s trajectory. Being a leader and organiser who himself experienced food insecurity and poverty, Paul Taylor brings a "reinforced commitment to tackle anti-black racism as part of our work to address food insecurity" (Taylor, 2021). Thus, what emerges in these years is the clear intention to reframe food insecurity and re-inscribe it into a wider anti-racism, anti-oppression, and anti-colonialism discourse (see also Manganelli, 2022). The greater orientation toward food justice is evident in FoodShare´s new strategic plan, that argues for "working to dismantle systemic forms of oppression that exist in our food system and in our food movement, consisting of colonialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy" (FoodShare, 2021, p.4).

Informed by this food justice lens, FoodShare engages in several actions tailored to scale out its principles. First, it acknowledges and provides evidence on the structural forms of oppression experienced by disadvantaged people such as Black and Indigenous communities. FoodShare partnered with the multi-disciplinary research group called PROOF from the University of Toronto. This partnership conducted a study to determine the connections between food insecurity and racism. The study shows that the probability of being food insecure is significantly higher for a person of colour than for a white person (Dhunna & Tarasuk, 2021).

This study provides the basis for evidence-based advocacy with the purpose to "challenge some of the understanding around food insecurity" (Taylor, 2021).

Additionally, FoodShare intentionally begins to scale out food justice principles by liaising with actors and movements sharing similar food justice values. For instance, FoodShare aligns with the push for racial justice fostered by the Black Lives Matter movement and builds alliances with food initiatives engaging in Black food sovereignty in Toronto, such as the Afri-Can FoodBasket and Black Creek Community Farm (Taylor, 2020). Food justice intentionally guides the way in which FoodShare targets communities and makes sense of its engagement through partnerships and programming. Specifically, FoodShare works "Alongside communities, across the City of Toronto that have faced chronic underinvestment— that have been on the brunt, or the receiving end, of systemic racism, sexism, those sorts of issues. And we're working with these communities…to build community-led food infrastructure." (Taylor, 2021)

Moreover, FoodShare orients its food sourcing strategies to embed food justice principles in an intentional and purposive way. FoodShare still focusses on providing culturally appropriate and accessible food but, in this phase, its leadership and staff reflect more deeply on other equity aspects as well. Notably, FoodShare has "Set up a 'dismantling white supremacy good food box', even if it does not reach enough volume… We want also to look to migrant workers. We are concerned with where we are sourcing from. Are they using migrant workers? We are trying to find ways to make that more important in our conversation with our suppliers. We want to find ways to bring this conversation up." (FoodShare staff, 2021).

Finally, a greater reflexivity on food justice is tangible in the ways FoodShare begins to (re)think and re-adjust its own organisational governance (see also Manganelli, 2022). For instance, an Indigenous advisory committee was created, consisting of sixty members, to be consulted for strategic decisions. Equity is at the forefront as FoodShare selects new staff and organises its labour, as they radically decided to virtually eliminate unpaid staff from its programs. This is a huge shift from the early and intermediary stages of FoodShare. Despite its challenges, volunteers are essential to program delivery and, as mentioned in the previous section (*FoodShare intermediary years*), being a volunteer could lead to a paid staff position. According to FoodShare´s leadership, these and other changes were guided by the will "to make a priority for us to do the work that we see we need to have in society, in our organisation as well" (Taylor, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic: coping with a new context of crisis

Shifting focus toward denouncing systemic injustices has intermingled with revived food insecurity challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the COVID-19 pandemic initially manifested as an emergency crisis, FoodShare's programming pivoted to respond to worsening food insecurity. For example, Good Food Box deliveries went from 250 to 1000 per week up to 2500 deliveries in the peak phase of the emergency (communication with a FoodShare staff, 2021; Manganelli, 2022). FoodShare relied on its partnership-making and fundraising capacity,

and its solid relations with the Ontario Food Terminal, to reinforce and expand the delivery system and respond to a situation of emergency in a short time (Manganelli, 2022). FoodShare staff mobilized a huge fundraising effort, connected with donors that raised money to cover the costs of the good food boxes, which allowed FoodShare staff to deliver food boxes for free to community agencies and food insecure inhabitants, "It is something that FoodShare never did. Technically, we are a charity but we have never been an organisation that gives food for free because we need to be able to change the system so that people can afford the food that they want and not being recipient of food at no cost. So that was a huge shift in how we operate." (Quote from a FoodShare staff, 2021).

Thus, responding to an emergency situation has meant temporarily putting aside some of the core values at the foundation of FoodShare. Overall, the pandemic outbreak has further revealed the massive level of food insecurity still affecting Canada and the North American context. The number of food insecure people went up from 4.5 million pre-pandemic to 5.5 million during the pandemic, "This is a massive crisis in this country… People see food costs going up, caused by the pandemic, by climate change, and also by greedy corporations…we need to look at who is most impacted by food insecurity and who is made more vulnerable." (Taylor, 2021).

Overall, the dream for a publicly supported food system has yet to be realized, and FoodShare´s leadership is in the midst of pursuing advocacy for Indigenous people, people of colour, disabled people—those who are the most impacted by food injustices. Yet, FoodShare is also aware that initiatives such as charities or food access programs are not going to solve a situation of endemic food insecurity (Manganelli, 2022) since FoodShare does "not have the capacity to end food insecurity or poverty—those are income issues. We are over-relying on charities to do the heavy lifting of tackling food insecurity and poverty" (Taylor, 2021).

In other words, while engaging in rebuilding food infrastructures from the bottom-up, FoodShare recognises that it is also essential to raise a consistent voice that advocates for changes at the government and policy levels, in order to remove structural barriers that impede the implementation of food justice.

4. Discussions and conclusions

By narrating the story of FoodShare, this paper has investigated the role of reflexivity in a CBFO, i.e., the ways in which an organisation such as FoodShare has re-examined and reasserted key values and principles through time, while scaling out these principles as vehicles of critical food guidance among actors and communities. Based on the conceptual framework, our empirical analysis has highlighted the relevance of key socio-political factors catalysing reflexive dynamics in FoodShare. In the first phase, a socio-political landscape of crisis, food insecurity, and emergency food networks ushered in a reflexive attitude in FoodShare´s pioneer actors. This reflexivity is manifested in the will to move away from the food bank model and

instead focus on community food security and empowerment as approaches tailored to work on structural and systemic solutions to food insecurity. This has led to partnership building and the setup of community programs as a means to practically implement and scale out food guiding principles. Supportive city councillors, community agencies, as well as other organisations such as the TFPC—sharing a similar mission to work on structural solutions—were key partners in the initial stages of FoodShare.

In the background of persistent food insecurity, but also with societal concerns about food system health, sustainability, and justice, the second phase addressing food system distortions became pronounced in FoodShare´s values system. Indeed, the organisation began to adopt a clear food system lens, underlining the need to repair food systems´ malfunctions which lead to food injustices. Thus, promoting a public or common food system, driven by values of universality and health, has been the flagship mission of FoodShare throughout its central years. As a result, partnerships and programs were developed to tackle different aspects of the food system—from access to land and community growing, to school nutrition programs, youth education and empowerment, to alternative food distribution systems, good food markets and composting programs. These partnerships and programs mark a clear intention to seek food system change through community empowerment and capacity building (Esteron, 2013). Yet, as highlighted in section "*Defining reflexivity: a socio-political view*", these programmatic actions are not free from socio-political tensions. In particular, these tensions relate to the very unstable multi-level political environment with respect to supporting community-based food systems. They also concern challenges to ensure stable access to funding and human capital to implement and sustain programs.

Another common theme throughout the history (and trajectory) of FoodShare is a stronger positionality on food justice, particularly in the latest phase of FoodShare´s life-course. This is mainly due to a socio-political and cultural landscape of enhanced sensitivity to race and justice issues, combined with the advent of a new leader at the guidance of FoodShare, as well as with a revived context of community food insecurity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. As explained in section "*Examining reflexivity in community-based food organizations*", this revived reflexivity on food justice has visible consequences in the organisational governance of FoodShare, including the ways in which the organisation builds alliances and shapes its programming.

Important lessons can be drawn from these understandings about endogenous and exogenous socio-political factors ushering in reflexive dynamics, and from the ways in which reflexivity becomes a medium to implement critical food guidance. Particularly interesting is how reflexivity can become a means to strengthen the resilience of a food organisation, i.e., its capacity towards sustainability and to provide a solid and durable alternative. In this respect, the concluding part of this section highlights three points.

The first point relates to the importance of holding clear values and mission as guiding principles and anchoring points of a CBFO. FoodShare has been in existence for almost forty years and has been consistent in its core principles. Basic values related to universality, health,

community empowerment, as well as structural solutions to food system inequities, remained rather solid through time, despite the different stages and challenges the organisation has faced. These were instrumental to guide the organisation through time, as well as to define the approach of FoodShare to partnership making and programming. This also relates to the role of leadership. Indeed, no one can deny the role of leaders such as Debbie Field—as the head of FoodShare for decades—and currently Paul Taylor, as charismatic figures who embody and communicate key organisational principles. These figures play a key role as leaders between the governing bodies of the organisation, the staff, and the "external" socio-political environment. Furthermore, leadership is measured at different levels. Committed staff members play a crucial role as program initiators, communicators, and translators of key principles into practices of critical food guidance. Moreover, resonating with food sovereignty principles, FoodShare translates critical food guidance into practices that also means empowering communities, i.e., building the community capacity to be leaders and champions of their own food systems.

Besides holding core values as non-negotiable pillars, the second point relates to the awareness about key socio-political tensions in which CBFOs navigate. As we learn from FoodShare´s history, phases of crisis and socioeconomic instability are part of the ways in which capitalist food systems and societies are built (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). While crises are surely sources of threat, they can also be important opportunities in which key values and missions are discussed, reframed, re-asserted and co-constructed through the interaction among actors and organisations (Manganelli, 2020). Furthermore, tensions also relate to the constant austerity in terms of resource scarcity and political support with which many CBFOs, including FoodShare, need to cope (Bedore, 2014). As highlighted in the latest stage of FoodShare (see section "*Examining reflexivity in community-based food organizations*"), too often, CBFOs need to compensate for the lack of political will or capacity of state and market institutions to repair food system´s dysfunctions. Being aware of these kinds of socio-political tensions, CBFOs should consistently raise their voices on the roles and responsibilities of state institutions to care for the right to food sovereignty. Thus, in a way, critical food guidance is a matter of shared responsibility of diverse agents playing a role in a joint or hybrid food system governance (Manganelli, 2022).

The third and final point, the existence of key socio-political tensions can also invite CBFOs to revise or re-adjust key values or modes of governance on the basis of changing contextual circumstances. On this point, the story of FoodShare is also illustrative. In the context of a revived emergency caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, core programs active in the organisation, such as the Good Food Box, pivoted into charitable food emergency programs. Thus, in a context of emergency, values of solidarity and mutual help were predominant over the focus on structural and long-term solutions. Moreover, as highlighted in section "*Defining reflexivity: a socio-political view*", acquiring political consensus has also meant reframing key values into pragmatic messages that can be attractive to various political coalitions. Therefore, being open, adopting an outward looking as well as a pragmatic approach to translating principles into practices may be essential in the face of uncertain and rapidly changing food

system and socio-political environments. In other words, "If you build an organisation with strong commitments to principles and flexibility in terms of programming and changing, you can survive a very long time." (Quote from a former FoodShare executive director, 2021).

In a sense, this capacity to revise certain values while maintaining a structural anchoring to important pillars is also critical in order to avoid a narrow or inward-looking attitude. Indeed, very often food organisations holding strong ideologies can run the risk of being short-sighted, adopting certain viewpoints while not listening to other perspectives. On the contrary, being open to self-reflection also means listening to a diversity of perspectives. After all, this is also what food democracy is about, and we like to think that this should also inform the ways in which critical food guidance is collectively implemented.

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