Collective Consumption and Food System Complexity: Citizen Mobilization, Territorial Rescaling, and Transformative Change

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Focusing on consumption as key to managing complex food system dynamics has drawn controversy from scholars and activists who argue that a focus on consumption obfuscates the social and ecological consequences of the larger transnational food system. We argue that these concerns, while holding merit, are grounded in assumptions about food systems that fail to grasp the importance of agency as much as structure. Starting from an appreciation for the transdisciplinary fusion of knowledge and concepts across governance, political economy, and urban complexity, we utilize the concept of "collective consumption" as a way to rethink how a consumption politics can help transform the larger system through collaborative governance at the local or regional scale. We take Food Policy Councils (FPCs) in the United States as our subject to explore how experimental governance arrangements can reshape the way political organization around food consumption can drive longer term transformation. Our paper proceeds in four parts. First, we dive into Castells' use of collective consumption as it relates to urban politics, which includes a close assessment of how both "consumption" and "collectivity" are relevant to urban food systems governance. Second, we offer a view of how collective consumption can be utilized to promote a justice-based perspective in urban food governance, which promotes socio-natural transformation of the current agro-industrial food system. Third, we develop a framework for imagining the possibilities of FPCs as part of new collaborative state-society relationships, offering a distinct reterritorialization of urban food politics tied to a socio-natural politics of urban metabolism. Finally, we conclude by offering comments on future challenges and opportunities in realizing the radical governance potential of FPCs.

Keywords: Sustainability governance; collective consumption; urban metabolism; food justice; Food Policy Councils.

1 Introduction

Policymakers and environmental activists who focus on consumption as key to coordinating complex food systems are drawing controversy these days, particularly when they come head-to-head with scholars

and activists working in the fields of political ecology and/or organizing around a 'just transition.'[1–5] Academics working in these traditions increasingly argue that using consumption practices to build more sustainable and equitable food politics can obfuscate the food system's globally relevant and ecologically disastrous consequences, including its many social inequities and ecological externalities.[6] They further argue that even if food consumption is framed through an understanding of global capitalism, and even when unequal impacts in distribution and pricing are taken into account, other factors such as class and race will mediate food supply and affordability in ways that provide food security unevenly, and often at the expense of justice for food production workers. In this scenario, enhancing food security for some will not produce food justice for all. For these reasons, changes in food consumption patterns tend to be conceived of as mere tinkering that will do nothing to challenge larger food systems dynamics. This partly explains why scholars concerned with the just transition of food systems have turned their attention to production more than consumption. And in this regard, the study of food systems parallels the research undertaken by political ecologists who prioritize the study of complex system dynamics – related in large part to capitalism – at the global or territorial scale rather than grassroots activism at the local or urban scale.

This is not to say that all scholars interested in making food systems more sustainable ignore consumption-driven strategies. In the US, adherents to the Alternative Food Movement (AFM) and other highly visible food advocates, like Michael Pollan, have argued that individual consumption decisions are a means through which food systems can be altered.9] Yet such approaches to food security also hold the potential to leave others in the food system more vulnerable, even as they can extend ecological devastation, primarily because they appeal to privileged consumers with flexible buying power and ignore the lack of options for low-income households. [7, 8] As such, despite being embraced across farmer's markets and among plant-based health food activists in the Global North, Pollan's "vote with your fork" adage has generated a fair amount of criticism, precisely because it tends to generate activism that is both racially and economically exclusive.[1] Likewise, even the more radical urban food movements that openly argue for a justice-based politics of individual food consumption – and who in the US use activist agendas to reveal and reverse histories of racial and socioeconomic oppression – have been critiqued for the detachment of urban food issues from production dynamics, including labor exploitation of farm workers as well as ecological resource depletion associated with certain types of agriculture. Some have gone so far as to argue that focusing on consumption, even if framed within a food justice perspective, will only produce workarounds to the agro-industrial system at best, and may even extend that abusive system at worst. As Herman et al argue, the "industrialization and institutionalization of food has acted to fetishize our relations with it, meaning that food justice movements, at least in the US, tend to focus on local and urban issues of consumption and distribution ... rather than overtly confronting the political economies of food production."[9]

2 Production vs. Consumption in the Study of Food Systems

We do not necessarily disagree with these criticisms. We also are fully cognizant of the ways that global corporate hegemony in food production and the political power of the agro-industrial sector make it difficult to advance more equitable patterns of food distribution, even in the face of concerted struggles to guarantee food security in an increasingly precarious environmental context. Even so, we want to argue that linking food production and distribution to food consumption through collective mobilization may offer ways to create locally operational and vibrant food governance systems that hold the potential to reconfigure the territoriality of supply chains, advance food justice, and may even achiever larger sustainability aims – despite the fact that moving the needle on all these challenges has remained elusive in most global food activism.

In making this argument, we build on insights drawn from the literature on urban metabolism, which offer the conceptual foundation for understanding how food systems operate "organically," that is, through networked connections and processes of production and consumption that can be either destabilized or stabilized through social and ecological disruption or constructive action. Broto et al's survey of

interdisciplinary approaches to urban metabolism highlights that, across many different disciplines, this concept has "inspired new ways of thinking about how cities can be made sustainable and has raised criticisms about specific social and economic arrangements in which some forms of flow, or of 'being in flow,' are prioritized and/or marginalized within the city." [10] Our particular usage of urban metabolism relates not only to material and energy flows, but more broadly situates food production, distribution, and consumption as embedded within particular socioecological relationships related to urbanization. While this is not itself a novel concept [11], our aim to apply a transdisciplinary lens that brings together a political economy, governance, and complexity framework is novel. The approach moves beyond a scientifically descriptive notion of urban metabolism to inspire interventions promoting more just transitions in the urban metabolism of food.

In re-imagining how to disrupt supply-chain and ownership dynamics in complex food systems, we argue that a focus on collective and not individual consumption is critical. This is so not just because individual decisions about what food to consume will never transform a tightly structured system in ways that collective action might. This also owes to the fact that mobilization around collective consumption concerns has long been considered a key element in the production of socially just governance arrangements [12], with the argument being that issues categorized under the 'collective consumption' rubric – such as housing and transport – require some sort of state oversight, whether through direct provision or via planning regulation. Although scholars have suggested that commodities like food are not considered collective consumption goods because they are purchased and consumed individually in ways that transportation for example is not, the reality is that since these arguments were originally developed in the 1970s and 1980s, many services that in the past were considered collective consumption goods, like housing, have now been privatized, owing in no small part to the global embrace of neo-liberalization.[13] More significantly, some authors are now arguing that in the contemporary moment of growing ecological crisis, commodities like food are in fact worthy subjects for designation as collective consumption goods.[14] What is not up for debate, however, is that food politics is on the contemporary political agenda both for citizens and for governing authorities. Taking the growing interest in and struggles over food as our starting point, we ask whether it is possible to bring citizens and authorities together in the production and coordination of a complex network of food production, distribution, and consumption that responds to local food priorities rather than corporate food logics.

In considering the extent to which organized collective action and/or new governance arrangements hold the potential to challenge the larger political economic dynamics of food production in ways that address food inequities and help produce a more just ecological transition we have a secondary aim: to focus on the scalar conditions that are necessary for the realization of these aims. Specifically, we ask whether and how citizens might collectively mobilize on their own or with authorities at the urban scale, and under what conditions or with what collective consumption mandates will they also engage citizens, authorities, or food producers organized in other locations and territories, ranging from urban periphery to the regional and beyond. In this regard, we build on the widely recognized opportunities and urgency for cross-mobilization of rural food movements, such as Food Sovereignty in the Global South, with those of urban food justice in the Global North.[2, 3, 5] Thinking about food consumption patterns as embedded in scales of production and distribution that may operate within but also extend beyond the locality may also lead us to consider the problematic of scale in both food activism and food governance. Our larger aim is to determine which scale(s) of action around food consumption will be most likely to produce a food system that is both equitable and sustainable, and which narratives, operational dynamics, or supply-chain logistics must be transformed in order to link local food activism to a more globally organized challenge to the contemporary food system.

By using the notion of collective consumption in the framing of these originating questions we both return to age-old debates about the role of the urban in social movement activism associated with the seminal work of Manuel Castells, yet also move beyond them. Decades ago, Castells proposed the concept of collective consumption to highlight the unique role of the urban within the broader political-economic system of capitalism, seeking to prioritize the city as a space of collective claim-making for social justice. While his original formulation was critiqued for its narrow focus on the territory of the city, which subsequent

scholars argued was ill-defined if not ideological, his original intent was to introduce the possibility that capitalist dynamics could also be challenged by a focus on consumption matters and not solely production relations. He thus argued that basic elements of reproduction – ranging from housing to transport and other services that attend to human needs – were equally critical to the advancement of equity and justice. Since originally making these claims a much broader definition of the "urban" has both materialized and has also been tied to a politics of collective consumption, and it is this understanding that we use in this paper.[15] Given that the urban remains a unique space for social action[16] as well as the fact that the increasingly globalized networks of food production have not prevented citizens from suffering through local food scarcities or making local claims about food consumption and food justice in their everyday lives, it would be an oversight to disregard the opportunity to determine whether a localized, urban politics of food can indeed contribute to wider transformation.

The threat of climate change and the growing possibility of armed conflict emanating from ecologically driven food insecurity both underscore the urgency and the immense challenges ahead in forwarding a just transformation of the international food system, which billions of people, spread across localities far and wide, depend upon for their basic needs. The social and ecological complexity that underlies these challenges require nothing less than the type of bold fusion of disciplinary knowledge that transdisciplinarity offers.[17] As we and others see it, transdisciplinarity involves the "loosening of theoretical models and the development of a new conceptual synthesis of common terms, measures, and methods that produce new theories and models."[18] It is characterized by a search for a unity of knowledge beyond disciplines.[19] Our intent in engaging a transdisciplinary approach is to imagine new theories and models with which unjust metabolic relations of food systems driven by contemporary urbanization might be transformed.

While processes of urbanization may extend far from the city and link sites of production to those of consumption,[20] some scholars have argued that consumption built around profit-making motives tends to drive these expansive material networks. In this paper we consider whether a consumption-production nexus built around food must necessarily reproduce such dynamics, as opposed to lay a pathway for transformation, particularly when social movement activism at the scale of the city aims to recalibrate these territorially extensive food system networks. For example, regionalizing food systems in the service of linking cities to their hinterlands represents an increasingly popular proposal to offer food system resilience and equity. Such attempts both derive from and reinforce a new territoriality of governance that incorporates but also extends beyond the urban in ways not initially addressed by Castells. And even though such innovations embrace a new territoriality of extended urbanization, it is also true that their underlying logic remains consistent with Castells' claims that social mobilization around collective consumption – in this case around food – remains key to both social justice and government accountability. This is not to say that unpredictable ecological conditions, socio-economic challenges at the urban and regional scale, and the relentless efforts of capitalist producers to protect their food operations will not be barriers to extended territorial mobilization efforts, particularly in regional contexts where either political alliance building or food growing capacity are limited by climate change, land ownership patterns, or fragmented political authority. Still, we start from the premise that across all locales, bottom-up governance innovation may still be marshalled by citizens and authorities alike to advance a more sustainable and equitable food system. Building on the recent growth of food justice movements in the US in particular, we suggest that collective mobilization around urban food holds the potential to strengthen the radical nature of urban food justice by tying food consumption to production and distribution in a collective project with global implications.

3 The Case of Food Policy Councils

Building on this ambition, and wary of the many critiques given to consumption politics in the food justice scholarship, in what follows we examine the conditions under which organized collective action structured around food consumption may enable potentially transformative changes to the politics, practices, and territorial operation of complex food systems – changes that may also challenge existent political, economic,

and ecological aspects of the wider agro-industrial food system. We take Food Policy Councils (FPCs) as our key subject of study. FPCs are an increasingly popular form of 'innovative' governance that, by virtue of their bottom-up dynamics and commitment to collective action, may offer a potential venue to more radically transform food systems. Today, FPCs are the most popular typology of collaborative governance in the US. Between 2000 and 2011, the number of FPCs in the US expanded from 50 to over 150.[21] By the end of 2017, 341 FPCs were either active, in development, or in transition in the US and Canada, and there was at least one FPC in all but three states in the US (Arkansas, South Dakota, Wyoming).[22] While the make-up, strategies, geographical territory, and degree of institutionalization within existing local and regional governments is diverse, FPCs share a broad objective to bring food systems planning to the local or regional level by assembling collective insights that incorporate place-based experiences of food. FPCs are interesting because their particular activities or priorities are not in any way defined; all that is shared amongst councils is a commitment to experimentation in addressing systemic food inequalities at a local or regional scale. In addition to paralleling the embrace of experimentation as the cornerstone of knowledge and/or problem-solving in the science and engineering professions, actions of FPCs mark a significant territorial departure from the food policy dynamics set by the US's federal history – themselves regime-specific conditions which have also been instrumental in shaping the international food regime.[23] In the face of the contemporary transnational regime's racist, class exclusive, and ecologically destructive nature, the notion that local or regional actors could co-produce governance arrangements intended to make food systems more equitable, by *planning* and territorially reconfiguring the food system, is a relatively new idea on the systems complexity literature.

The emergence of food justice movements as form of grassroots mobilization spanning across the neighborhood, city, and regional level has helped lend FPCs legitimacy as a new governance form. While some Councils adopt existing borders of municipal jurisdictions as their site of governance, many scale-up or articulate their action at to the regional level, incorporating semi-urban and rural land of the immediate hinterland. Nearly all Councils assemble a group of stakeholders across government, the private sector, and civil society. There are wide disparities in the degree to which FPCs institutionalized within municipal or regional governments. In many (though not all) cases, FPCs adopt a food justice framework, which discursively reimagines cultural, economic, and ecological relationships with food. Typically, this involves both policy work and program development to foster "new relationships and interconnections between food system initiatives at municipal and state/provincial, regional, and tribal/First Nations levels."[24] Some of the more popular goals of FPCs include the alternative procurement of food (such as local food sourcing), new agricultural initiatives (such as regional land preservation and urban agriculture), and improving access to healthy foods.[21]

We understand it as pivotal that FPCs continue to build on food justice values. As a case of collaborative governance, however, it is important that a clear distinction is drawn between food justice as a form of grassroots mobilization and FPCs as a form of local governance innovation. This separation is something Castells' formulation of the distinct relationship between urban movements and the state offers in clear theoretical terms. As of yet, FPCs are primarily a form of governance experimentation, and some seem more successful and/or radical than others. None, we acknowledge, have effected what we might consider to be radical system transformation and it would be naïve to assume they have the organizational power to do so alone. FPCs will not be the panacea to agro-industrial, system-based oppression and hunger. That does not mean they do not present one interesting collaborative pathway that, through a politics of collective consumption, can harness urban politics in interesting ways, and potentially effect some material change in the urban metabolism of food.

We have chosen food systems as our focus not only because of this recent governance experimentation, but also because it offers an urban subject with an overtly ecological foundation. While this is true of all urbanization processes involving any process of material transformation, the undeniability of this fact across disciplines is one important reason it has been widely approached in urban complexity and ecological sciences, as we explore. Yet these scientific paradigms, even when drawn on in a policy context, consistently lack a political economy dimension and avoid engaging with justice-based discourses that acknowledge socio-natural and trans-scalar inequalities produced by the current global food system. This is where we

believe a collective consumption perspective offers a more radical approach.

Our paper proceeds in four parts. First, we dive into Castells' use of collective consumption as it relates to urban politics, which includes a close assessment of how both "consumption" and "collectivity" are relevant to urban food systems governance. Second, we offer a view of how collective consumption can be utilized to promote a justice-based perspective in urban food governance, which promotes socio-natural transformation of the current agro-industrial food system. Third, we develop a framework for imagining the possibilities of FPCs as part of new collaborative state-society relationships, offering a distinct reterritorialization of urban food politics tied to a socio-natural politics of urban metabolism. Finally, we conclude by offering comments on future challenges and opportunities in realizing the radical governance potential of FPCs.

4 Collective Consumption Meets Urban Food Politics: Theoretical legacies

With the intent of focusing on an urban political economy of nature-based systems, we first turn to the foundational work of Castells.[25] Castells first proposed the concept of collective consumption to highlight the unique role of the urban as a space of consumption within the broader political-economic system. Cities were territories of consumption because of their concentration of urban populations and were therefore organized spatially such that consumption was a key political concern and source of mobilization.

In earlier accounts, Castells argued that urban collective goods were provided by the state for the purpose of labor reproduction, with the aim of maintaining and stabilizing capitalist class relations. Yet as Saunders describes, Castells later moved away from this functionalist approach, putting greater emphasis on class struggle and urban social movements as the causes of state intervention, by virtue of the urban policy claims being made on the state by citizens.[15] Urban social movements came to be understood as specific articulations of collective concerns towards satisfying everyday needs in the city. Though the state was never neutral and was always in some way tied to the interest of dominant classes, the provision of collective consumption was nevertheless a more direct response to the actions of collective movements, giving more agency to political mobilization.

Since it first foray in the literature, collective consumption has been adapted, critiqued, and reformulated both by Castells and others. The core of the concept we find fruitful, however, is the political opportunities to problematize consumption as a collective concern, which finds its expression in the relationship between urban movements and new objects of urban governance. In specifying our interest more precisely as it relates to food systems and FPCs, we address the concept via its two key elements: a) thinking about food consumption and its relationship to production as territorial political practices and b) conceptualizing the collective struggle over food networks as a potentially radical and just endeavor, particularly in the context of climate change and other global challenges to capitalist logics of food production.

4.1 Consumption

The focus on the consumption-end of food policy is a relatively new concern as a matter of policy, as well as a controversial one. Food has a long history of federal and international intervention by the US government. Massive industrial-developmentalist programs promoted by American imperialist policies quickly transformed the global food system during the Cold War period.[26] Within national borders, US federal agricultural policy has focused on subsidizing food production for national consumption and exportation, underselling local farmers in developing regions has devastated many rural areas, in combination with American-led restructuring policies that led to large-scale land seizures and the industrialization of food production. Until the policy discourse of food security later became popular, state intervention in food systems was focused on the production and was definitively rural.

The explicit emphasis by Castells on consumption as an organizing principle of urban politics thus offers a clear alternative. Although food systems would not, in his original formulation, be considered

a problem of collective consumption because Castells primarily focused on spatialized goods that had particular relevance within the territorial bounds of the city: public transportation, housing, and the like. In addition, these were considered socially produced goods and were understood to have little relationship to natural systems. State involvement in food systems, moreover, did not typically focus on consumption but rather on production. With governments involved in promoting agricultural production through supportive policies and subsidization, the distribution of food was left to marketized practices, and consumption was considered an individual matter built on cultural and income preferences in ways that housing or transport were not.[1]

The fact many of these same urban goods would be privatized under neoliberalism or delivered via private-public partnership suggests there is no longer any obvious reason why areas like housing and transport should be considered collective while others, like food systems, should not. Rather than assuming, then, that collective consumption no longer has self-evident relevance to the urban sphere, we argue instead that many contemporary concerns over food supply in fact parallel original preoccupations with housing and transit activities, including their relationship to sustainability and the unequal distribution of access to food via race or class-based biases. Instead of confining collective concerns as those related explicitly to the local state, we argue collective consumption in fact has greater relevance in scholarship than formerly defined.

Saunders' assessment of Castells' urban question and the role of collective consumption focuses on two critiques: the notion that this definition makes the city irrelevant to political-economic processes other than consumption, and the implication that the "non-city" becomes irrelevant to consumption politics. The first of these critiques he saw as dubious. Castells never assumed that only consumption was important to the urban, but rather that collective consumption is a uniquely urban process, despite the presence of many other important processes including those related to production.[15] Saunders is more convinced of the second. He argues that Castells' particular spatial focus meant he addressed only specific in-kind, collective goods in his study of collective consumption, infrastructures that rely on a certain population density and thus are logically found within cities. This unnecessarily limits the definition of what urban consumption politics might entail. For Saunders, collective consumption can be easily expanded to include that which is aspatial (provisions in cash, rather than in-kind form) or else organized at a spatial scale beyond the city.[15] These critiques, however, are precisely what informs our desire to re-introduce the concept of collective consumption into the study of food networks and food supply. Not only do many provisions of support in the case of food systems take on cash form, but the spatial organization of food can also occur at a range of scales and rarely matches the territory of the city.

Approaching food through a politics of urban consumption does not, importantly, imply a disarticulation with production. Again, the focus on consumption as severed from production was a critique levelled at Castell's original work, one that did not accurately represent his intentions. Castells understood the relationship of the urban as a space of consumption but still tied this to the political-economic system at large: his argument was that production did not necessarily have primacy over consumption. We suggest, similarly, there is still political opportunity in reshaping the larger system via a more explicit politicization of consumption. In fact, the creation of a just food system requires that a politics of consumption remain tied to a politics of production, but that there remains opportunity for a collective politics focused on the consumption end driven by a new urban politics.

The existing policy paradigm of food security offers an example of why a politics of consumption cannot be isolated entirely from production in promoting transition towards a more just and sustainable food system. Food security first emerged in the early 1980s, with this nomenclature bringing the issue of food to the consumption end of the supply chain through urban-specific policies and planning strategies. Food security advocates continue to emphasize access to reliable, high-quality and affordable food sources.

[1]Much of Castells' work on the topic of collective consumption has already been critically interrogated within the period of neoliberal transformation of the state and globalization. The focus on the city as a distinct territorial organization of consumption suggested urban politics was merely reactive to global economic relations, and the dissolution of the Fordist state beginning in the 1980s put into question many elements of Castells' argument as it related to the state's role. Many goods and services formerly provided by the state have now been privatized or are delivered via public-private partnerships.

Yet these urban solutions have typically involved corporate supermarket expansions, often facilitated via municipal land incentives.[27] Rapid expansion of food retailers has come at a cost, not only to producers but in placing vulnerable, low-wage employment in many poor urban neighborhoods as well with the support of governmental incentives. Extending the contemporary agro-industrial food regime also goes hand-in-hand with continued ecological destruction.

In underemphasizing historical and cultural relationships to food, policy framings like food security are imagined as one-size-fits-all.[28] The paradigm assumes that food possesses a flat, undifferentiated meaning to individuals, and ignores historical trauma of racism and oppression relating to food inequality that extends across the system. As a top-down approach organized at the urban level but bolstering the global food system, food security policies often seek small regulatory interventions or corporate interventions with food distribution as its focus.[29] In prioritizing distribution equity and the crisis of food deserts disarticulated from their capitalist context, food security policies often help extend the existing agro-industrial food models. While food security planning, then, might offer rapid solutions, as a policy paradigm it can also contribute to "depoliticizing the socio-environmental configurations and associated governance structures that create poverty and inequality in the first place."[30] In contrast, the potential of FPCs rests in their capacities to promote new forms of politicization withinthe urban realm. Compared to the neighborhood-specific and top-down focus of food security, FPCs offer the opportunity to realize more flexible practices of territorial organization. At their most innovative and radical, they link an urban politics of consumption with food production justice by promoting a collective approach.

4.2 Collective

What Castells meant by the use of collective is not only a topic of debate, but also clearly evolved through the course of his own work. Again, Saunders highlights that early definitions by Castells saw this type of consumption determined by the scale of its organization and management. He later referred to it more specifically as related to the state. This latter understanding has posed obvious challenges to scholars since the late 20th century who have observed the privatization of many former state-managed goods and services. Thus, an understanding of what made consumption collective wavered for Castells: was it collective because it was "communal" (and thus could be still be delivered by the private sector) or because it was "socialized" (state-provided, but not necessarily consumed collectively)?

But the binary itself in understanding the privatization of state goods and services is also too simplistic: privatization has been "rolled out" on the back of state financial incentives and in-kind support.[31] Nevertheless, a focus on communal rather than simply socialized presents an interesting opportunity to rethink the collaborative governance of food systems.

This is not an argument against the state's important role in organizing more just food systems. Rather, it suggests a nuanced approach to how communities, alongside state institutions, can collaboratively organize the scale and politics of food system interventions more effectively and justly—a more realistic, if not optimistic, account of the contemporary governance context.

The related though distinct idea of collaborative consumption has already been adopted in food studies.[32–34] Present across a range of disciplines, collaborative consumption has adopted a wide spectrum of definitions. For instance, it is often used to describe the so-called "sharing economy" in which businesses either facilitate sharing to consumers that can access a good or service through renting or borrowing (eg. Zipcar) or a third party facilitates sharing between individual consumers for a fee or for free (eg. Uber).[35] But collaborative consumption has also been used to describe community and peer-to-peer sharing without the involvement of a third party, oftentimes non-monetized.[36] Grassroots action in the production of collaborative consumption networks and a transition to more sustainable consumption practices is an important focus of this literature.[37, 38]

Collaborative consumption in food networks offers many helpful insights. Not least is the focus that has been given to the importance of building "active trust" in the success of the New Food Economy or Civic Food Networks.[33] This type of trust is distinct from the "system trust" that has traditionally undergirded the development of global agro-food networks, and which has broken down significantly in the new risk

society and under contemporary climate change politics.[39] Yet this collaborative focus can also be limiting in its typically community-centred approach that can divert focus on the continued participation of the state in securing food justice, as well as the support of the private sector, in what might be called the collaborative governance of food networks.

While a sole focus on the state is clearly limiting, expanding the notion of collective consumption to embrace a wider panoply of actors is important in extending its contemporary relevance. This also means embracing an understanding of grassroots action as the potential cause of state support, and not simply assuming that the state acts to extend and stabilize existing capitalist relations. A politics of consumption can be more than just the satisfying of need, but the creation of new needs through radical innovation in local politics and alternative management systems.[15]

5 Collective Consumption in Nature-Based Systems: Towards a Justice-based Perspective

The above discusses the potential in organizing a consumption politics of food systems that, while specifically promoting new collaborative governance experiments through innovations like FPCs, at the same time embraces the notion of collectivity in producing more just food systems. Food systems are only one of many nature-based systems that have become popular topics of analysis in urban studies. These systems are frequently engaged through new frameworks that focus on socio-natural complexity. This turn towards socio-natural complexity cannot be abandoned in shaping the new collective consumption politics, but it should still be foregrounded as part of a shift towards more sustainable consumption. Yet from a governance perspective, existing sustainability and complexity management frameworks that have been drawn from scientific origins present obvious shortcomings.

Recent policy attention to the Food-Energy-Water nexus is one example. The FEW nexus emphasizes the inextricable natural linkages that exist between these three domains such that cross-sectoral coordination is understood to be most effective, if not necessary. Although the FEW nexus is a primarily scientific management framework, the idea of the "urban" in this framework is also becoming a critical conceptual and action space. The FEW nexus is being used as a powerful metaphor to conceive of the interdependencies on which urban life depends.[40] As trends in urbanization have increased, integrated approaches are said to offer new management frameworks to address complex inter-sectoral relationships.[41] As a policy frame, the FEW nexus aims to produce transformative knowledge of complex and interdependent systems that drive urbanization, viewing integrated management as the "panacea to problems of availability, access, and provision of essential human resources."[42]

The FEW nexus is closely related to more mainstream resiliency frameworks associated with urbanized nature-based systems, particularly in the context of climate change. Like the FEW nexus, the concept of resiliency has a precise scientific definition, yet its use in policy contexts has been far more imprecise. It has often been likened to the concept of policy metaphor or way of thinking that can guide and organize thought in ways that promote new approaches to sectoral interdependency through experimentation, discovery, and innovation.[43, 44] Thus beginning as a descriptive term in the natural sciences to describe a systems' inherent capacity for self-transformation,[45] it has become a normative concept in the policy world that focuses on shifting thinking towards flexibility and adaptability.

Yet in adopting scientific concepts such as the FEW nexus and resiliency as policy frames, a distinct political economy dimension is likely to be abandoned. While premised on the idea of interconnected and inter-scalar system complexity, both the FEW nexus and resiliency approaches can overlook, in practice, how resources intrinsic to urbanization connect issues of the city with socio-ecological conflicts in other places. As Newell et al argue, in the urban FEW literature one of the clearest gaps is the "lack of sufficient focus on issues of institutional structure, governance, equity, resource access and behavior."[46] Despite its progressive insights, the nexus approach can promote the reproduction of the status-quo, often adopting neoliberal management models as the means of dealing with complexity. Given the rapidly shifting context of climate change, building resiliency of food systems is a highly logical priority from a

scientific perspective.[47–50] For policymakers, resiliency can act as a helpful heuristic to shape responses to socio-natural risk and climate-related challenges.[51] But as a scientific metaphor, the adoption of resiliency frequently avoids a clear position on the power relations that shape resource networks. This can paradoxically empty the local level of agency despite typically reverting to localist analyses of environmental risk.[52, 53]

In mainstream discussion, the politics of sustainable consumption is, comparatively, wholly individualized, and exists on the far end of the management spectrum from a complexity perspective. Many of the mainstream AFMs in the US focusing on eating locally or "voting with your fork"[54] and offer a vision of local and sustainable consumption that is itself considered a form of political action amongst typically wealthy consumers.[1] Systems are thought to be made more sustainable through more conscientious individual consumption. The rise of farmers markets across cities in the US is perhaps the most obvious example, where purchasing decisions are understood to effect a shift towards more just food systems through market exchange alone. While the food justice movement often also adopts and organizes at the local scale, the development of similar activities like farmers markets or urban agriculture within these movements are not themselves understood as a social project: rather, a social project is constructed in tying sustainable agriculture and consumption with justice frameworks, including racial, cultural, and socio-economic identity formations.[55]

The goal should be towards building innovative governance structures that can respond to these challenges with the explicit vision of constructing more just food networks. We offer collective consumption in this effort. But there is still a need to move beyond collective consumption understood only as a socially produced good, to explore how it is also constituted by expansive socio-natural networks that exceed the territory of the city and the lexicon of social goods. For this, we believe concepts like urban metabolism can be valuable frameworks to promote a more expansive view of urban processes that are tied to a consumption politics across a range of socio-natural scales and material transformations. Amongst a host of disciplines,[10] urban metabolism has become a core critical concept in the Urban Political Ecology (UPE) literature. This particular approach foregrounds the political economy of resource flows, and addresses power relations implicated in the production of specific metabolisms that has direct relevance to imagining more just food planning. In UPE, the domain of food[28] has accompanied other resource flows like water[56, 57] as quintessential subjects of research. This framework highlights that urban ecological processes extend beyond the jurisdictional territories of cities. Focusing on rescaling the governance of natural systems can itself offer an avenue of political action, and opportunities for more democratic governance of food systems.[58]

Food justice, as already stated, is not only an urban (consumption) issue. Rural peasant movements across the Global South have demonstrated how a politics of food production can also form the basis for radical mobilization against the agro-industrial system.[6] But while arguing that production and consumption are intrinsically networked together, we also see a potential for a politics to emerge from efforts to shape new norms of sustainable consumption—from a collective rather than individual perspective. How can placed-based approaches to food consumption create new socio-ecological needs around which the food system might be transformed? How can a reterritorialization of food system governance via new collaborative institutions respond?

6 Food Policy Councils and the Reterritorialization of Food Governance

In this section, we explore more closely the opportunities of FPCs as a project of reterritorializing the collaborative governance of food systems in productive and potentially radical ways. We find FPCs interesting as a subject because of their unusual success (at least in terms of their growth in number) within local and regional settings in the US and Canada as a form of collaborative governance. Perhaps this success speaks to the fact both the ecological and political complexity of food as a policy matter is already widely recognized, particularly under the mounting stress of climate change—as is the inadequacy

of current governance structures to manage that complexity.

A new governance context since the 1990s has shaped governmental efforts to enroll civil society in its own self-management, part of "good governance" reforms. This transition has been tied to the neoliberalization of Fordist state arrangements, and critiqued for the burdening of civil society with responsibilities formerly assumed by the state.[59] While FPCs is situated as part of this history, we argue they offer potentially more radical routes. Taking seriously the idea of collaborative governance means viewing this civil society–state relationship in different terms. New collaborative governance arrangements like FPCs offer a unique conduit through which state power might become a resource for communities, rather than the other way around.

This section focuses on three important dimensions of how collective consumption can be made relevant to the ecological and political complexity of food systems governance by focusing on FPCs. First, we highlight more specifically the way through which FPCs are designed to facilitate collaborative approaches to food management. While there is wide variance in the design of Councils, and thus a wide disparity in the degree to which Councils actually deliver on radical aims, still we see an important normative project in the development of Councils themselves as opportunity for constructive state–civil society engagement based on food justice values. Second, we discuss challenges related to the territorialization of food system governance and speculate on how the more flexible territorial organization of Councils, which are not bound by existing jurisdictional borders, can similarly be seen as an opportunity for governance innovation responding to nature-based systems. Finally, and closely related, we highlight what it means to contend with the urban politics of food systems through a socio-natural approach to collective consumption.

To what degree movements like food justice can or should become institutionalized as part of more radical transformation aims is a key question that shapes both the opportunities and limitations of collaborative governance. While the discursive identification of racism and oppression in food systems is regularly invoked in FPC frameworks, for instance, typically this translation to policy addressing structural causes of food-related disparity, or even discussions about institutional racism and anti-poverty work, is rare. As Horst's study of the Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council and the City of Seattle Food Policy Council highlights, there is clearly a desire to redirect from emergency responses to forward-looking strategies that engage with the complexity of the injustice produced through food systems by adopting a food justice framework. Yet given the limitations of realizing some of these aims within such a semi-institutionalized setting, there is clearly good reason to maintain some degree of separation between food justice as an urban movement and FPCs as a collaborative governance arrangement, particularly because there is a risk of movement appropriation and de-radicalization.

As the location of one of the most "radical" FPCs, the City of Oakland has drawn from its deep history in food justice organization.[55, 60–63] This food activism dates back to the community work of the Black Panthers, whose community-based context enabled food to emerge as a "salient and necessary tool for the movement-building capacity."[64] The Oakland Food Policy Council (OFPC) was founded in 2008, following a report commissioned by the Mayor's Office of Sustainability that recommended the creation of an FPC to review the food system.[65] The unanimous passing of funding for the FPC by City Council underscored the deep impression food justice organizers had made on local officials.[66] The OFPC centers its approach on racial equity, drawing from local movement frameworks. At its creation, the radical organization Food First, already located in Oakland, was chosen as the OFPC's incubator, setting early agendas, securing funding and putting other basic systems in place.[67] Members included underserved community residents, food sector professionals, elected officials, and city staff. The case of Oakland highlights both the opportunities and risks of alliances between radical urban movements and innovative governance institutions like FPCs. Some local activists remained opposed to integrating their work with government because "they view the task of nourishing their communities as being inextricably tied to a project of decolonization."[66]

Of course, there are also obvious challenges in translating food justice ideas to policy work at this scale. Since the 1990s, participatory planning and policymaking has become popular in local level governance, with the promise of democratic expansion. Participatory planning is already well established within FPC strategies.[68] Yet there is a tradition in scholarship recognizing the many obstacles to true participation,

particularly in the limiting way participation is designed into such platforms.[69] In the case of FPCs, Horst's study suggests that many resulting strategies exemplify technical, top-down visions of planning more aligned with the food security paradigm, despite association with food justice values. The same study also revealed that not only is diverse representation within councils themselves a thorny issues in many cases, members still often do not engage deeply in anti-racism and anti-oppression when it comes to food. While some Councils, such as the OFPC, are certainly more radical than others, in general many policy and planning solutions have been limiting, and many strategies promote workarounds to a dysfunctional, unequal, and racist agro-industrial regime, rather than situating their work as a direct challenge to that regime.

Despite these limitations, we remain optimistic that FPCs might act as new collaborative governance venue that can begin to shape a new politics of food consumption as it engages with urban food movements. Far from promoting a solely localist perspective, we acknowledge that the success of these arrangements relies on the political and legal context within which they are situated, including at the state, federal, and international level. However, this does not also mean political power cannot be territorialized in strategic ways that take advantage of the local and regional level as well.

The relationship of FPCs to the larger national and international food regime is of course critical. Given their diversity, FPCs have been territorialized at a range of scales, from the sub-municipal to regional level. The latter has the advantage of defining a new governance territory which might incorporate both consumption and production by incorporating semi-urban and rural hinterland as part of a coordinated localization of the food system. Still, given the size of many population centers, urban consumption requirements are unlikely to be fully addressed at the regional scale and will realistically involve much more expansive material food networks to match levels of production with these requirements. While coordinating a localization of production and consumption at the regional level can certainly be one contribution of FPCs that could help buffer food supply crises brought on by climate change, for instance, the contribution of FPCs might be more importantly their production of new territories through which urban food consumption politics becomes territorialized. The regional scale of many FPCs can thus act as both an ecological opportunity to support localizing the food system, but also offers distinct political opportunities that may be at least equal, if not more, important.

With regards to localization, the domain of urban agriculture has also become a popular area among FPCs, reflecting the broader transition in planning and governance that has focused on reforming zoning laws that traditionally restrict such activities. Heynen et al emphasize that urban agriculture can be a radical, local agenda that responds to the "loss of producer and consumer agency in the food system ... with a focus on developing 'alternative' markets."[28] Urban agriculture is attractive as part of the FPC agenda because it presents a local and alternative means of growing food at a localized scale, and thus represents a more straight-forward action agenda than challenging agro-industrial food networks. The OFPC's ongoing collaboration with City Council to reform zoning laws for urban agriculture has been particularly successful, involving a long process of working with City staff, the local planning office, and community engagement groups to support local farming.[70]

The association of alternative food growers in low-income and racialized communities with food justice values certainly resonates with the choice of FPCs to focus on legalizing urban agriculture through zoning amendments. Yet not only do ecological limitations in local food production capacity limit the expansion of local and regional farming. The challenges in competing on the market with agro-industrial products that benefit from land and labor exploitation also limit the expansion of locally produced food. Relying on market mechanisms to solve food poverty is a central failure of how the provision of food systems in modern society as a necessary and collective good is treated.[71] Despite urban agriculture's political branding, the use of market mechanisms to coordinate this localized food network mean that "even the projects that explicitly articulate a politics of food justice find the confines of neoliberalization hard to escape."[72]

What we mean to emphasize is not that FPCs cannot or should not provide a venue for experiments related to the localization and regionalization of food networks, with opportunities for local food systems to operate as critical stopgaps in moments of system stress. Rather, the argument is there is a distinct political opportunity beyond thinking of the FPC as merely a means of coordinating food systems at this

scale. This is why we offer a focus on collective consumption, as an expansive and ecologically founded concept, and a critical entry point where power and resources (ecological but also political and economic) can be organized. As an urban issue, we focus on the politics of consumption as one with the potential to drive more sustainable and just food resource networks.

But this cannot occur without critically engaging the socio-ecological complexity of these networks. Scientific frameworks like the FEW Nexus and resiliency contribute to this common-sense view, which we agree with in many ways. But a more intentional political ecology of food is needed as well.

Moragues-Faus and Marsden, for instance, argue a political ecology approach to food would foreground how interconnected ecologies are connected to issues of social power across scales.[30] Work on urban metabolism similarly sheds light on the production of racial and class inequality through processes of material transformation. The focus should be on how "these metabolisms create socio-ecological conditions that are beneficial to some and detrimental to others," highlighting the social inequalities and ecological destruction produced by the food system across scales of analysis.[30] Grounding a politics of food consumption in an urban metabolism perspective engages with the need to build more sustainable food systems but also avoids a focus on individual consumption as a political act.

By comparison, food justice takes a community rather than individual perspective in promoting sustainability. Similarly, we see FPCs as opportunities to organize sustainable transitions on the consumption end through a collective approach. In both cases, a perspective that foregrounds how inequality and racism are upheld through social and ecological practices is paramount. This means a focus on consumption should be simultaneously focused on defetishizing the food system in ways that confront political economies of the system at large.[9] Collective consumption adopted as a new political framework of food systems, then, would problematize the status of food as commodity, bringing it within a collective politics that foregrounds its socio-natural complexity and a matter of new political, economic, and ecological needs that exceed its status as a simple biological necessity.

7 Consumption Politics beyond the Local

We conclude this paper by commenting on where future challenges and opportunities lie in realizing the radical socio-ecological governance potential of FPCs. The territorial flexibility of the Council form is itself a powerful resource; this flexibility should be embraced as central to FPC typology, avoiding any a priori scale of organization. FPC policy work that supports urban or regional agriculture may offer promising solutions in certain locales compared to others, depending on factors such as local climate, open space, or existing patterns of sprawl and ecological destruction. The federal and state political context also greatly shapes these opportunities.

We are not suggesting that FPCs offer a panacea simply by localizing food systems. Instead, our argument highlights how an urban politics of food, based on the notion of collective consumption, can find more politically effective expression at the local or regional scale. Promoting a just sustainability transition of the agro-industrial food system should remain the normative objective. With this system-scale transformation acting as the foundation of urban food politics, we offer a place-based politics of consumption as an important organizational strategy. Through this form of collective politics, we argue that catalytic points of transformation at the urban level can be fostered which in turn might support broader sustainability transitions. Transformative policy, we argue, is one that increases governance capacity, particularly by appealing to a large number of stakeholders, engaging in longer term struggle rather than prioritizing quick policy solutions, and contributing to new social and political alliances that lay the "groundwork for change in institutional and planning capacities that can outlast any individual political leader."[73] FPCs offer just such an experiment in rethinking how, even within existing capitalist relations, more radical food justice values can shape governance arrangements that build the local and regional political resources still capable of challenging transnational food systems.

One related and interesting experiment, in this respect, is the launch of the Food Policy Network (FPN) by the John Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. The academic-based networking project focuses

on building capacity of local, state, regional and tribal food systems councils, in addition to national organizations and other groups focusing on improving the food system.[74] Santo and Moragues-Faus argues the John Hopkins project progresses our understanding on "how complex, interconnected, dynamic, and geographically dispersed networks constitute new forms of food governance and their role in building more sustainable and just food systems."[24] At this stage, the project is primarily an information-sharing platform. But in leveraging the political possibilities of networking existing place-based FPCs, the John Hopkins project hints that there is further opportunity to push food governance innovation forward in ways that overcome many limitations of current jurisdictional scales.

We find promising not only this scaling up of governance innovation, but also peer-to-peer learning strategies that have offered significant outcomes in locating place-specific political opportunities in food policy. For instance, in Baltimore, where extensive food initiatives have been organized via new collaborative institutions and via the City's official Sustainability Plan[75] and Food Plan[76], important lessons have been adopted from the experience of Detroit, a city that has faced similar processes of deindustrialization and community disinvestment. Baltimore's Community Greening Resource Network adopts strategies that have delivered important gains in Detroit via the city's own Garden Resource Network. New ecosystems of food justice mobilization, creative planning practices, and governance innovation foster the desire to share experiences between locales that can spark new urban food initiatives.

In their study of food systems planning, Born and Purcell offer the notion of a local trap to describe the "tendency of food activists and researchers to assume something inherent about the local scale" where the local is assumed to be desirable and "preferred a priori to larger scales."[77] While agreeing with this perspective, it is the innovative and experimental nature of FPCs that suggest new political opportunities for reimagining how the local level can be politically engaged in wider sustainability transition efforts. What we offer, then, byway of conclusion, is an optimistic assessment that FPCs, as a new governance arrangement, can help build an urban politics of food that embraces consumption as a driver of change in the urban metabolism of food – so long as it is built as a collective rather than individual project.

Governance innovation is critical because the complexity of food resource networks pose considerable challenges: both new ecological risks related to climate change and longstanding racial and economic oppression of the system at large. How the urban can be situated in food system transformation is controversial, particularly amongst those who continue to emphasize the need to link sites of production to those of consumption. However, rather than disarticulating the two spheres, we argue consumption as a driver of urban politics should not be abandoned but appropriated strategically in pursuing the goal of just sustainability transitions.

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