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Title: Urban Green Commons as Food Sovereignty (and vice versa)

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Abstract: Urban Green Commons are “physical green spaces in urban settings of diverse ownership that depend on collective organization and management and to which individuals and interest groups participating in management hold a rich set of bundles of rights, including rights to craft their own institutions and to decide whom they want to include in management schemes” (Colding et al, 2013: 4). While these institutional arrangements are well covered in the commons literature, they often appear as isolated examples, such as community gardens. In such discreet spaces, (local) actors arrive at shared (local) normative and governance structures in the maintenance of some (local) socio-environmental system providing a range of (local) benefits. However, situating these local arrangements within a broader context adds complexity to the question: at what ‘scales’ do urban commons emerge or get produced?

One theoretical framework that can provide this context to many of the local examples of Urban Green Commons is Food Sovereignty. Food Sovereignty is defined “as the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environment” (Wittman et. al, 2011: 4). In other words, it is a conceptual and political label for diverse struggles over productive (especially food-producing) resources. In organizing for control over food systems, networks of farmers, processors and vendors develop arrangements that democratize access, ownership and management of elements of the food system. Importantly, the struggles that the discussions in the literature on Food Sovereignty centre around are also prevalent in local struggles to govern Urban Green Commons. This paper discusses these parallels and argues for a conceptualization of local Urban Green Commons as part of multi-sited, multi-scalar and multi-dimensional struggles – such as those over land, water, markets and regulations. As an illustration, the paper looks to an example from a community initiative in Winnipeg, Canada, called the ‘[South Osborne Permaculture Commons](#).’ The Commons includes a network of communal garden spaces, educational programs and events and is comprised of multiple groups involved in different ways in urban agriculture. This paper maps the social network of different institutions and actors, showing how their actions simultaneously engage in Food Sovereignty and the production and reproduction of a complex Urban Green Commons. It draws on the author’s experience as the Co-Founder and Past President of Sustainable South Osborne Community Cooperative, the Coordinator of the South Osborne Permaculture Commons, the President of the South Osborne Permaculture Workers Cooperative and a University of Manitoba instructor teaching the community-based course called ‘Building a Community Commons.’

Intro/Context: Trends characterized as ‘neoliberal’ – such as privatization, corporatization, globalization and the shrinking role of the state – are among the most contentious in contemporary political and public discourse. While responsible for incredible economic growth over the past 4 decades, they also raise concerns about corporate control of key resources, constrictions on democratic decision-making and environmental degradation. The neoliberal underbelly has germinated a counter-movement of experiments in alternative forms of social organization that emphasize sustainability, subsidiarity and community (Smith, 2001; Mittelman, 2000; Cavanagh & Mander, 2004). These experiments sometimes appear as isolations very specific to a particular local context. Other times they seem clearly embedded within larger structures, even coordinated transnationally in green or ‘anti-globalization’ social movements. This paper concerns the relationship between the two, the micro and macro, or the ‘glocal’ dimensions of the struggle against neoliberalism within the context of food. On the micro side, I focus on Urban Green Commons (UGCs) and take the South Osborne Permaculture Commons from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada as an example case. On the macro side, I look to the global Food Sovereignty¹ movement, a complex framework envisioning pathways to more just and sustainable food systems. The paper deals with the relationship between local commoning and global collective action.

Here my research questions travel both directions between the two ends of this spectrum. First, to what extent is Food Sovereignty a factor influencing Urban Green Commons, or more specifically the creation of the South Osborne Permaculture Commons? Second, to what extent can we say that this Commons is part of the global Food Sovereignty movement. In addressing

¹ Some authors make a conscious decision to either capitalize ‘Food Sovereignty’ or not. Here I am treating the capitalized version as representing the Global Food Sovereignty Movement, and lowercase version of food sovereignty as the concept.

these two questions, some preliminary conclusions about the role Urban Green Commons play for food system transformation. The answer to the first question is fairly straight forward: In the case in question, not subjectively – most of the participants in the South Osborne Permaculture Commons do not see what they are doing first as Food Sovereignty. Instead, different frames are used, like ‘permaculture,’ ‘Transition’ and ‘food justice.’ The answer to the second question is: Yes, with some qualifiers. The process of commoning is part of the strategy of and the struggle for food sovereignty, and so on this level the question leads to a sort of tautological response when the commons relates to Food (producing or consuming). But more specifically, these commons can be seen as part of a wider Food Sovereignty movement when the institutional arrangements match an ‘alignment of principles’ and when the struggles faced share a resonance, perhaps at different ‘scales,’ to those addressed by the global Food Sovereignty movement. To restate, I argue that the struggles and strategies that define Food Sovereignty find reflections in local development of commons institutions, and that these institutions are therefore part of the larger movement, even if they do not self-identify as such. And so, food producing Urban Green Commons are important to conceptualizing the urban commons and the Food Sovereignty Movement alike. I conclude with questions for further research.

Part 1: Micro

UGCs. Urban Green Commons are “physical green spaces in urban settings of diverse ownership that depend on collective organization and management and to which individuals and interest groups participating in management hold a rich set of bundles of rights, including rights to craft their own institutions and to decide whom they want to include in management schemes” (Colding et al, 2013: 4). In this definition, physical green spaces in urban environments take centre stage, and the defining feature relates to how the space (or spaces) are *managed*. Rules are

created and enforced about how the space can be used, who's allowed to do what, where and when and for how long. What makes a commons different from other forms of regulation is that we're talking about rules that are not created by the state, nor by individual property owners by right of ownership. This category of space has less to do with ownership than with structure. Resources managed as urban green commons can be privately-owned by an individual or a corporation, cooperatively-owned, or state-owned, or some combination of these. But what is distinguishes a commons is that it's management is somehow community-based.²

The typical example: A classic example of an Urban Green Commons is a community garden. The land itself might be owned by a non-profit organization who parcels it into plots which are rented out to gardeners. A code of conduct created by the organization places certain restrictions on the member gardeners, such as the need to keep weeds under control and the banning of certain kinds of pesticides or chemical fertilizers. They limit access to only those who have rented plots, and specify procedures for applying, set fees and monitor who has paid and who has not. These are some examples of management rules that are specific to this particular urban garden space.

Complex combination of property relations: Beyond the local institution managing the resource, there are other sources of rules that apply to how land is used and how people behave when in the space (Davy, 2004). For example, restrictions on pollution that still apply regardless of whether or not the manager of the community garden sets out such restrictions in their organizational or policies. Further the individual gardeners participating in the commons are accorded the right to 'own' the produce they grow, so UGCs also involve private property relations, and the sale of that produce by individual gardeners is likely subject to state regulation

² This simplification carries ambiguities, especially around definitions of 'management' and 'community' – but for the purposes of this paper, it captures the core of an Urban Green Commons.

as well. And so what started out as a clear example of a ‘commons’ is actually a complex layering of different regulatory flows. Then there are also other elements associated with the garden that emerge from it to assist in the management of the resource, like a website, signage, and even events held on site, all situated in the intersection of various forms of regulation and control. And so while there are many different forces of governance that intersect within particular UGCs, what makes them a ‘commons’ is that some non-state and non-private institution controls some aspects of the management of some green space, the institutional form which that management takes is shaped by itself. For the scope of this paper, here I’m only looking at food producing UGCs.

Multifunctionality of UCGs: Urban Green Commons, such as community gardens, provide a wide range of benefits beyond just food production. While there are many ways to describe this feature of urban agriculture, many refer to it as ‘multifunctionality’ (Huang et al 2015; Mougeot 2010). Urban agriculture increases social connectedness between participants (Agustina, 2012), is involved in identity formation (Dobernig & Stagl 2015), and has health (Bellows, Brown and Smit, 2002) and public health benefits (Brown and Jameton, 2000; (Armstrong, 2000). In terms of economic impacts, some evidence suggest that community gardens increase adjacent property values (Voicu & Been, 2008) and urban agriculture has potential in reducing the effects of poverty, particularly in poorer countries (Zezza & Tasciotti, 2010). Urban agriculture has potential environmental benefits, such as helping protect or enhance ecosystem services (Lin, Philpott & Jha, 2015) and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Kulak, Graves & Chatterton, 2013). Community gardens have also served a political function in the process of claiming contested space (Schmelzkopf, 1995).

There are also several limitations and challenges faced by urban agriculture, including economic competition from conventional agriculture, limitations to scaling up production, land access, issues with environmental quality and legal issues arising from a lack of state regulation (Bradshaw, 2013; French, Becker & Lindsay 2010; Martellozzo et. al. 2014; McClintock 2013; Mendes, Balmer, Kaethler & Rhoads 2008; Wortman & Lovell 2013). Despite many of these challenges, urban agriculture is on the rise in North America (Mougeot, 2005).

UGCs as ‘isolated’: While Urban Green Commons such as community gardens are well covered in the literature, they often tend to appear as isolated examples. The typical illustration is a single community garden as a local institution tied to a particular milieu. A commons analysis of the SOPC might sketch the same picture, considering this example as an isolated case of a community-based institution. In such discreet spaces, (local) actors arrive at shared (local) normative and governance structures in the maintenance of some (local) socio-environmental system providing a range of (local) benefits. The major factors that influence the institutional arrangement managing a community garden are generally seen as: What space is available? Who will be in charge of it? Who is there to take the initiative to create the green space? What local regulations or other institutional factors exist that will either hinder or support the development and management of the space? These questions are firmly rooted in the specifics of a unique and particular place.

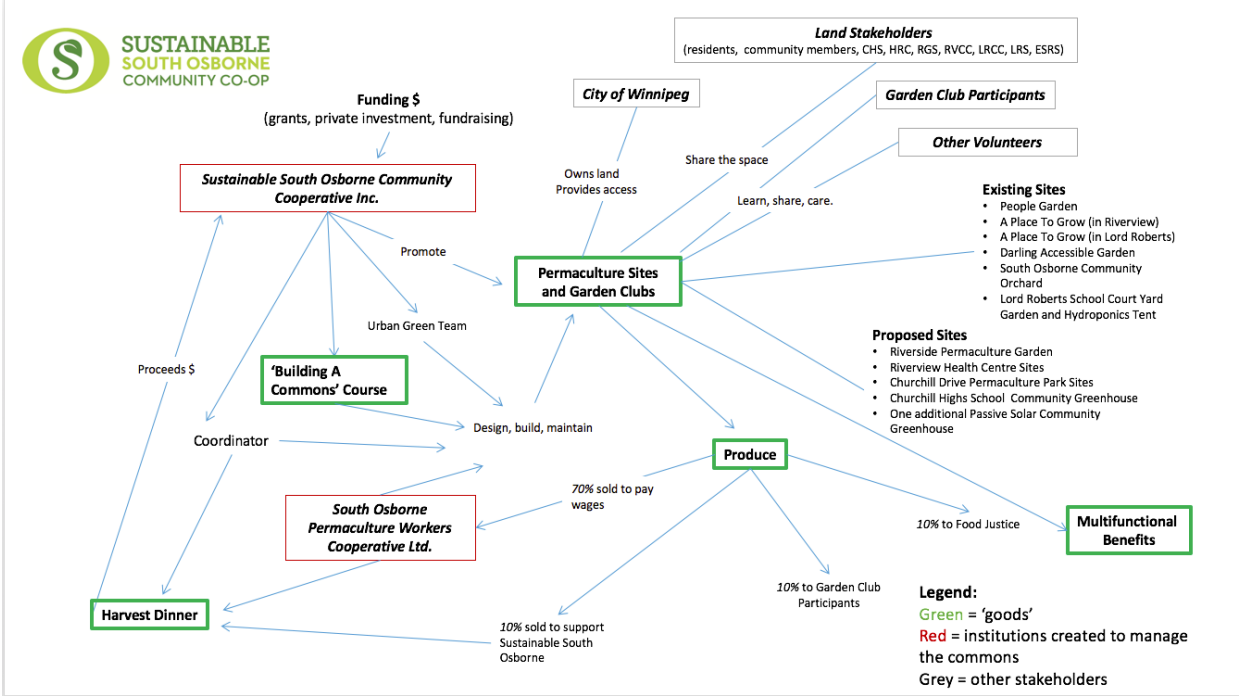
But also influenced by non-local factors: *This is not to say that UCGs are not influenced by non-local factors or are not part of wider social processes.* It’s been noted that UCGs tend to emerge under certain conditions, like in the presence of food shortages, or when there is available space, or in times of heightened environmental movement activity (Colding & Barthel, 2013: 161). For example, municipal promotion of urban gardens can also happen

through the adoption of climate change action plans. As with all social phenomena (Mills, 1959/2000), in at least some ways UCGs while very local in nature are embedded of extra-local social processes. And so a first set of questions about the nature of the South Osborne Permaculture Commons can identify what factors, both local and non-local, are implicated in the emergence and management of the Commons: *What are the organizations' principles and goals? What are the struggles faced in managing the Commons? What are the strategies used to try to address these struggles within the Commons?* These questions are posed with reference to the Global Food Sovereignty movement as context.

Overview of the SOPC: The South Osborne Permaculture Commons is a small network of multifunctional community green spaces, educational programs and events in Winnipeg, Manitoba (www.SouthOsborneCommons.ca). The gardens make up approximately half a hectare of productive space located on city-owned land. The sites are spread out around the neighbourhood, on school grounds, near community centres and in public parks. A pair of cooperatives manage the commons: A non-profit, Sustainable South Osborne Community Cooperative (SSO) and an urban farmer collective created by SSO called the South Osborne Permaculture Workers' Cooperative (SOPWC). SSO is primarily responsible for accessing grant funding, organizing fundraising and coordinating the educational programs. The worker cooperative is in charge of caring for the garden spaces, selling produce to pay their wages. A variety of other local institutions also share access to the green spaces in the commons or have their own adjacent green space, including a local hospital, school, community centres and an allotment garden organization. SSO offers a university course called 'Building a Commons' and runs educational 'gardening clubs' to help with their education mandate of 'fostering a culture of sustainability and resilience in the neighbourhood' (www.SustainableSouthOsborne.com).

Students in the course, participants in the garden clubs, general volunteers and members of both cooperatives work together in designing and building new garden spaces in the Commons. The Commons is captured in the following network diagram:

Figure 1: South Osborne Permaculture Commons



Part 2: Macro

Food Sovereignty: In the 1980s and 90s, problems in a rapidly globalizing food system were starting to boil over. Attention to a range of issues, among them concentration of land ownership, environmental impacts of chemically intensive production, health concerns of large-scale processing, and long distances that food travelled to consumers, drew more attention from academics and activists in the Global North. And in the Global South, the growing power of corporate, industrial agriculture pushed against a newly united global peasantry as poor labour conditions, access to key resources and food commodity prices made it harder for small-scale producers to eke out a living. This is the context in which calls for transformation rang out on the

international stage, where the concept of *food sovereignty* emerged as a vision for a sustainable food system – one beholden to people and the planet.

Pillars: Food sovereignty is becoming one of the more-studied international discourses. Descriptions often begin with a “canonical account” (Edelman 2014), which generally makes note of a few key moments and social movement players. La Via Campesina, for instance, launched the concept at the World Food Conference in Rome in 1996. La Via Campesina is the world’s largest transnational peasant organization, and one of the key participants in the 2007 forum for Food Sovereignty which resulted in the Nyéléni Declaration (2007A) and a synthesis report (2007B) which, speaking on behalf of the international the Food Sovereignty movement, defined its six pillars³:

1. **Focuses on Food for People:** Food sovereignty puts the right to sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalised, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies; and rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.
2. **Values Food Providers:** Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food; and rejects those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.
3. **Localises Food Systems:** Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms; and resists governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and

³ Any number key definitional pieces which have also been proposed as summary frames for Food Sovereignty could also be used in the process of frame alignment analysis here, such as the ‘axes’ that emerged from the La Via Campesina’s forum in Havana (Edelman, 2014). Furthermore, a separate but aligned methodological approach would be to look at the degree to which UGCs attain food sovereignty indicators, such as those proposed by Binimelis and colleagues (2014).

promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.

4. **Puts Control Locally:** Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways which conserve diversity; it recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities; and rejects the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.
5. **Builds Knowledge and Skills:** Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organisations that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations; and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.
6. **Works with Nature:** Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us; and, rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions, that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialised production methods, which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

Not a ‘one size fits all’ model: As these pillars indicate, the practice of food sovereignty is highly contextual, made up of struggles and a pattern of tactics that marks each instance of it. Answers to the question “how do you make food sovereignty happen?” tend to get ‘it depends’ as a response. Part of this is because food is so varied along cultural, geographical and political lines. While some might argue that urban agriculture is a pathway towards democratizing control over the food system and a step towards food security, in many of the poorest countries where this would make the greatest impact there simply isn’t the space (Martellozzo et al, 2014). Or while many suggest that agroecological methods used in growing food staple crops are a key

tactic, the farmers on the ground might want to grow non-food commodity crops using production practices that might be considered harmful (Agarwal, 2014). Some states have institutionalized food sovereignty into their constitutions (Araúo, 2014), while elsewhere different levels of the state struggle over food safety regulations (Bellinger & Fakhri, 2013). And so this makes the question of ‘what does food sovereignty look like’ difficult to answer without being overly vague – and ultimately part of its definition implies that its practice will be decided *by those who practice it*.

The Concept of ‘Sovereignty.’ Central to Food Sovereignty is the contentious notion of ‘sovereignty.’ While it’s defined in several different ways, it can be boiled down to an essence of control over food producing resources – the ability to make decisions about what and how food is produced, sold and consumed. In other words, sovereign power in the context of food is that which allows for binding decisions over elements of the food system. Therefore a key question to the Food Sovereignty dialogue has been: who/what is the sovereign in food sovereignty? The struggle for sovereign power is generally framed as being against a corporate agribusiness-state complex where small-scale producers using agroecological methods wrestle with a variety of challenges in staying viable and keeping their livelihood. However, this oversimplification of the political landscape of food issues ignores internal conflicts and tensions within the movement. Instead of a unidirectional challenge, food sovereignty scholarship is recognizing the the role of multiple and competing sovereignties in the food system (see for example Schiavoni, 2015). In a given site of struggle, the state, competing producers and consumers can all have different forms of intersecting ‘power’ at play in their involvement to govern the food system. And so in some sense, the work of food sovereignty is in supporting alternative, marginalized forms of

sovereignty and supporting the struggle against the strongest currents of control within the food system.

The Food Sovereignty Movement's Struggles and Strategies: In another paper underway, Dr. Annette Desmarais and I are tracing the Global Food Sovereignty Movement as it is captured in academic literature over the past 3 years. The movement can be said to be made up of examples of Food Sovereignty 'on the ground' that appear in the literature, and academic 'theoretical' discussions about the possibilities and limitations of the concept. We argue that both areas of construction of the movement focus on *struggle* for democratic control over productive resources and *strategies* for social transformation towards a sustainable and just food system. Struggles reflect power imbalances (ie corporate dominance) in the food system at different scales between actors and institutions. The classic framing is the small holder peasant who is dispossessed from some combination of land grabbing and concentration, or the impacts of climate change or crop 'dumping' on local economies. Strategies involve efforts to resist these imbalances, and include the formation of NGO groups representing the 'struggling peasant' – such as coalitions like La Via Campesina and their member groups – to the institutionalization of food sovereignty policies in state constitutions that elevate food to the status as a human right. Although beyond the scope of this paper, a brief sketch of the framework appears in the table below.

Food Sovereignty by another name. This framework doesn't capture a potentially massive arena where Food Sovereignty happens on the ground which could be called 'Food Sovereignty by another name' – projects and initiatives that engage with these struggles employing these strategies which are not recognized, either by the participants or by outsiders as 'food sovereignty.' The diversity of ways in which groups might pursue Food Sovereignty goals

do not always adopt of food sovereignty frame. Such initiatives occupy a range of proposed alternatives or pathways towards sustainable and just food systems. They include alternative food networks, food hubs, food policy councils, food justice, permaculture, and the wide range of interdisciplinary projects reimagining how to better deal with challenges from farm to fork.

Table 1: Food Sovereignty Struggles and Strategies

Struggles Over / Against / For	Strategies
Physical (land, water, other) and intellectual property resources	Democratize access and control for small-scale producers
Environment	Agroecological methods
Markets	Localization, building connections between producers and consumers
Knowledge	Farmer-to-farmer learning; educational programs; conferences, courses, programs and research.
Regulations	Challenge the state, institutionalize Food Sovereignty policies
Social Justice	Inclusive along lines of class, race, gender and sexuality; promote equality.

Rural/Urban Divide: Amidst the global trend towards urbanization (United Nations 2014) and declining ratio of food producers to consumers (Satterthwaite, McGranahan & Tacoli 2010), urban agriculture, or local food production in cities and towns, is increasingly recognized as an important component of the contemporary food system (Cockrall-King 2012; Mougeot 2005; Pearson, Pearson & Pearson 2010). However, food sovereignty primarily speaks from and to rural small-scale producers and self-defined ‘peasants’ (Bernstein, 2014). A source of ambiguity among scholars is the role of ‘urban’ food production and the role of urban consumers in the fight for food sovereignty. Only recently has the urban context been raised in question such as those posed by Edelman and colleagues in a recent introduction to a special issue in *Globalizations* on emerging questions and areas of controversy within food sovereignty scholarship:

What do[es] the growing material and strategic importance of urban agriculture mean for the construction of food sovereignty? How can food sovereignty help bridge the land, resource, market and policy struggles of rural and urban producers? (Edelman et al, 2014)

And so a key question for food sovereignty scholarship concerns the role of urban producers and consumers. Contributing to that research gap, the following section explores some features of case study, the South Osborne Permaculture Commons.

Part 3: Case Study

SSO: As mentioned above, the South Osborne Permaculture Commons is a network of educational and productive garden spaces, programs and events. The Commons involves a variety of different actors and institutions, but two in particular have emerged as taking on a management role for the Commons: Sustainable South Osborne (SSO) and the South Osborne Permaculture Workers' Cooperative. SSO has the mandate of 'fostering a culture of sustainability and resilience in the neighbourhood' (www.SustainableSouthOsborne.com). The group started in 2009 under a different name, the South Osborne Urban Community Cooperative, with a narrower focus on growing, sharing and learning about sustainable food. In the first few years, the fairly modest initiative amounted to gardening programs, a local food buying club and a few fundraising events and local markets. In 2012 they underwent a broadening of mandate along with a name change that brought 'activity areas' beyond food into their scope, like energy, transportation, materials management and biodiversity conservation. Even with the broader mandate, in practice their work focused on supporting education and practice of community-based urban agriculture which has expanded considerably since the change.

The Permaculture frame: SSO endorses the practice of 'permaculture,' which is a concept and social movement that advocates a set of principles for regenerative human design of

productive and useful spaces (Holmgren, 2002/2011; Mollison, 1988). Permaculture is a framework that uses the language of ‘working with nature,’ favoring low-impact technologies and perennial crop production and emphasizing multifunctionality of the elements of productive systems. Polycultures, or growing multiple varieties of species of crop in the same area, are preferred to monocultures in the world of permaculture as the increased diversity is thought to increase the long-term productivity and resilience of the system. The Permaculture Commons is organic in practice (but not certified) and experiments with forest gardening - or the process of growing food in a similar way to how forest ecologies perpetually care for themselves.

SSO programs in the Commons: While SSO hosts a few smaller events during Winnipeg’s long winter when the gardens are not in operation, most of their work happens during the gardening season. SSO’s primary responsibility in managing the commons is securing access to space and finding and allocating resources to develop permaculture sites (in particular, in finding grant funding). They also coordinate fundraising efforts, such as the perennial South Osborne Harvest Dinner which feeds 175 community members a meal both served and grown in the community orchard hosted by a few popular local restaurants.

The permaculture sites sit on publically-owned land (most often, City of Winnipeg park space). SSO enters agreements, sometimes formal sometimes informal, with groups and individuals who share a stake in the land, and then uses the space to host educational ‘Garden Clubs,’ and to grow produce either to donate to local organizations who support lower-income folks or for sale. When new spaces need to be developed, part of the expansion work is done by volunteers in the community, and other parts are done through a community-based applied course offered through the University of Manitoba’s Department of Sociology called ‘Building a Commons.’

SOPWC: In 2015 the expansion of existing sites became too much of a heavy burden to manage by volunteer and student involvement alone. SSO developed an urban farming social enterprise, the South Osborne Permaculture Workers' Cooperative, who would be responsible for managing the food production and garden clubs at the sites. Members of the co-op, deemed 'Garden Stewards,' would take on the role of designing new spaces, overseeing their construction, managing existing gardens, hosting the Garden Clubs, distributing food to participants and social justice agencies, and selling produce to pay their wages. This last part is key, as a major part of the SOPWC's mission is to make urban farming a viable career. The worker co-op also follows permaculture principles to the extent that they can, focusing on soil building and growing techniques that, as much as possible, grow both healthy food and landscapes.

Alignment of Principles Nowhere in any of the organizational document or websites do either of these local cooperatives state that directly that their work is 'food sovereignty.' However, there is clearly overlap and alignment between the Commons and Food Sovereignty principles. Referring back to the pillars from the Nyéléni Synthesis Report (2007B), we can see organizational commitment to all six:

- *focuses on food for people:* The Commons is primarily oriented at producing food for human consumption – for the stewards, volunteers, participants in the Garden Clubs, local restaurants, and those who attend the Harvest Dinner. The Stewards also give somewhere between 10-30% of the produce to a local public housing community and to social agencies who provide low-cost meals those folks on a limited budget.
- *values food providers:* As a social enterprise, the South Osborne Permaculture Workers' Cooperative has the mandate to create employment for urban farmers, and the compensation structure is intended to reflect a living-wage for food producers.
- *localises food systems:* Many consumers of food grown in the Commons live in the South Osborne neighborhood, and all of the food is consumed in Winnipeg. The Commons works with restaurants that support local producers and is working to develop a CSA option for members of the community.

- *puts control locally*: The decision-making power over how the commons is structured (who takes care of the gardens, how the food is distributed, who gets it) largely resides with SSO and SOPWC. While the City has approval authority for new site development and imposes some regulations on what can and can't happen in existing sites, significant control is given to the Stewards to manage the space.
- *builds knowledge and skills*: The Garden Clubs are intended as educational programs that help develop food production skills in the community. The Stewards learn from one another and through bringing in other farmers for workshops and by visiting other farms. The purpose of the commons is to build capacity and knowledge.
- *works with nature*: the practice of permaculture is closely aligned with Agroecology – the gardens use no chemical pesticides, herbicides or fungicides, the focus is on perennial production and soil building and polycultures (different plant species grown together) rather than monocultures.

Long in-depth-interviews with the participants in the Commons (n = 6) also indicated that the group is mixed with respect of seeing themselves as advancing food sovereignty. Some did see the value in the approach to accessing public land and transforming it through grassroots programs, and this is generally where the term 'sovereignty' had the most weight among the group. Although generally the frame employed by those in the commons more closely aligned with the idea of education and sharing space rather than controlling access to it and reclaiming productive resources.

Struggles and Strategies: Regardless of the subjective alignment with Food Sovereignty, the interviews helped to identify the key struggles experienced in organizing the commons and strategies deployed to deal with them. Many shared significant overlap with what count as examples of Food Sovereignty in the literature, which are summarized in the table below:

Table 2: SOPC Struggles and Strategies

Struggles	Strategies
Access to Land	Build relationships with other land stakeholders to share space, occupy, find less desirable land

Regulations – Bees, Animals and Manure	Do things ‘quietly,’ slowly work towards structural change
Participation – Labour, participation in social movement activities	Diversity – Labour: Worker Cooperative, Stewards, Students, Volunteers, Garden Clubs
Competition from conventional agriculture	Niche markets, shoulder season focus, CSA (not yet)
Resources (\$)	Diversity – Grant Funding, Community Investment (not yet), Fundraising.
Lack of knowledge	Education – Community Conversation Series, events, Building a Commons course, workshops, farmer-to-farmer
Food Insecurity and Inequality	Contributions to ‘food justice’
Theft	Exclusion signage and usage/access rules
Environment	Permaculture
Product logistics (storage and transport)	Bike couriering (in progress), fridge depots (in progress)
Communication breakdowns within the Commons	e-mail, website, others.

Some of the major themes in this table are fleshed out in two short examples from the Commons.

Example 1: The Darling Permaculture Park: The struggle for land.

As mentioned earlier, the green spaces in the South Osborne Permaculture Commons is scattered around the community, with gardening sites occupying public land whenever a negotiation for shared space could be reached with other land stakeholders. The majority of the growing space is in the Community Orchard located on a dyke separating the residential community from the Red River which flooded the neighbourhood in 1950. One the riverside of the dyke is an allotment garden called the ‘Riverview Garden Society,’ and some of the growing space there is shared as space in the South Osborne Permaculture Commons. And on the other side of the dyke is a large publically-owned green space. Since the inception of Sustainable South Osborne, the organizers of the urban agriculture projects had plans for transforming the space to increase food growing capacity in the neighbourhood. However, there had been rumours that alternative plans had been made for the land. The group did some research into the history of

the land which revealed that the park was gifted in the past to the city by a private owner⁴ in 1913, and the transfer left it held in trust with a ‘green caveat’ restricting development. In other words, the original owner stated that the City could have the land so long as it remained a public park in perpetuity.

Armed with knowledge of the caveat, during the first year of the Building a Commons course students and soon-to-become members of SOPWC created a design for an agricultural ‘park’ proposal. It was called the ‘Darling Permaculture Park’ as the green space was located on Darling St. Open community consultations were held with mostly enthusiastic support for the proposal. The City of Winnipeg’s Parks and Open Spaces department had initially approved the design in principle, although never offering a long-term agreement for use of the land. When SSO started to prep funding applications to develop the space, it was revealed that the land had been promised to a nearby hospital for their expansion plans, and the Permaculture Park would be subject to bulldozing as soon as the regional health authority secured the funds for construction.

Here a number of struggles were present that share a resonance with food sovereignty projects. First off, multiple and competing stakes in land crowd-out small-scale agroecologically-based attempts at producing food. At the same time, this struggle isn’t so much one against capital as it is one against the state at multiple levels – as owner of the land, as regulator and as competing interest.

The failed strategies for accessing the land in the first place included developing a proposal that honored the intention of the green caveat, which turned out to not hold legal clout in the eyes of the City. Similarly, the focus on ‘permaculture’ meant that the approach to

⁴ The pre-colonial history of the land is a question that members of the commons are currently looking into.

production was going to follow ‘ecological’ growing methods. Further engaging the community and securing signatures of support was intended to bolster the likelihood of moving forward, and the installation of the site was to take place over the next two years of the applied ‘Building a Commons’ course.

In the wake of getting denied a number of alternative strategies emerged to maintain a commitment to the goal of increasing food growing capacity in the area. The first was to identify alternative spaces that are ‘less desirable’ (i.e. less in demand by competing interests). Another was to work with the Health Centre in developing a plan to include food growing spaces in their construction plans, and elsewhere on their large campus. And finally another tactic emerged to create productive spaces on the original intended site, but not to invest much in it in the event that construction begins and the space becomes no longer available. In the end, the struggle over the Darling Permaculture Park helped SSO and later the SOPWC plan to create a network of sites around the neighbourhood through partnerships with other interests who could share the land in the common interest of maintaining multifunctional spaces that also produce food.

Example 2: Building a Commons & Worker Co-op: The struggle for labour.

A constant issue in the commons is participation. While SSO has been successful in securing access to land for permaculture installations, typically getting enough help in building the spaces and then keeping participation to maintain the sites is a struggle.

In the case of installation, SSO advertises to a volunteer list to get help. As this wasn’t enough, the group created a plan to offer a community-based hands on university course called ‘Building a Community Commons.’ Offered for the first time in July 2013 through the University of Manitoba’s Department of Sociology, the course attracted students who wanted

some experience with all parts of the process of starting and running a community-based urban permaculture project. The course was scheduled as a two-week long intensive summer institute course, with the first week focusing on planning (design, funding, networking, consultation, advertising) and the second week of the course involved installing or expanding a site in the Permaculture Commons.

Once the sites are constructed, they need to be maintained. While volunteers and students helped with the front end of transforming public green space into productive garden sites, there still was the question of who would actually use the space to produce food. Just as in many community initiatives, there is lots of excitement initially in the creation of these spaces. But after the ‘permabliz’ as the community-led flash installations are often called, generally interest wanes and slowly the sites become untended and messy. And so after several years of attempting to find a strategy to maintain engagement, the group settled on creating a social enterprise, and therefore during the summer of 2015, just before the second offering of the Building a Commons course, the South Osborne Permaculture Workers’ Cooperative was formed.

The SOPWC’s 5 initial members would be employed urban farmers. They are guided by permaculture principles in the planning and management of the sites, are responsible for creating designs for new sites. They also fill the educational mandate of SSO by hosting Garden Clubs where participants schedule themselves in for sessions at the garden sites to learn how to grow food in urban gardens. Together with the Building a Commons course, the SOPWC would address the issue of participation in the Commons.

As a new worker cooperative, the SOPWC has run into some significant troubles in its first year. Communication between members has been lacking and cooperative decision making structure hasn’t lived up to its expectations. Neither has projected sales or productivity. Flaws in

previous site designs have led to inefficient use of the space and significant demands on non-productive labour, such as weeding. The relationship with the restaurants has also experienced some strain due to inconsistent invoicing and communication, and sales stagnated towards the middle of the summer. Coupled with a bumper crop, the co-op has also struggled to compete with commercial local producers who are able to offer products at a significantly lower price-point. And so the co-op has had to respond by focusing on unique and niche products for sale, with the more common vegetable staples grown supplying the Harvest Dinner, Garden Club Participants and being given away to a local public housing residence. In light of some of these struggles, the group has reconsidered some of its ambitious expansion plans and are considering reducing their targets for increasing growing space underproduction.

So despite some modest successes, the struggle for labour and participation continues and the group has confronted new challenges as it enters the first off-season of planning. New proposals including a CSA model to incentivize consistent participation in the Garden Clubs and to diversify sales are under consideration. And for more reliable access to funding, a community investment plan is also under consideration, with the plan being to offer investment shares to community members who want to support development of new agricultural park spaces in the neighbourhood. These measures might help pull the cooperative back together to keep the existing sites in production and to continue to build new ones, but the group recognizes that success here depends on making some fairly significant changes.

Preliminary Conclusions: This draft paper is a starting point in exploring the relationship between food-producing Urban Green Commons and the global Food Sovereignty movement. Using a small case study (the South Osborne Permaculture Commons) as launching point,

through interviews, analysis of organizational documents and through participatory reflection my involvement with the commons since 2009, this paper can draw a few preliminary conclusions.

For the first question, has the Commons been influenced by food sovereignty, the answer has two dimensions. First, the role of subjective recognition should be considered. For the participants in the Commons, does it matter that they acknowledge the concept of food? The role of subjectivity makes for interesting questions about how food sovereignty gets manifested, or what the global Food Sovereignty movement is made up of. I return to this point below. But based on the interviews and experience with the group, it's most likely that food sovereignty has not directly motivated participants in the commons.

Beyond subjective recognition, another way to follow this direction in the relationship between the abstract/global towards the concrete/local is to look structurally at factors that have instigated the Food Sovereignty struggle, and then to match them up with the emergence of the Commons. Could the same processes that drive food sovereignty exist at different scales, appearing simultaneously in different contexts? Does the struggle for public park space, earmarked for hospital expansion plans, somehow aligned with the struggle for land faced by small holders who lose to urban sprawl or the consolidation of land ownership by large conventional firms? Is the struggle to find people to participate in a common green space parallel to the struggle against urbanization and the lack of available labour in rural environments? Has the South Osborne Permaculture Commons emerged in response to similar threads of neoliberal forces that have started the transnational food sovereignty movement, forces that straddle the urban-rural divide? Is drawing these parallels irresponsible in the analysis of food systems?

The role of subjectivity should also be considered when thinking about the second question: is the Commons (and similar projects) a contribution or involvement in a social

movement? The fact that the Commons doesn't self identify (either as organizations or by all the individual participants) as practicing food sovereignty does not preclude it from practicing food sovereignty or from being part of a social movement. It's likely that some social movement scholars would find this contentious, asking 'then do consumers of fair trade coffee constitute social movement actors?' Is this analogy not equally valid, that by analogy purchasing fair trade coffee without recognizing it as such does not make it unfairly traded coffee. This speaks to a tension between objective and subjective elements of social phenomena which I return to below. While the participants don't call the Commons as food sovereignty, there is a strong resonance between what they do and the Nyéléni's pillars cited above. The strategies for dealing with shared struggles do put the Commons as positioned in a similar spot to those represented under the food sovereignty banner.

The idea of commoning as a food sovereignty strategy also deserves its own consideration. How does the commons as a conceptual framework fits into food sovereignty? Here I would argue that the process of creating Urban Green Commons engages the creation and support of competing sovereignties in the food system (Schiavoni, 2015) within the food system. Building UGCs is the establishment and maintenance of community-based institutions that play a role in the governance of food producing resources. The group determines the form of governance and management of shared resources. Further to this point, in the case of public land, these additional sovereignties that emerge to govern use and access of green space are engaged in a simultaneous struggle and partnership with the state who has the mandate of stewarding the land for the benefit of citizens generally.

This leads to another area of controversy in considering the role of community-based urban agriculture in wider food systems transformation – the potential for decolonization (Grey

and Petal 2014). In the case of ‘public land’ with contentious history of indigenous-settler transfer (for example, unseeded land, occupied land, or unrecognized treaty land), partnerships for claiming green space could be used as a tool for localizing the food system and decolonizing land at the same time. This is relevant to urban and rural land and adds another layer to the different and competing forms of sovereignty that needs to be considered in more detail in the context of the South Osborne Permaculture Commons and beyond.

Both research questions in this research point to a more theoretical territory in exploring the ontological nature of global social movements. Arguing that the South Osborne Permaculture Commons is both influenced and participates in the Global Food Sovereignty movement requires taking a relational view. Social scientists tend to align more closely with either subjectivist or objectivist understandings of social phenomena such as social movements (Powell and Dépelteau, 2013). Objectivism sees the social world as having objective qualities similar to physical objects in that they exist independently of conscious recognition of them and so are objectively measurable using instruments. Social systems in this regard are seen in the same way as ecosystems like forest or island ecologies that can be studied as a whole. Subjectivist approaches to the social world are different in that they interpret institutions as only existing in the minds of individuals as ‘subjective’ representations of what might objectively exist. The social movement literature here is heavily influenced by social constructionism and how social problems are defined as such.

An objectivist ontology applies here to the structure of the UGC – the organizations and rules for interacting, and therefore focuses on objective qualities of struggle and strategy. A subjectivist ontology applies here through the perceptions of the participants and their experience and an ‘alignment of principles.’ Relational ontology takes both into account simultaneously as

the central focus. The objective structures (institutions) are actually dynamic processes between perceiving subjects caught in dynamic processes that can be seen as intersecting with different scales of social phenomena. In this way, seeing the struggles and strategies as connecting points between different ‘elements’ in the food system can first map out what these processes look like and then situate them within broader processes. This has implications for the question of whether or not a social movement organization belongs to a particular ‘movement’ if it doesn’t intentionally apply a shared collective-action frame. Here I draw on Iles and Dewit’s notion of ‘relational scale’ which they have argued should be incorporated into food sovereignty scholarship (2014). Relational scale sees the major conceptual categories in food sovereignty scholarship (food systems, the state, producers, consumers etc.) as being the nexus of complex webs of dynamic social processes.

1. Relational scale sees connections between elements of the food system during: actors, institutions, physical world (land, water, animals, fertilizer, drought, climate, etc).
2. Struggles are relationships between elements that resist moving towards the vision of food sovereignty.
3. Strategies are relationships between elements and also points in time for overcoming struggles and moving towards transformation
4. Struggles also exist between strategies that are in conflict with one another
5. Struggles and or strategies in one context have elements caught in struggles elsewhere
6. All of this happens at and across multiple scales in continuously changing processes (sizes, organizational groups, times and the connections between these)

All of the parts of this research, the principles, the perceptions of participants in the commons, the struggles and strategies, can all be seen as part of a relational model for the Global Food Sovereignty movement. Efforts to build Urban Green Commons occupy space for increasing urban production and enlisting urban folks in the struggle for a better food system.

This framework leads to a new set of research questions for future work, including: What is role does public land play here, especially in the context of reclaiming indigenous land? How do the multifunctional benefits of urban agriculture play into the different scales of food sovereignty

struggle? And in what ways to the struggles faced internally in the structure of Urban Green Commons tie to different elements of Food Sovereignty more broadly?

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