Neighbourhood Food Democracy:

Participatory Food Asset Mapping in Vancouver's Westside

By

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 2017

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS – COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

in the School of Public Administration

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Abstract

Food insecurity represents a pervasive systemic issue that has a devastating population impact. Ordinary people, especially those most impacted by the failings of the food system, have little say in its governance. Food democracy aims to support regaining of the democratic control of the food system and enable its transformation by promoting active citizen participation in the decision-making processes. This research study presents a vignette to begin to consider potential pathways for supporting participation of equity-denied groups in addressing the issue that directly impacts them. Set in Vancouver's Westside, this thesis explores the potential of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as tools for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. Based on the proposed conceptual framework of neighbourhood food democracy, these Community Based Participatory Action Research methods serve to support research objectives of community empowerment, knowledge co-creation and setting an agenda for social change. The research study engaged 15 community members with lived experience of food insecurity in the Westside in participatory mapping and focus group discussion. Participants identified neighbourhood food priorities, including values and barriers to local food access, as well as considered contributing systemic factors (knowledge co-creation). Participants suggested recommendations for the community, non-profit and public sectors to support community food security by maximizing value, reducing barriers to food access, and addressing systemic factors (agenda for social change). The research study validated the promise of CBPAR methods in supporting participation of equity-denied groups in a democratic process (community empowerment). To fully realize the promise of neighbourhood food democracy, the report recommends ongoing local opportunities for meaningful participation of marginalized groups in democratic processes on the issue that affects them.

Keywords: food security; food asset mapping; community development; democracy; community-based participatory research

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Glossary

Community development - a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems to improve their life circumstances (Ife, 2016).

Equality – each individual or group of people is given the same resources and opportunities, regardless of their circumstances (Milken Institute School of Public Health, 2020).

Equity - recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome (Milken Institute School of Public Health, 2020).

Equity-denied – refers to communities or groups that experience significant collective barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination, based on age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, Indigeneity, gender identity and gender expression, nationality, race, sexual orientation, etc. (UBC Equity & Inclusion Office, n.d.).

Food assets - resources, facilities, and spaces that can be used to support community's food security. These assets may include urban farms and community gardens, food processors, food retailers, food assistance programs, and community kitchen (Soma, Li, et al., 2022).

Food security - when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (World Food Summit, 1996).

Food sovereignty - the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (National Farmers Union, n.d.).

Food justice - sees healthy food as a human right and aims to address structural barriers to that right. Food justice approach seeks to address issues of inequality and injustice throughout the food system. Food justice goes beyond the narrow scope of food security and emphasizes the broader social, economic, and environmental factors that influence people's relationship with food (FoodPrint, 2024).

Neoliberalism - an economic and political ideology that emphasizes free-market capitalism, limited government intervention, deregulation, and individual entrepreneurship, with a focus on promoting economic efficiency and growth (Manning, 2024).

Participatory mapping - is a collaborative and inclusive qualitative research method of creating maps that involves active involvement and contributions from community members. It aims to capture local knowledge, perspectives, and experiences related to specific themes and geographic areas. This approach recognizes the value of local expertise and community engagement in representing and understanding the complexities of a particular space (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2009).

Abbreviations

ABCD - Asset-Based Community Development

ANHBC - Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia

CBPAR – Community-Based Participatory Action Research

Kits House – Kitsilano Neighbourhood House

VNFN – Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks

WFC – Westside Food Collaborative

Acknowledgements

I would like to respectfully acknowledge that this work took place on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded homelands of the šxʷməθkʷəy̓əmaʔɬ təməxʷ (Musqueam), sə̓lilwətaʔɬ təməxʷ (Tsleil-Waututh), and Skwxwú7mesh-ulh Temíx̱w (Squamish) Nations. Thank you for teaching the lessons of balance, connections and relationships!

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory University of Victoria stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. Thank you for sharing the wisdom of the land-based teachings and the importance of reciprocity!

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank the research participants – residents of the Westside, for sharing their valuable knowledge and wisdom to help co-create a story of Neighbourhood Food Democracy: Lydia, Ollie, Claire Vivier, Xarosh, Carter, Stella, Amin Ahari, R.D., P. T., K. O., M., M.C., K.E., P., S. Thank you for raising your voice!

The project was led in partnership with the Westside Food Collaborative and Kitsilano Neighbourhood House with the kind financial support of Students in Community: Engaging Meaningfully, funded by Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada and coordinated by the Community-Engaged Learning Office at University of Victoria. Thank you for making community-engaged research possible!

I would also like to offer my appreciation to Kits House and community volunteers for their kind support with the logistics of the sessions: Iman K, Ann H, Connell S, Danielle Mc. Thank you for helping create a welcoming, safe and sacred space for community to come together and share their stories!

I extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisory committee: the supervisor Dr. Sarah Marie Wiebe and the second reader Dr. Astrid V. Pérez Piñán for the continuous, patient and kind support throughout this journey. Thank you for your inspiring mentorship!

Big thanks to the University of Victoria's School of Public Administration for curating a supportive and engaging learning environment. A big shoutout to my MACD colleagues, especially Amy, Carmen for consistent emotional support – it was an honour to walk this path together!

With special thanks to my family, my dear husband Geoff, my wonderful mother-in-law, Mama Lyn, as well as friends and community for your endless support and encouragement!

Dedication

To Mama, Papa, Deda, Baba, with gratitude for paving the path.

To my future children, with the promise of a better world.

To my fellow citizens, with a plea to our better angels.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

How do we change the world? As we are faced with a slew of intersecting problems of local and global proportions, impacting people and the planet, from Vancouver's housing affordability crisis to climate crisis, it is clear that change is overdue. Yet, how do we bring about change when these complex, multifaceted problems feel so overwhelming and unsurmountable, beyond our full comprehension, let alone take action? It feels that we are at a whim of larger forces and powers, and have no control of our own lives, having no say in what is done to us. It is easy to feel helpless and hopeless. This is an unequal battle.

Yet, history shows, time and again that change starts with ordinary people deciding to influence their life circumstances, which is the very definition of community development (Meade et al., 2016, p. 2). This draws a strong parallel with the ideal of democracy characterized by active citizen participation and strong civil society (Merkel, 2004) "government of, by and for the people". Done right, a healthy democracy works for everyone: everyone's needs are met, and everyone's voices are heard in the process (Merkel, 2004). Democracy starts in neighbourhoods: through participating actively in local community life, citizens discover their shared fate and make a connection between their private concerns and collective interest, implicated in local policy (Pitkin, 2004). By supporting low-barrier, local opportunities for participation, citizens can exercise their power and observe the more immediate impacts of their actions, and, as a result, get more involved in the democratic participation on higher levels (Pitkin, 2004).

Food insecurity is a prime example of a complex, systemic intersecting issue that has roots on multiple scales, and a real impact on real people. Food is one of the most basic of human needs, yet 1 in 6 Canadians are finding themselves food insecure with some devastating impacts. The status quo is no longer working. The change has long been overdue, but the status quo is persistent. This is a story of hope – of ordinary people deciding to influence their life circumstances, reclaiming their voice and finding their power to address a complex issue, right in their neighbourhood. This is a story of neighbourhood food democracy.

Defining the Issue

> *Do we want to be more fully engaged as human beings, community members, and citizens? Do we want to have an active, direct, and meaningful voice in our governance? … Or are we content as passive recipients of policies imposed on us by those with political and corporate power? Are we content with mere illusions of democracy?* (Johnson, 2015, p. 125).

Governance refers to the institutions, processes, and practices through which issues of common concern are decided upon and regulated ("About good governance," n.d.). It involves "the rules, processes, and behaviours whereby interests are articulated, resources are managed, and power is exercised in society" (Addink, 2019, p.3). It is a fundamental concept that underpins the functioning of societies and organizations, contributing to stability, justice, and the achievement of goals and objectives (Addink, 2019). Effective governance is "good governance". Good governance serves to uphold human rights, assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in the decision-making process (UN ESCAP, 2009).

According to the United Nations, good governance has eight major characteristics, or principles. According to the widely adopted definition by United Nations, good governance is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law (UN ESCAP, n.d.). Done right, good governance results in people's needs being met while making the best use of resources (UN ESCAP, n.d.).

However, the opposite is true: we are far behind on reaching most of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, while continuing to deplete our planet's reserves (UN DESA, 2023). No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Wellbeing, Clean Water and Sanitation for all remain elusive aspirations, while irreversible damage to the natural environment appears an increasingly inevitable certainty. A "historic promise to secure the rights and well-being of everyone on a healthy, thriving planet" is failing (UN DESA, 2023). To help understand the grim outcome of the modern global governance, one can begin by asking, who governs? Since governance, at its core, is the process of decision making, an analysis of actors involved in the decision-making process may help shed light on the driving factors and motivators of the said decisions (UN Economic and Social Commission, n.d.). The global policy arena is filled with a wide variety of actors such as international organizations, corporations, professional associations, and advocacy groups, all seeking to 'govern' activity surrounding their issues of concern (Avant, 2010).

State, public, private, NGOs and the people: it is not hard to notice who wields more power. In the midst of governments' pursuit of power and corporations' pursuit of profit, people's voices fade and often become the collateral - carrying the brunt of government and corporate decisions and in-decisions. People are the most affected, but most excluded from the decision-making process. That is not good governance, at all!

Wide citizen participation is the foundational principle of good governance and is considered a "key cornerstone" of good governance (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.). By analysing the actors who participate, it is clear that lack of community participation leads to other core principles of good governance being compromised. If those most impacted by issues are excluded from the decision-making process,

equity, inclusiveness, and consensus orientation suffer. Meanwhile, accountability, which cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law, is not present. It is no wonder that participation is the foundation upon which the other principles rest. Perhaps, to begin to unravel the crisis we find ourselves in, we can begin by re-building a stronger foundation of participation?

In the context of public administration, a number of authors speak to the importance of centering community voices in governance conversations (Tremblay & Wiebe, 2019). Active public participation is said to be a critical factor determining the very health of a democracy as it strengthens its legitimacy and accountability (Pitkin, 2004; Johnson, 2015). Johnson (2015) calls for upholding the principle of affected interests, whereby those who are "governed, bound, or seriously affected by a policy have a claim to be involved – directly or indirectly – in the processes of its development" (p.12). Building on the all-affected-interests principle, Moscrop and Warren (2016), call for inclusion of equity consideration, and posit that the degree to which a community is affected by an issue should be reflected in the distribution of representation (Moscrop & Warren, 2016, p. 9). Levac and Wiebe (2020) assert that including diverse people, knowledge systems, and forms of evidence in the process of policy creation may lead to more just policy outcomes. Authors unanimously call for approaching democratic decision-making processes with the same intentionally anti-oppressive and social justice-oriented aims that guide the desired policy outcomes (Johnson, 2015; Levac &Wiebe, 2020; Moscrop & Warren, 2016).

Despite the theoretical consensus on the importance of including community voices, public participation is in crisis. Those in power (e.g. governments and corporations) are not keen on hearing the voices of the public. And even if they do, they face a dilemma: on one hand, community members experience structural barriers for participation with those in power doing little to remove them, on the other hand, the public is not trusting that their opinion matters and becomes disengaged. Opportunities for participation that governments provide often fall within the inform-consult side of the spectrum of public participation ("Core Values, Ethics, Spectrum – The 3 Pillars of Public Participation," n.d.), where "the general sentiment that citizens' voices are being used to advance the government's predetermined position" is prevalent (Levac & Wiebe, 2020, p. 4). Even in cases when public participation is invited, it is skewed toward those with education, money, and social status, while traditionally marginalized communities, who are often the most impacted, face persistent barriers to civic participation (Johnson, 2015, p. 494; Moscrop & Warren, 2016). In fact, studies find that socio-economic inequities mirror themselves in the inequities of democratic participation (Merkel, 2014). Material inequalities, related to income, housing, education, food security, flexibility of time, and access to childcare, inhibit equal and meaningful participation (Johnson, 2015, p.12). Without addressing inequities and barriers to citizen participation, formal public engagement processes not only reflect the systemic inequities (Moscrop & Warren, 2016, p. 10), but also serve to replicate the same kind of exclusion and marginalization that created complex policy problems in the first place (Levac & Weibe, 2020). As a result, apathy, cynicism, and scepticism towards formal democratic processes are widespread (Cattapan et al., 2020, p.227). Dissatisfied with the government representation of their interests, and not believing that their opinions matter, the public becomes disconnected and disengaged from taking active part in civic issues and political life (Johnson, 2015).

Authors universally call for the need to shift power dynamics from government-mandated community engagement towards demand-driven, bottom-up community-led citizen participation (Lodewijckx, 2020) by creating low-barrier local opportunities for participation, where citizens can exercise their power and observe the more immediate impacts of their actions, which, in turn,

can serve as the foundation for democratic participation more broadly (Pitkin, 2004; Merkel, 2014; Ife, 2016; Russell, 2020; Santos & Avritzer, 2005). I agree with Pitkin (2004), who posits that "lively, participatory, concrete direct democracy" locally forms a foundation for democratic representation nationally - it is through participating actively in local political life, starting in their immediate neighbourhood, that they discover their shared fate and make a connection between their private concerns and collective interest, implicated in local policy (Pitkin, 2004).

This thesis argues that democracy starts in neighbourhoods – in line with Rousseau (1968), who posits that true and free democracy presupposes active, direct and personal participation of all, assembled together, jointly deciding public policy, neighbourhoods may serve as a locus for democratic engagement. Indeed, by coming together, neighbours not only are able to realize the indispensable value of social capital and trust, but also help transform their community through collective action, while minimizing the impact on the planet. It is through maximizing internal resources and the ability to access necessary external supports, that neighbourhoods are empowered to achieve meaningful change on a large scale.

Food is an example of a complex, multidimensional, intersecting issue – food we put on our tables is managed by an interplay of private and public actors, as well as regional, national, and global forces and regimes. The modern food system represents a complex spectrum of food production, processing, distribution, and recovery. Sadly, the modern-day food system is also a shining example of bad governance in action: driven by the neoliberal logic, fueled by pursuit of profit, the current situation resulted in the concentration of power in the hands of a few big corporations and is no longer under communities' direct control ("Theory of Change," n.d.). Not surprisingly, this results in practices that harm people and the planet (Hawken, 2021). Food insecurity, described as "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet, quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so" is one of the most devastating symptoms of a weak food system (Health Canada, 2020). Food insecurity is a major public health issue as it is found to be associated with a number of negative health effects, including increased risk of diabetes (Gucciardi et al., 2009), cardiovascular disease (Fowokan et al., 2018), elevated risk of mental illness (Martin et al., 2016), and mortality rates (Gundersen et al., 2018; Men et al., 2020). The rates of food insecurity in Canada are growing - in the latest report by PROOF - the leading research program on food insecurity in the country ("About PROOF," n.d.), has found that 1 in 6 people in Canada live in food insecure households. Despite (or, arguably, due to) the efforts of food banks and other charity food provision programs that claim to address the need, food insecurity is a persistent issue that is only growing.

By applying a similar analysis of the food system governance by asking who is in charge of our food system, it does not come as a surprise that corporations, without fail, appear to hold disproportionate power ("Power in the food system," n.d.). It is not the governments entrusted with meeting people's basic needs, not the farmers who grow food, and, certainly, not the people who rely on food for their very survival, but companies who make a business out of the human right that is food. As big food corporations continue gaining market dominance and political influence, people's patience has reached its limits and people have demanded government action (Steinman, 2019; Lakhani et al., 2021). Governments listen and are now taking more decisive measures in response to the unhampered reign of grocery chains and bringing the suspects to the table – which is certainly a step in the right direction (Zimonjic, 2023). Does the situation have to reach an extreme for the government to step in? How can citizens directly impacted by the issue exercise their democratic right to have a say on the matter that affects them?

Food democracy posits that citizen participation is critical in regaining democratic control of the food system and enabling its transformation by addressing the issues that affect them (Booth & Coveney, 2015). Active participation of diverse citizens is said to promote the quality and legitimacy of food policymaking (Candel, 2022). Several studies point to the considerable mobilizing potential of food democracy initiatives, making them an auspicious site for broader democratic experimentation and innovation (Candel, 2022, p. 1486). Despite its promising potential to yield a sustainable and just food system, a number of authors identify challenges of participation of marginalized groups in food democracy – an issue shared with democratic participation more broadly (Booth & Coveney, 2015; Candel, 2022; López Cifuentes & Gugerell, 2021). To engage equity-denied groups in food democracy, Booth & Coveney (2015) recommend creating local opportunities for discourse to explore, influence, shape and redefine issues (Booth & Coveney, 2015).

The process of policy development begins with setting the baseline and analysing the contextual setting and food asset mapping effectively supports these goals. Food assets are resources, facilities, and spaces that can be used to support a community's food security (Soma, Li, et al., 2022). These assets may include urban farms and community gardens, food processors, food retailers, food assistance programs, low-cost meals, and community kitchens ("Vancouver Food Asset Map," n.d.). Food asset mapping is increasingly used as a tool to analyse the strengths and fragilities within urban food systems with an aim to address food insecurity, by identifying food-related resources and gaps (Soma, Li, et al., 2022). Food asset maps are typically developed by municipalities, public health departments and food justice activists: there are food asset maps created by the City of Vancouver ("Free and low-cost food programs in Vancouver," n.d.), Vancouver Coastal Health Authority ("Food asset maps," n.d.), and Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks ("Vancouver food asset map," n.d.).

Yet, such an approach has been criticized for not being representative of the diversity of the community's voices, especially equity-denied groups, who may have different experiences of the local food system (Soma, Shulman, et al., 2022). Such an expert-driven process represents a top-down, oppressive approach that not only does not reflect the everyday realities of certain demographic groups, but may serve to perpetuate power imbalances that exist in the community (Soma, Li, et al., 2022). In other words, such an approach not only does not serve equity-denied groups it is trying to reach, but further alienates them from meaningful participation in the process of development.

Participatory food asset mapping, on the other hand, whereby it is the community members who identify assets that exist in their own neighbourhood and determine the value of such assets, better reflects the experience of those most impacted by the issue, and may serve as an effective tool to promote participation (Soma, Shulman, et al., 2022). Such meaningful participation is shown to build individual agency and lead to gradual redistribution of power, turning passive beneficiaries into active partners in development (Nosek, 2017). As a Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) method, participatory food asset mapping may not only help resurface different forms of community knowledge, but it may also serve to mobilize local community and disrupt power (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). With that, I propose to explore the potential of participatory food asset mapping to promote participation of equity-denied groups who are experiencing food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside, in the process of development of evidence-based municipal food policy. Every neighbourhood is different. It is in my own backyard – Vancouver's Westside, which I proudly

call my community, that I set the stage for my inquiry into the democratic exercise that is the subject of this study.

Self-Location

As a community-based researcher, I locate myself in place, on the traditional, ancestral and stolen lands of xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səl̓ilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples, colonially known as Vancouver, BC in the Kitsilano neighbourhood. While my research study upholds the ideals of democracy, Indigenous peoples, devoid of the right to participate in self-governance, have not been part of a democratic project in Canada (Green, 2017) - this presents an uncomfortable point of contention and brings forward the urgency of adopting a decolonizing approach. Decolonization recognizes the devastating impacts of colonialism and aims to confront the ongoing injustices (Corntassel, Chaw-win-is & T'lakwadzi, 2009). In my commitment to decolonization, I aim to act as an ally to Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples in their struggle of freedom through 'infra-political resistance' (Tully, 2000, p. 42) by disrupting colonial relationships and power structures, and centering Indigenous voices and ways of being in my research process (Napoleon & Friedland, 2014, p. 209). I recognize the seemingly impossible paradox of decolonization in the context of this research study aimed at influencing municipal food policy within the colonial government structures. This is where I call on the principle of Squamish matriarchical leadership, *Mi tel'nex̱w* - which means "figuring it out" (T.M. Nahanee, personal communication at a consulting session, June 2022). I commit to the principles of decolonization at every step of my research process, while leaning into the discomfort, embracing uncertainty and being open to learning and unlearning.

It is in my professional position of Community Food Developer with Kitsilano Neighbourhood House coordinating the work of the Westside Food Collaborative (WFC), that I am engaging in the research process. Deeply embedded in the community as a staff member of the community organization, as a resident of the neighbourhood and a grassroots community activist, I am adopting the insider role in the context of the research. From this vantage point, the care for the research process and concern for the outcomes becomes personal, as I carry a deep sense of responsibility for the community I serve and the community I am part of. Community-based research upholds the "relational virtues" of the researcher, whereby such positionality is acknowledged as a strength, as it leads to trust, care and a "commitment to working for a better world" (Banks et al., 2013, p. 274). However, it does not absolve the researcher of the responsibility to consider the ways in which such a position may raise ethical questions of conflict of interest, which I describe in detail. While my role of the community insider is consistent with the foundational principles of Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR), my social location and the privileges it affords, puts me in the position of an outsider along the dimension of relatedness of the researcher to the study participants and must be examined (Rowe, 2014). In order to do that, I take a close look at my intersecting social identities.

Positionality Statement

I am a Caucasian, cis-gendered, able-bodied woman from a middle-class family. While my previous lived experience of food insecurity growing up in Russia and as a newcomer to Canada offers me a degree of relatedness to the research participants, my current membership to the dominant-status groups puts me in the persistent position of privilege in relation to the

community members who have been denied equity. This creates a power imbalance and creates a risk for oppressive practices to occur. Hyde (2018) suggests for a community-based researcher to engage in the practice of self-reflexivity as the foundation for the anti-oppressive work. As a self-reflexivity practice, I am constantly aware and cognisant of the unearned advantages available to me by the virtue of belonging to the privileged groups, while being mindful of the systems that deny equity to the community members I am engaging with. I am hopeful that by rooting my work in social justice and equity principles, and continuously reflecting on the systems of oppression at play, while embracing humility, I am able to challenge the structures of domination, overcome the uneven power distribution and build authentic relationships with community members.

I would also like to acknowledge my education and specialist knowledge as a researcher, which, in the context of the Community-Based Participatory Action Research, may present a point of contention. CBPAR emphasizes collaborative knowledge co-production by trained researchers and communities, while prioritizing "practical form of knowledge-in-action to an empirical form of knowledge-as-statistic" (Pant, 2014, p.593). In the attempt to resolve this tension, I turn to the design justice principles that aim to uplift local knowledge, center voices of those who are directly impacted by the issue and see the researcher as a facilitator of the process (Costanza-Chock, 2020). I am also inspired by the Indigenous approaches to epistemology, described by Goodchild (2021), that posit that the knowledge is not created, but it already exists within all human beings and the world around - a Squamish teaching of Nch'ú7mut, recognizes the equal value of everyone's gifts and contributions (T.M. Nahanee, personal communication at a consulting session, June 2022). As such, I view my role as a broker, and not a creator of knowledge, aiming to uncover and uplift the knowledge and wisdom that exists in the community. To achieve this, I have committed to embracing uncertainty and humility, listening and learning, asking questions, accepting feedback and criticism while maintaining a high degree of self-awareness.

I intend to continue using my privilege and professional standing to uplift the voices of the members of my community who have been silenced and feel that their voices do not matter. Thus, my leadership approach is focused on disrupting power imbalances, intentionally creating spaces for equitable engagement and harnessing the power and agency of the equity-denied groups (Dugan, 2017). This approach falls under the model of leadership for strategic social change: it distributes power in a more equitable way and works towards more equitable and just outcomes of the system (Dugan, 2017).

Methodology: Community-based Participatory Action Research

This study adopts a Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) Methodology to create low-barrier opportunities for participation of equity-denied groups in a democratic deliberation on a complex issue that affects their lives. The methodology of community-based research has been recognized as a proven framework for generating ideas and facilitating community organizing to address complex community issues (Dawson et al., 2014). Its action-orientation and participation focus support the goals of knowledge co-creation, community empowerment and meaningful action. CBPAR, in itself, then becomes an exercise in community development and deep democracy, whereby ordinary people come together to take action to improve their life circumstances. This study engaged community members with lived experience of food insecurity in participatory food asset mapping and focused group discussion

to identify valuable food assets in the Westside and consider values, barriers, and systemic factors (knowledge co-creation) that contribute to the current state of affairs and suggest a set of recommendations to addressing them (agenda for social change). CBPAR as a partnership between a trained researcher and community, aims to decentre the expert knowledge and prioritize community voices throughout the research process: from research design to the dissemination of findings. The choice of methodology directly supports the research objectives of disrupting power and encouraging participation of marginalized groups.

Significance of Study

The current study holds both practical importance and academic significance. This research study, guided by CBPAR methods, helped create conditions to resurface valuable knowledge of community members directly affected by the issue of food insecurity in the Westside. These valuable first-hand perspectives will help inform program and policy development. The study makes an academic contribution to community-engaged research methodology, as well as theories of community development and neighbourhood democracy.

As food costs continue to rise, more and more people are finding themselves food insecure, and the toll of human suffering is mounting. Free and low-cost food programs are struggling to keep up with the ever-increasing demand. While governments and institutions are looking for effective solutions, the voice of the very people affected by the issue is missing. People are distrustful of governments, while non-profit institutions, who do hold the valuable relationships and trust, are lacking capacity (e.g. time, financial resources, expertise) to meaningfully and ethically engage with the marginalized community members. This is where academic institutions can play a critical role in bridging the gap through community-engaged research partnerships.

This research study is especially timely as both the local government and non-profits are eager to hear first-hand perspectives of the community. The City of Vancouver's Food Policy department is actively looking to understand neighbourhood food priorities from the perspectives of the equity-denied groups. There is also a renewed interest among community-serving organizations in the Westside to strengthen collaboration around the issues of food security, guided by the community's voice. This study, rooted in the CBPAR methodology, that aims to resurface and centre community knowledge effectively supports these goals. Moreover, and most critically, CBPAR serves to mobilize local community and disrupt power – the necessary preconditions to addressing the complex issue of food insecurity in the current context. Thanks to the University of Victoria's Students Engaging Meaningfully funding, this study was able to create an intentional space for engaging people experiencing food insecurity and reduce barriers for participation by offering honoraria for their generous contribution.

The social change agenda of the current research study is not merely aspirational, but rooted in a real community issue, motivated by the opportune policy window and supported by the structures for implementation, far beyond the conclusion of the formal research project. I am confident that the knowledge produced as a result of this research will lay a foundation for tangible action and meaningful change. In addition to practical importance, the study holds academic significance as it advances the understanding of community-engaged research methods in an urban context, as applied to the issue of food insecurity. The study makes an academic contribution to theories of community development and neighbourhood food democracy.

Thesis Purpose, Objectives and Research Questions

Thesis Purpose

The purpose of the thesis is to explore the potential of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as a tool for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. The research study aimed to engage community members with lived experience of food insecurity in mapping valuable food assets in the Westside, identifying values and barriers to local food access, considering contributing systemic factors and creating recommendations for community, the non-profit and public sectors to help improve local food access.

Thesis Objectives

1. Identify neighbourhood food priorities in the Vancouver's Westside from the perspective of equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity (knowledge co-creation)

2. Generate recommendations for community, the non-profit and public sectors in Vancouver, informed by people experiencing food insecurity in the Westside (agenda for social change)

3. Analyze the efficacy of the participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion to promote participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in a democratic process (community empowerment)

Research questions

- **Food assets, values, and barriers**
    - What valuable neighbourhood food assets do community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity identify in Vancouver's Westside?
    - What values related to accessing food assets in the Westside community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity identify as important?
    - What barriers to accessing food assets in Vancouver's Westside do community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity face?
- **Systemic factors that contribute to the current state of affairs**
    - What systemic or structural factors contribute to the current state of affairs?
- **Strategies for change: What to do about it?**
        - What can we do?
        - What can community do?
        - What can non-profits do?
        - What can governments do?
- **Participation of equity-denied groups in a democratic process**
    - How did participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion help contribute to promoting participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside in a democratic process?

Structure of Thesis

Chapter 2 offers important background information, including geographical, organizational, historical and legislative perspectives, that contextualize research problems and helps establish a rationale for the study. *Chapter 3* provides an overview of the existing literature on the topics of democracy, citizen participation, food insecurity, food democracy, and food asset mapping: highlighting the main themes, consensus, contradictions, and knowledge gaps. I conclude the chapter by proposing a conceptual theoretical framework of neighbourhood food democracy that underpins my research approach. *Chapter 4* outlines the research methodology - Community-Based Participatory Action Research and selected methods: participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion. The chapter describes the process of data collection and analysis, as well as strengths and limitations of the research study. *Chapter 5* details the findings of the participatory asset mapping and focus group discussions through showcasing the identified food assets and delves into a comprehensive qualitative account of the values and barriers to food access. The chapter then describes the findings on the systemic factors that contribute to the current state of the issue, according to the research participants. It concludes by sharing the dialogue participants' recommendations for improving immediate food access and addressing systemic factors. In *Chapter 6,* I offer the discussion of the research findings on neighbourhood food priorities, contributing systemic factors and strategies for change. I provide my analysis and reflection on the potential of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as a tool for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. *Chapter 7* concludes the thesis report by providing a summary of the research process and findings, outlining practical implications and proposing recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Background

This section offers important background information, including geographical, organizational, historical and legislative perspectives, that contextualize research problems and helps establish the rationale for the study.

Geographical Context: Westside Community Profile

Vancouver's Westside, bordered by the Pacific Ocean, featuring stunning beaches and mountain views, is one of the most vibrant and attractive areas of the city. Vancouver's Westside is not an official designation and there exists a considerable disagreement on the boundaries of the area ("Areas of the city," n.d.). For the purpose of this thesis, I have adopted the broadest definition of the Westside's limits: from the ocean to the west, to Main Street to the east – see Figure 1. The Westside encompasses the neighbourhoods of Kitsilano, Kerrisdale, Dunbar-Southlands, Arbutus Ridge, Shaughnessy, West Point Grey, UBC, Marpole, and Fairview. Such a broad definition better reflects the everyday experiences of the participants navigating food access within a given geographical location. What defines Vancouver's Westside is that is typically thought of as a wealthy area based on lower poverty rates and higher household incomes than the City's average (Social Policy and Projects, 2020). Indeed, neighbourhoods of Kitsilano, Arbutus Ridge, Shaughnessy and West Point Grey feature a great number of upscale housing options, while shopping districts of West 4th Avenue, Kerrisdale, and Point Grey Village cater to affluent customers. Kitsilano, the most vibrant neighbourhood in the Westside, has a reputation for an active and healthy lifestyle, and environmental consciousness. Kitsilano features an array of health food stores and organic markets, and offers a variety of recreational activities, including yoga, jogging, cycling, beach volleyball and outdoor tennis and basketball courts.

Despite the perception of universal affluence of the area, the Westside is not immune to the issues of poverty. In fact, it is precisely because of this false perception that poverty often remains hidden. According to the latest available, pre-pandemic census data, 17% of Kitsilano residents have incomes below the National Poverty Line (Social Policy and Projects, 2020). Poverty disproportionately affects certain demographic groups, including youth between 20 and 24, new immigrants or non-permanent residents, Black and Indigenous individuals, and seniors. A number of demographic trends, including an aging population as well as a growing population of newcomers and families with children, coupled with rising housing costs and costs of living, put additional pressure on the rising rates of poverty and increasing inequality (Social Policy and Projects, 2020). Long-time Westside residents, who struggle to make ends meet amidst plenty, express concerns over the future (Community member, personal communication, January 2023).

Vancouver's Westside boasts a legacy of community action. As early as 1907, Westside residents lobbied for sewers, tram service and other infrastructure for their community ("Kitsilano," n.d.). Historically, it was neighbourhood associations comprised of Kitsilano property owners that represented Kitsilano's interests at City Hall since the early 1900s (Ross, 2013). This, in turn, begs the question: which interests were represented?

In the 1960s, beachside Kitsilano saw a growing hippie movement, characterized by displays of resistance to materialism, conformity, and state authority (Ross, 2013). As a response, Kitsilano property owners set out a "moral panic" by declaring a hippie problem (Ross, 2013, p.2). Concerned about the future of the neighbourhood, local elites used their privileged voice at City Hall to label the young people congregating on 4th Avenue as "undesirables", as a

criminal element requiring state intervention (Ross, 2013, p.3). Westside wealth disparities reflected in the patterns of civic participation persist to this day: a number of well-organized homeowners' associations continue to exert influence in the decision-making process through well-funded and organized lobbying efforts. Most recently, the homeowners' associations voiced their opposition to a social housing proposal and an Indigenous-led housing development (St. Denis, 2022; Greer, 2023). This reality is consistent with the academic research on the patterns of public participation. Higher economic status, coupled with higher levels of education and disposable time, provides an advantage to advance one's interests in the public process (John, 2009).

Figure 1. Map of the Vancouver's Westside. Google Maps.

Organizational Context: Westside Food Collaborative

The Westside Food Collaborative (WFC) is a community partner in the current study. WFC is a neighbourhood food network, comprised of non-profit organizations, grassroots groups, and individual community members, working together to address community food insecurity and build a just and sustainable local food system in Vancouver's Westside ("Westside Food Collaborative," n.d.). WFC aims to raise public awareness around the issues of community food insecurity, coordinate efforts to build collective capacity to improve food access for the most vulnerable community members and form a unified voice to advocate for systems change ("Westside Food Collaborative," n.d.). Through its diverse network of non-profit organizations and community groups, WFC has a wide reach into the community and holds valuable relationships with people experiencing food insecurity. Funded in its entirety by the City of Vancouver's Sustainable Food Systems Grant, WFC is mandated to support the goals of the Vancouver Food Strategy aiming to address food system issues, including food access and participation of equity-denied groups - the current study is effectively supporting these objectives ("Sustainable food systems grants," n.d.).

WFC is hosted by Kitsilano Neighbourhood House (Kits House) - a registered non-profit, charity organization ("About us," n.d.). Kits House works to address the most urgent and emergent needs by providing important social services and programs for people of all ages and backgrounds: children, families, youth, seniors, newcomers ("About us," n.d.). Since its inception in 1974, Kits House has always been a hub for the local community - it is a place for residents from all walks of life to come together, cultivate a sense of belonging and get engaged ("About us"). In addition to providing critical social services and supports, Kits House has a long and vibrant history of community activism and political action. Over the years, Kits House supported some important initiatives, from a community theater and first community garden, affordable housing projects for seniors, rezoning and redevelopment discussions to the early days of the Greenpeace movement (Lauer & Reisz, 2012). As a member of the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia (ANHBC), Kits House is a part of a large, connected network of neighbourhood houses.

WFC is also a member of the Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks (VNFN) - a food justice movement, a "network of networks" collectively working to address food insecurity in the neighbourhoods across the city by creating opportunities for collaboration and shared learning ("25 years of Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks," n.d.). VNFN recognizes the importance of centering community voices and actively engages in policy advocacy efforts in support of food justice in Vancouver (Stepkina & Marcuse, 2022). Such an organizational setting provides a robust networked support and offers effective channels for implementation of the research recommendations.

Historical Context: Food Security in the Westside

As early as 2006, food security started to arise as an issue of importance at the meetings of the social service providers in the Westside ("Westside Food Collaborative," n.d.). As a response to the growing concern, the Westside Food Collaborative (WFC) was formed, with the goal to better understand and more effectively address the issue of food insecurity in this part of Vancouver ("Westside Food Collaborative," n.d.). In 2007, WFC commissioned a seminal study to explore food security in the Westside (Gillard, 2009). The main finding was that there is, indeed, a serious food insecurity problem in the Westside (Pottery & Jinkerson, 2007). The study also identified a number of demographic groups most vulnerable to food insecurity, including seniors, newcomers, young families, single-parent families, those with mobility and transportation issues, and individuals with fixed low incomes (Pottery & Jinkerson, 2007). Inadequate, often fixed income, rising housing costs, and unaffordability of food and other essentials were identified as some of the causes that led community members to compromise on the quantity and the quality of food (Pottery & Jinkerson, 2007). One of the distinct characteristics of the food insecurity in the Westside is that the general perception of universal affluence of the area hides pockets of poverty and entire populations that face barriers to food access (Shore, 2012). Food insecurity, described as "hidden" also contributes to stigma and shame: people living in the "rich" Westside are less likely to admit that they are struggling and are more reluctant to ask for support (Pottery & Jinkerson, 2007). As a result, food supports in the form of free food programs are concentrated in the Eastside of the city, which prompted the desire of the Westside service providers to improve the existing programs as well as to advocate for increased funding ("Free and low-cost food programs in Vancouver," n.d.).

The senior population was identified as one of the most vulnerable: in addition to income constraints, seniors were facing accessibility challenges, due to social isolation, mobility issues

and deteriorating health (Pottery & Jinkerson, 2007). Moreover, as Vancouver's Westside became more desirable, it experienced significant growth, which contributed to the rising housing costs and unaffordability. As a result, many seniors, who had long been calling Westside home, found themselves "house-rich, but cash-poor," struggling to make ends meet and afford the basic necessities, including food (Leung, 2008). Westside's suburban sprawl was said to contribute to food deserts, as they offer the least access to fresh, affordable food, which is a particularly serious problem for the aging population with deteriorating health and mobility challenges. (Shore, 2012). Food deserts can be described as geographic areas where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables) is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient travelling distance ("Food Empowerment Project," n.d.)

Seniors' food insecurity emerged as a strategic priority. In an effort to address food accessibility and affordability for seniors living in Vancouver's Westside, in 2013, WFC, in partnership with the South Granville Seniors Centre, launched the Plenty Campaign to close the gap (Loewen, 2013). The campaign aimed to raise awareness of the lack of options for affordable, fresh produce in the Westside and to provide cheap, fresh produce in places where seniors congregate through mobile food markets (Loewen, 2013). The Westside Mobile Market for seniors and low-income residents offered low-cost fresh fruits and vegetables and received a positive response ("Westside mobile market creates an oasis in a food desert," 2013). The program came to a halt due to a lack of funding and staff transitions (G. Spring, personal communication, November 2022).

In 2018, Kits Cares Café – a collaboration among four churches launched a café-style free community meal hosted at Kitsilano Neighbourhood House (Bird, 2018). This program quickly became a staple for accessing food support in a welcoming setting in the Westside (K. Giesbrecht, personal communication, June 2021). Kits Cares deliberately chose the café format of program delivery – unlike more traditional soup kitchens, it allowed for the roles of guest and host to be blurred as they shared a meal together (Bird, 2018). Westside Food Collaborative and its members offered a variety of initiatives to improve community food security, including gardening, food distribution, community meals, and food skills workshops ("Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks," n.d.).

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed systemic faults in the fragile structure of the food system: more people became food insecure due to job losses, lack of mobility due to health risks, and lack of food availability due to supply chain interruptions, drastically increasing the demand for emergency food supports (Giesbrecht & Stepkina, 2021). Social services in the Westside, in response to the increase in demand, while constrained by the safety precautions, were finding innovative ways to get the food to the people, such as frozen meals, expanded grocery hamper pick-up and home delivery programs (Giesbrecht & Stepkina, 2021). With Kitsilano Neighbourhood House shut down to the public, Kits Cares moved to a grocery hamper format: serving 90-100 people weekly through a grocery distribution out of a neighbourhood church, as well as 40 people through home deliveries ("Kits Cares Café," n.d.). In 2021, the Westside Food Collaborative conducted an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of food supports in the Westside: a report, titled *Thinner and Thinner: 2021 Westside Vancouver Food Asset & Need Scan* aimed to take stock of the lessons of the pandemic and chart the path forward (Giesbrecht & Stepkina, 2021). The key informant interviews with staff and volunteers from community-serving organizations in the Westside revealed that collaborative action, grounded in community

knowledge is key to building resilience of the local food system and supporting community food security (Giesbrecht & Stepkina, 2021).

Building on the recommendations of the report, WFC began facilitating the development of a shared vision and fostering a renewed commitment to collective action towards a sustainable and just food system in the Westside. Starting in 2021, WFC has been hosting regular partner meetings, facilitating knowledge exchange, shared learning and collaboration among member organizations. In 2022, a Kits Community Fridge was open: based on the "take what you need – leave what you can" mutual aid model, the fridge represents an alternative approach to addressing food insecurity. Rather than relying on charitable donations, it appeals to community solidarity. In early 2023, Kits Cares relaunched as a low-cost community market: while continuing to provide some free items as well as hot drinks and snacks, it offers low-cost and subsidized produce and groceries ("Kits Cares," n.d.). Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, thanks to the partnership with the Greater Vancouver Food Bank has launched low-barrier food distribution, guided by food justice principles. Weekly Living Room Food Distribution does not include means testing or eligibility requirements: it offers free groceries, as well as tea, coffee, pastries, Wi-Fi and a safe place to be. In March 2023, WFC, in partnership with Kitsilano Neighbourhood House and with the financial support of United Way's Safe Seniors Strong Communities finding, hosted a community dialogue, engaging Westside seniors experiencing food insecurity to gain a first-hand perspective on the unique needs of seniors (Stepkina & Giesbrecht, 2023). The community dialogue report, *Food For All: Seniors Food Security in Vancouver's Westside* highlighted barriers to secure food access, including high food inflation and rising costs of living, and offered recommendations for supporting food security among the senior population (Stepkina & Giesbrecht, 2023). Seniors' food security dialogue was the first instance of engaging community members with lived experience in a systemic way. There is an interest in continuing to engage community members with lived experience.

Legislative Context: Food Security on the Federal, Provincial, Municipal Agendas

Food security is a multijurisdictional issue – it crosses jurisdictions of all levels of government. Federal, provincial, and municipal policies regulate a wide range of food system concerns, from food production and agriculture to food processing, food safety, distribution, nutrition and food waste (Mendes, 2008). Food insecurity is addressed, directly or indirectly, through a number of policies at all levels of government. It is evident that the issue has gained prominence on the governments' agendas from Ottawa to Victoria to Vancouver.

Federally, *Food Policy For Canada* offers an overarching framework and set of initiatives aimed at addressing various food-related issues and challenges across the country. The Canadian government is recognizing the intersectional nature of food system issues and calls for a coordinated comprehensive approach that can guide food-related decisions of a public, private and non-profit actors (GoC, 2019). Rather than a set of tangible policies, the document outlines the vision, priority outcomes to achieve the vision, action areas to make short and medium-term progress on the long-term outcomes, as well as the principles to help guide action on food-related issues (GoC, 2019). The Food Policy sets out a vision:

All people in Canada are able to access a sufficient amount of safe, nutritious, and culturally diverse food. Canada's food system is resilient and innovative, sustains our environment and supports our economy.

GoC, 2019, p. 5

Food security, as evident from above, is at the forefront of the policy's aspiration. The long-term outcomes position food as a key determinant of health and center the importance of community-based solutions and multi-sector collaborations to effectively address food system issues (GoC, 2019). "Helping Canadian communities access healthy food" is the first (out of four) priority action area outlined by the policy (GoC, 2019). While the *Food Policy* does not set out specific measurable objectives, deferring to the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council, it stresses the importance of aligning the national targets with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 2 - Zero Hunger and SDG 3 - Good Health and Wellbeing (GoC, 2019).

In addition to food-specific policies, federal income support programs contribute to addressing the root cause of food insecurity – poverty (see food security section of the Literature Review for a detailed discussion). Social policies aimed at improving financial circumstances of lower-income households have been shown to help alleviate food insecurity (Ionescu-Ittu, Glymour & Kaufman, 2014; McIntyre et al., 2016; Brown & Tarasuk, 2019; Men et al., 2021). Federal income transfer programs, including the public pension system and child benefits were found to have a positive effect on reducing food insecurity (Men et al., 2021). The Canadian federal pension system is widely acknowledged as one of Canada's major social policy success stories (McIntyre et al., 2016). After the Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement were introduced, the poverty rates among seniors dropped substantially, which led to a sharp decline in the rates of food insecurity among the senior population (McIntyre et al., 2016). Similarly, due to an increase to Canada Child Benefit program, families with children began to experience lower levels of food insecurity (Brown & Tarasuk, 2019).

The province of British Columbia set out a variety of policies aimed at supporting agricultural food production, improving community food access, and promoting food waste reduction. BC's Agriculture Land Commission Act designates certain lands as agricultural to encourage farming and food production (Agricultural Land Commission, n.d.). In BC, approximately 4.6 million hectares of agriculturally suitable land are protected by the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) designation (Agricultural Land Reserve, n.d.). The BC Government recognizes food security as a key public health issue and includes it as one of the core public health programs, aligned with Healthy Living and Healthy Communities goal of the *Promote, Protect, Prevent: Our Health Begins Here: BC's Guiding Framework for Public Health*. Core Public Health Functions for BC: Model Core Program Paper for Food Security outlines roles, responsibilities and general policy directions of the Ministry of Health, the Provincial Health Services Authority, and the regional health authorities with respect to food security. Recognizing the unique structures and approaches of each health authority, the Model Core Paper outlines common goals, objectives, and guiding principles for supporting public health through improving community food security outcomes. Food security is identified as a priority area within *British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy* that outlines guiding principles for lifting people up and out of poverty. Akin to federal income transfers, provincial income support programs, including an increase in the minimum wage were associated with lower odds of experiencing food insecurity (Men et al., 2021). Recognising the critical importance of food security, in 2023 the BC Government made a historic $200 million

investment in supporting food security initiatives ("Historic investment in food security supports British Columbians," 2023). The funding will go to support food availability by providing a boost to the agriculture sector through the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, while improving food distribution through community partner grants available from Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.

While food security measures in Canada span jurisdictions of multiple levels of government, the importance of cities in addressing food insecurity should not be underestimated. There is an ongoing debate on the jurisdictional mandate of the cities: while some adopt minimalist view of cities being responsible solely for public safety (e.g. fire and police), infrastructure (e.g. roads, sewers, public facilities), and municipal services (e.g. water and sanitation, waste management, parks and libraries) there is an increasing recognition that social policy, including food security, plays an important role in ensuring health and wellbeing of the residents (Mendes, 2008). Cities have a variety of policy tools at their disposal, including budgeting, tax policies, and public service delivery that can help address issues of food insecurity (Mendes, 2008). Urban food policies may cover the whole spectrum of the local food system and affect the ways in which the city residents produce, obtain, consume, and dispose of their food (Mendes, 2008). Municipal food policies help support opportunities to grow food in the city, to access nutritious and affordable food within walking distance, and to reduce food waste (Mendes, 2008).

Vancouver is one of the few cities in Canada where food policy is embedded within a City department – Arts, Culture and Community Services ("Organizational structure," n.d.; Mendes, 2008). In 2003, the Vancouver Food Policy Council – a citizen advisory body was established, in 2007, the Vancouver Food Charter was adopted, and finally, the Vancouver Food Strategy was created in 2013 ("Background: How we got here," n.d.). Food system issues are also embedded in other actions within other City strategies and plans, including the Healthy City Strategy, the Climate Emergency Action Plan and the Resilience Strategy ("Food policy," n.d.). These documents set out food policy directions aimed at supporting urban agriculture through land use and zoning, improving access to food resources, including cultural food assets, reducing food waste, and promoting a sustainable food system.

The City of Vancouver administers a number of grants to non-profit organizations working to improve community food access, including the Sustainable Food Systems Grant, the School Food Grant, as well as the Core Support Grant ("Community and social service grants for non-profit organizations," n.d.). In other words, local food system concerns occupy a prominent place on the municipal policy agenda in Vancouver. However, it is important to note that municipalities, in contrast to the federal and the provincial governments do not have direct policy levers at their disposal to increase income security (Collins et al., 2014). As a result, municipalities came to rely on food-based approaches to food insecurity, which have been scrutinized as failing at targeting the root cause of the issue, related to poverty (Collins et al., 2014). However, addressing affordability and the housing crisis, which have the most impact on the cost of living is at the top of the current City Council's agenda (City of Vancouver Corporate Plan, n.d.). By improving affordability of the cost of living (as promised) in one of the most livable city on the planet (The Global Liveability Index, 2023), Vancouver's City Council will have the most direct impact on the community food security status of its residents.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Literature sought for the thematic review involved a search through the Web of Science Database, with a focus on authoritative primary sources, namely online peer-reviewed academic journals using a combination of key words: “democracy”, “citizen participation", “food insecurity”, “food democracy”, “food asset mapping”. The purpose of the literature review is to provide a summary of the studies on these topics and identify knowledge gaps to help inform the development of the conceptual framework and methodology of the study.

Democracy, Citizen Participation and Policy Justice

The body of literature on democracy makes a strong case for the importance of citizen participation for the development of just and effective policies, however, public participation in Canada is in crisis as those most affected by the issues are either excluded from public processes or experience significant barriers to participation. Citizen participation is cited by a number of authors to be a critical factor in determining the health of a democracy (Pitkin, 2004; Merkel, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Russell, 2020). While the minimalist model of democratic governance equates democracy with elections, the mid-range model presupposes active citizen participation in civil society activities and public discourses (Merkel, 2014). Since broad citizen participation strengthens the legitimacy and accountability of a democracy, the importance of involving diverse citizens, particularly those who are affected by the policy issue, in the democratic processes is
strongly emphasized (Johnson, 2015; Levac & Wiebe, 2020; Moscrop & Warren, 2016). Johnson (2015) calls for upholding the principle of affected interests, whereby those who are “governed, bound, or seriously affected by a policy have a claim to be involved – directly or indirectly – in the processes of its development” (p.12). Building on the all-affected-interests principle, Moscrop and Warren (2016) call for the inclusion of equity considerations and posit that the degree to which a community is affected by an issue should be reflected in the distribution of representation (Moscrop & Warren, 2016, p. 9). Levac and Wiebe (2020) assert that including diverse people, knowledge systems and forms of evidence in the process of policy creation process may lead to more just policy outcomes. Authors unanimously call for approaching the democratic policy making process with the same intentionally anti-oppressive and social justice-oriented aims that guide the desired policy outcomes (Johnson, 2015; Levac &Wiebe, 2020; Moscrop & Warren, 2016).

In reality, authors concur, public participation is not equitable: governments either do not create spaces for meaningful participation, or equity-denied groups experience barriers to participating in public processes (Cattapan et al., 2020; Johnson, 2015; Levac &Wiebe, 2020; Moscrop & Warren, 2016). Opportunities for participation that governments provide often fall within the inform-consult side of the spectrum of public participation ("Core Values, Ethics, Spectrum – The 3 Pillars of Public Participation," n.d.), where “the general sentiment that citizens’ voices are being used to advance the government’s predetermined position” is prevalent (Levac & Wiebe, 2020, p. 4). As a result, apathy, cynicism, and skepticism toward formal democratic processes are widespread (Cattapan et al., 2020). Dissatisfied with the government’s representation of their interests, and not believing that their opinions matter, the public becomes disconnected and disengaged from taking an active part in civic issues and political life (Johnson, 2015). Moreover, studies find that socio-economic inequities mirror themselves in the inequities of democratic participation (Merkel, 2014). Citizen participation in democratic

processes is skewed toward those with education, money, and social status, while traditionally marginalized communities face persistent barriers to civic participation (Johnson, 2015; Moscrop & Warren, 2016). Material inequalities, related to income, housing, education, food security, flexibility of time, and access to childcare, inhibit equal and meaningful participation (Johnson, 2015). As a result, the voices of lower-income individuals, newcomers, people experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, seniors, youth, caregivers with children, as well as Indigenous peoples are often missing in the public policy processes (Johnson, 2015). Indigenous peoples, in particular, face unique barriers to participation in Canadian democracy, which is inherently incompatible with the rights of the Indigenous people to self-determination and self-government (United Nations, 2007). The colonial state structure was imposed on Indigenous sovereign nations, which goes against the Indigenous rights to self-determination and self-government, as well as the very principles of Canadian democracy (Green, 2017). While expressing its commitment to UNDRIP that emphasizes the importance of consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, including "free, prior and informed consent" on matters that affect them, Canadian democracy is inadequate in representing the most basic needs and interests of Indigenous people, who, effectively, live under separate laws (United Nations, 2007; Williams, 2016). Without addressing inequities and barriers to citizen participation, formal public engagement processes not only reflect the oppressive colonial systems and systemic inequities (Moscrop & Warren, 2016, p. 10), but also serve to replicate the same kind of exclusion and marginalization that created complex policy problems in the first place (Levac & Wiebe, 2020).

Authors universally call for the need to shift power dynamics from government-mandated community engagement towards demand-driven, bottom-up community-led citizen participation (Lodewijckx, 2020) by creating low-barrier local opportunities for participation, where citizens can exercise their power and observe the more immediate impacts of their actions, which, in turn, can serve as the foundation for democratic participation more broadly (Pitkin, 2004; Merkel, 2014; Ife, 2016; Russell, 2020; Santos & Avritzer, 2005). There has certainly been a surge in exploring and promoting participatory democratic innovations globally, as highlighted through Participedia – a worldwide network and crowdsourcing platform for researchers, educators, practitioners, policymakers, activists interested in public participation and democratic innovations ("Participedia," n.d.). Some of the methods include participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies, neighbourhood councils, deep canvassing, and collaborative governance ("Participedia," n.d.). However, no research on citizen participation, particularly from equity-denied groups, has been conducted in the Westside of Vancouver.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is a complex and serious public health issue that has received significant attention from local and global communities. Thanks to the overwhelming and persistent evidence that the dominant solutions to addressing food insecurity are not effective, there is a growing discourse on targeting the root causes of the issues while continuing to mitigate their immediate and acute impacts. Food insecurity, described as "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet, quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so," is one of the most devastating symptoms of a weak food system (Health Canada, 2020), as it is found to be associated with a number of negative health effects, including increased risk of diabetes (Gucciardi et al., 2009), cardiovascular

disease (Fowokan et al., 2018), elevated risk of mental illness (Martin et al., 2016), and mortality rates (Gundersen et al., 2018; Men et al., 2020).

The critical importance of achieving food security is recognized by the global community: zero hunger is the second goal for global sustainable development ("Zero Hunger," n.d.). The human right to adequate food is recognized under international law: The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights outlines the obligations of states to implement the right to food at the national level (United Nations General Assembly, 1966). The rates of food insecurity in Canada are growing in the latest report by PROOF - the leading research program on food insecurity in the country ("About PROOF," n.d.), has found that 1 in 6 people in Canada live in food insecure households, which is a dramatic increase from the pre-pandemic statistics of 1 out of 8 people (Tarasuk & Fafard St-Germain, 2022).

Food security is ensured when four conditions are met: availability, access, utilization, and stability over time – see Figure 2 (FOA, 1996). Availability is ensured when there is a reliable supply of food of sufficient quantity and quality (FOA, 1996). Access is achieved when individuals and households have adequate resources to obtain appropriate food, which is dependent on political, economic, and social factors, equitable distribution, markets, and infrastructure, and most notably, affordability and purchasing power (FOA, 1996). Utilization refers to obtaining food that is nutritious and can be adequately metabolized and used by the body – it is directly related to food quality, which is reliant on food safety, proper preparation, and nutritional knowledge (FOA, 1996). Finally, stability is ensured when there is permanent and durable access to food, where the other three conditions of food security are maintained over time (FOA, 1996).

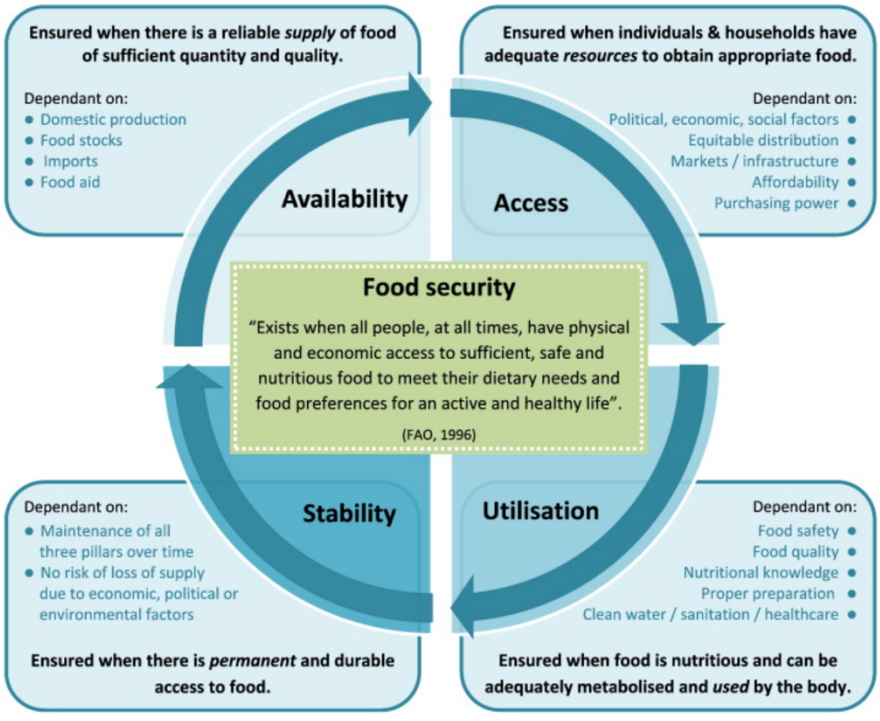

Figure 2. Four conditions of food security. FOA, 1996

There is a strong consensus among leading authors that in the countries of the Global North, including Canada, food insecurity is related to lack of food access closely tied to financial constraints and low household incomes (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012; McIntyre et al., 2014; Men et al., 2021; Tarasuk, 2001). Food insecurity is described to be embedded in a web of issues associated with poverty as it is one of the strongest indicators of economic deprivation (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2015). With a recognition that household food insecurity in Canada is closely tied to financial constraints, academic research is unanimously calling for long-term policy actions, related to anti-poverty measures to meaningfully address the problem of food insecurity (Tarasuk, Fafard St-Germain, & Loopstra, 2019; Li, Dachner & Tarasuk, 2016; Brown & Tarasuk, 2019; Men et al., 2021; Deaton & Scholz, 2022). Social policies aimed at improving financial circumstances of lower-income households, such as federal and provincial income transfer programs (e.g. public pension system, child benefits, and increase to the minimum wage), have been shown to help alleviate food insecurity (Ionescu-Ittu et al., 2014; McIntyre et al., 2016; Brown & Tarasuk, 2019; Men et al., 2021).

With food insecurity viewed as a problem of inadequate incomes, the dominant food-based approaches to addressing the issue receive unanimous and sharp critique by a number of authors (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2015; Tarasuk, Fafard St-Germain, & Loopstra, 2019). Food banks and other charity-based models (e.g. grocery hampers, meal programs) have been criticized, time and again by academics and food justice activists as top-down and oppressive, creating unnecessary barriers to access for participants, lacking choice and agency, ignoring differing cultural and dietary preferences, and significantly impacting feelings of dignity (Kim & Enckevort, 2020). Charity-based food bank model does not support participation from marginalized lower-income communities and turns community members into passive recipients: it strips community of power, diminishes social capital, and creates dependency (Russell, 2000). Most critically, the food charity approach has been denounced as an ineffective response to food security as it fails to target the root causes of the issue that is deeply embedded in poverty (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2015; Tarasuk, Fafard St-Germain & Loopstra, 2019). Moreover, a number of authors caution against normalizing the food bank model as the universal solution to food insecurity: in the absence of alternative responses, the charity model removes the pressure from the government to address the underlying causes of food insecurity by offering an income-based public policy response (Tarasuk, Fafard St-Germain, & Loopstra, 2019). Finally, authors (Tarasuk, Fafard St-Germain, & Loopstra, 2019) found that a large proportion of the population struggling with food insecurity does not see food banks as a helpful solution to access food, opting instead to managing limited financial resources, including requesting financial help from their networks, or missing bill payments. While food banks and other charity-based programs are critical in emergency food provision to meet the acute needs of the population in times of crisis, it is important to recognize their limitations in systemically addressing the issue of food insecurity in a sustainable manner.

Alternative food security models (e.g. food skills workshops, food budget workshops, community gardens, farmers markets and community-supported agriculture) embrace the community development approach, promote social cohesion and mutual support, and help overcome some of the gross critiques of a food charity model (Tarasuk, 2001; Yan & Sutherland, 2019). However focused on food and food-related behaviours, these models are still not sufficient in meaningfully addressing underlying causes of food insecurity that are rooted in social and economic inequities (Tarasuk, 2001; Huisken et al., 2016; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk,

2009). While food-centered solutions in and of themselves are not sufficient in bringing about transformative change, Vibert et al. (2022) highlight the importance of place-based grounded knowledge, rooted in daily practice, for structural transformation. Vibert et al. (2022) call for "next meal" and "transformation", whereby the complex issue of food insecurity is best addressed by a combination of a community action with advocacy for systems change.

Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks, in addition to being an expert in community food development, boasting a strong record of place-based action through neighbourhoods in Vancouver, and have been a leading voice in advocating for food systems change city-wide, with some of the networks actively engaging in mobilizing local knowledge. For example, Gordon Neighbourhood House is working on a multi-year participatory research project funded by the Vancouver Foundation, aimed at developing a strengths-based and place-based approach to food security in the West End of Vancouver ("Systems Change," n.d.). In Vancouver's Westside, previous reports (Pottery & Jinkerson, 2007; Giesbrecht & Stepkina, 2021) centered service providers' perspectives on the state of community food security. The first community dialogue that directly engaged Westside residents experiencing food insecurity was focused on seniors (Stepkina & Giesbrecht, 2023). The community dialogue report, *Food For All: Seniors Food Security in Vancouver's Westside,* highlighted barriers to secure food access, including high food inflation and rising costs of living, and offered recommendations around food availability, access, utilization and stability among the senior population (Stepkina & Giesbrecht, 2023). More research is needed to understand the perspectives of the diverse population experiencing food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside.

Food Democracy

Food democracy presupposes active citizen participation in food system governance. Yet, similar issues of participation are observed in the food system context: while limited opportunities exist for citizens to make a meaningful contribution, equity-denied groups experience additional barriers to participation. As a result, the voices of those most impacted by the issue are not represented in food governance decisions. Food democracy scholars call for the expansion of local opportunities for participation.

Food system governance is consistent with the general trend of lack of citizen participation: people, especially those most impacted by the failings of the food system governance, are left with little to no opportunities to have their voices heard in the decisions that affect them (Hassanein, 2008). The concepts of democracy and policy justice have found their applications in the food system governance context. The concept of "food democracy," first prominently coined in 1999 (Michel et al., 2022), posits that citizen participation is critical in regaining democratic control of the food system and enabling its transformation by addressing the issues that affect them (Booth & Coveney, 2015). Active participation of diverse citizens is said to promote the quality and legitimacy of food policymaking (Candel, 2022). Several studies point to the considerable mobilizing potential of food democracy initiatives, making them an auspicious site for broader democratic experimentation and innovation (Candel, 2022). Despite its promising potential to yield a sustainable and just food system, a number of authors identify challenges of participation of marginalized groups in food democracy – an issue shared with democratic participation more broadly (Booth & Coveney, 2015; Candel, 2022; López Cifuentes & Gugerell, 2021). To engage equity-denied groups in food democracy, Booth & Coveney (2015) recommend creating opportunities for discourse to explore, influence, shape and redefine

issues (Booth & Coveney, 2015). Food Policy Councils (FPC) – citizen advisory bodies, often to a municipal government, are seen as important sites for food democracy. While the success of FPCs calls for a systematic evaluation (Michel et al., 2022), the local example of the Vancouver Food Policy Council draws criticism as not being representative of communities with lived experience of food insecurity, while the Vancouver Food Policy team is struggling to engage people from equity-denied groups in identifying local food system priorities (Hsieh, personal communication, January 18, 2023). Traditional methods of public engagement, such as surveys and town halls, are fraught with frustration and distrust in the process, which is particularly true for groups that have been betrayed by the system, including Indigenous and racialized communities, and low-income individuals (Levac & Wiebe, 2020). Ironically, these equity-denied groups are the most impacted by the food system issues, such as food insecurity (Community Food Centers Canada, 2020), and are known to be experiencing barriers to meaningful political and civic participation (Barrett & Zani, 2014).

Proponents of food democracy call for a variety of locally based and participatory forms of decision-making (Crivits et al., 2016). Neighbourhood as a unit represents an ideal setting for an exercise in democracy. Through participating actively in local community life, starting in their immediate neighbourhood, citizens discover their shared fate and make a connection between their private concerns and collective interest, implicated in local policy (Pitkin, 2004). By supporting low-barrier, local opportunities for participation, citizens can exercise their power and observe the more immediate impacts of their actions, and, as a result, get more involved in the democratic participation on higher levels (Pitkin, 2004). To assess the democratic quality of local food initiatives, Hassanein (2008) proposes a normative framework for meaningful participation. Food democracy, according to this framework, must be based on a collective action that promotes meaningful participation, which enables people to gain knowledge about the food system, share ideas about the food system with others, develop efficacy with respect to the food system and acquire an orientation toward the community good (Hassanein, 2008). An important aspect of exercising food democracy, Hassanein (2003) posits, is a practice of deliberation that enables citizens to clarify issues and discuss values. Besides the recent seniors' community dialogue, residents of the Westside experiencing food insecurity did not have meaningful opportunities to participate in the food democracy and to share their voice on the issue that affects them.

Food Asset Mapping

Food asset mapping is an effective first step in assessing the health of a local food system, most prominently issues of food availability and access. While dominant approaches to food asset mapping center expert knowledge, there are increased calls to engage community members, particularly those with lived experience of food insecurity in defining, identifying and mapping food assets. Food assets are resources, facilities, and spaces that can be used to support a community's food security (Soma, Li, et al., 2022). These assets may include urban farms and community gardens, food processors, food retailers, food assistance programs, low-cost meals, and community kitchens ("Vancouver Food Asset Map," n.d.). Assessing the local food system through food asset mapping is often the first step to developing food policies and plans that help promote strong local food systems (Blay-Palmer et al., 2019). Asset mapping in itself, is associated with the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, developed by John Kretzmann and John McKnight (Puntenney, 2014). Instead of focusing on a community's

needs and deficits, the ABCD approach invites a community to consider individual, organizational and physical assets that could be built upon to improve community wellbeing (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). ABCD has been considered by some authors as a favourable alternative to the needs-based approach, as it contributes to sustainability and the ripple effect of the development efforts (Nel, 2018), while supporting community empowerment (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

Maps are inherently considered as tools of power (Corbett & Lydon, 2014) that reflect the world views, perspectives, and biases of the mapmaker (Looney, 1998). Mapping projects then call for a critical inquiry into who makes the maps, and, consequently, whose knowledge is prioritized (Corbett & Lydon, 2014)? With food maps primarily produced by the government agencies, a number of authors caution against a top-down, oppressive approach, described as "map tyranny," (Duncan, 2006) as it does not reflect the experience of all community members, particularly the most vulnerable (Soma, Li, et al., 2022) or obscures barriers to access (Ledoux et al., 2017). The lack of citizen engagement, particularly with lived experience of food insecurity, is identified as a clear gap in the dominant approaches to food asset mapping (Soma, Li, et al., 2022). Building on the previous findings, two Vancouver-based studies of food asset mapping in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) (Soma, Li, et al., 2022; Soma, Shulman, et al., 2022) confirmed the importance of including qualitative aspects of food assets in the mapping process. A citizen-science photovoice project (Soma, Li, et al., 2022) helped uncover barriers to accessing government-identified food assets, and unveil a number of "hidden" food assets that are not typically considered by the municipal planners. Both studies call for increased participation of diverse citizen scientists, particularly from underrepresented, equity-denied groups, in mapping local food assets (Soma, Li, et al., 2022; Soma, Shulman, et al., 2022).

To further address the common critiques of food asset mapping, particularly power imbalance, Jakes et al. (2015) highlight the importance of articulating values in the asset mapping process. Such an approach allows for the development of an understanding of the current neighbourhood food priorities from the community perspective and for setting goals for the future, both guided by what community members value and find important (Jakes et al., 2015). While the Westside Food Collaborative organized several food asset mapping projects in the last two years, they did not document the perspectives of community members experiencing food insecurity, nor were they followed up. Thus, there exists a gap in understanding of the experience of navigating local food assets from the perspectives of equity-denied groups affected by food insecurity.

The literature review of the seemingly diverse themes of democracy, citizen participation and policy justice, food insecurity, food democracy and food asset mapping, highlights the critical importance of equitable citizen participation in decision-making. It also emphasized the need to develop local opportunities for participation of equity-denied groups affected by the issue, in a democratic process as it applies to food system governance, particularly in Vancouver's Westside. To address this gap, I now present a conceptual framework that will provide a theoretical foundation for the research study and help achieve the research objectives.

Conceptual Framework: Neighbourhood Food Democracy

I propose this conceptual framework of neighbourhood food democracy as an approach to advancing participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in a democratic process of addressing the complex issue that directly affects them. The conceptual framework

underpinning this study rests on theories of community development (Ife, 2016; Meade et al., 2016), participatory democracy (Pitkin, 2004; Merkel, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Russell, 2020) and policy justice (Merkel, 2014; Levac & Wiebe, 2020) as applied to addressing a complex issue - food insecurity, set in a neighbourhood context. The framework creates opportunities for locally based, democratic and participatory decision-making. Community-Based Participatory Action Research methods of participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussions serve as tools of neighbourhood food democracy, and, the framework suggests, work to support research objectives of community empowerment and knowledge co-creation towards setting an agenda for social change. The objectives of the study find a strong alignment with the core principles of design justice framework, as described by Costanza-Chock (2020). CBPAR methodology can be thought of as a tool of design justice as it aims to rethink the policy design process by centering marginalized people and using collaborative practices to address community challenges (Costanza-Chock, 2020).

Objectives of CBPAR (present research)	**Design justice principles**
1) co-creating community knowledge	• We center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process. • We prioritize the design's impact on the community over the intentions of the designer. • We see the role of the designer as a facilitator rather than an expert. • We believe that everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience, and that we all have unique and brilliant contributions to bring to a design process.
2) setting agenda for community change	• We seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems. • We work towards sustainable, community-led and controlled outcomes.
3) promoting democratic participation	• We use design to sustain, heal, and empower our communities.

Figure 3. CBPAR methodology as a tool of design justice: Comparison of the objectives of the present research with the design justice principles. Costanza-Chock, 2020.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

This section introduces research methodology and methods, describes data collection and analysis, as well as outlines strengths and limitations of the current research study. The research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants and received a Human Research Ethics Board's Certificate of Approval # 23-0085 – see Appendix 1.

Methodology

Community-Based Participatory Action Research aims to shift power dynamics between the researcher and the community by involving community members throughout the research process, including the research design. Instead of passive subjects of a study that is designed by a researcher, participatory approach aims to engage participants in shaping the research process itself around the issues that are meaningful to their communities (Coughlin et al., 2017). While the initial research questions were proposed by the researcher, they were informed by several years of conversations and dialogues with community members in my formal role at Kitsilano Neighbourhood House and through my informal community involvement. The final research purpose, objectives and questions are the product of co-design between the researcher – me, and the research participants– community members with lived experience of food insecurity. For a detailed description of the process of research co-design, see Appendix 2. This research study set the following objectives:

1. Identify neighbourhood food priorities in the Vancouver's Westside from the perspective of equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity (knowledge co-creation)
2. Generate a list of recommendations for the community, the non-profit and public sectors in Vancouver, informed by people experiencing food insecurity in the Westside (agenda for social change)
3. Analyze the efficacy of the participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion to promote participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in a democratic process (community empowerment)

To achieve these research objectives, the study aimed to address the following research questions:

- Food assets, values and barriers
    - What valuable neighbourhood food assets do community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity identify in Vancouver's Westside?
    - What values related to accessing food assets in the Westside community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity identify as important?
    - What barriers to accessing food assets in Vancouver's Westside do community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity face?
- Systemic factors that contribute to the current state of affairs
    - What systemic or structural factors contribute to the current state of affairs?
- Strategies for change: What to do about it?
        - What can we do?

        - What can community do?
        - What can non-profits do?
        - What can governments do?
- Participation of equity-denied groups in a democratic process
    - How did participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion help contribute to promoting participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside in a democratic process?

To answer these research questions, this research study adopted a Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) methodology, which prioritizes a collaborative approach between the researchers and community members, recognizing community members as equal partners in the research process (Coughlin et al., 2017; Israel et al., 2018; Falcón & Stoecker, 2022). It is important to qualify the methodology's critical features: participation, research and action. Participation does not refer to study participants just taking part in a researcher-defined study, but it presumes that the group has power to guide the research and action process (Falcón & Stoecker, 2022). Stemming from the Freirean tradition of anti-oppressive pedagogy and community empowerment (Freire, 1970), CBPAR aims to create a sense of shared ownership of the research process between community members and academic researchers: from co-designing the research questions to working together to interpret and disseminate the findings (Coughlin et al., 2017). Research refers to the process of active knowledge co-creation that a group engages in (Falcón & Stoecker, 2022). Researchers are seen as mere catalysts or facilitators that help bring the knowledge of community experts to the surface (Hacker, 2013). The final distinct feature of CBPAR is its action-orientation: beyond contributing to new knowledge, it aims to advance meaningful action on a social issue that impacts the community participating in the study (Hacker, 2013).

The chosen methodology closely aligns with the goals of the current research: community empowerment, knowledge co-creation and agenda for social change. As a result, by centering marginalized voices and disrupting power structures, the research process, in itself, becomes a form of resistance to the oppressive power structures (Brown & Strega, 2015). Through CBPAR, researchers and oppressed peoples join in solidarity to take collective action for radical social change (Maguire, 1987). CBPAR is closely related to Community Development (CD) in its commitment to community empowerment, valuing local knowledge and context, adherence to social justice values with the goal of addressing complex issues and improving people's life circumstances. Incorporating CBPAR methodology with CD practices is believed to strengthen CD's transformative potential (Falcón & Stoecker, 2022). Finally, the CBPAR methodology embodies the very conceptual framework of the study, that rests on principles of participation, policy justice, all-affected principle, and participatory democracy.

Methods

While CBPAR methodologies incorporate a number of research methods, this research study employs two qualitative methods: participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion. Participatory asset mapping is a process where community members collectively identify and provide the information about their own community's assets on a map, which offers an effective visual representation of community knowledge (Burns et al., 2012). Community asset mapping emphasizes collective knowledge co-production based on the affirmation of the

participants' lived experience and world views (Corbett & Lydon, 2014). While the method of participatory food asset mapping served to determine the distribution of tangible neighbourhood food assets from the perspective of the people experiencing food insecurity, the focus group discussion that followed aided in uncovering the deeper meaning behind the points on the map by revealing the underlying value structures and barriers to access and situating their experience of navigating them within a larger structural context. Focus groups are a form of qualitative interviewing that uses a facilitated group discussion to generate data (Morgan, 2008). Focus groups bring together people who share a similar background to engage in meaningful conversations on a particular topic – notably, there is no requirement for focus group participants to reach a consensus (Morgan, 2008). Instead, this research method allowed for learning about participants' diverse perspectives, informed by their unique lived experiences. Focus groups are an effective research method that supports participation of community members whose voices are often marginalized, which is the case for the participants of this study (Morgan, 2008). Together, the methods of participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion supported the research objectives of knowledge co-creation, the agenda for social change and community empowerment by mapping valuable food assets in the Westside, identifying values and barriers to local food access, considering contributing systemic factors and creating recommendations for the community, the non-profit and public sectors to help improve local food access.

Participants for the research study were recruited through an open call advertisement through the Westside community channels, including bulletin boards, public social media groups, Kitsilano Neighbourhood House and the Westside Food Collaborative social media networks and mailing lists, as well as through WFC community partners representing social service organizations and community agencies – see Appendix 3. Participation was open to all residents of the Westside of legal age who self-identified as experiencing or have experienced food insecurity.

The research study consisted of three in-person research sessions, hosted at Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, monthly from July to September 2023:

1) Info Session and Research Co-Design - July 20, 2023
2) Participatory Food Asset Mapping and Community Dialogue – August 17, 2023
3) Presentation of Preliminary Findings and Feedback – September 21, 2023

Meals, refreshments, and childminding were offered at every meeting – see Appendix 4. Honoraria for participation were provided at the main session*, Participatory Food Asset Mapping and Community Dialogue*. A total of 15 unique participants participated in the research study over the course of the three sessions. Participants, in addition to experiencing food insecurity represented a diverse range of intersecting identities: seniors, a single mother with children, youth, students, working adults, individuals with no fixed address, a newcomer.

Since food insecurity is increasingly being recognized as a traumatic experience, causing significant physical and emotional harm (Hecht et al., 2018), I acknowledged that the research process, inviting community members to share stories related to their experience of food insecurity created a potential risk of retraumatization, emotional or psychological discomfort, and stress. Acknowledging these potential risks, I committed to minimizing them and protecting research participants from possible harm through abiding by the ethical principles and guidelines of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS). Participants were provided with a detailed description of the research process to ensure they could adequately assess the associated risks and benefits and make an informed decision about

their participation in the research (TCPS2, 2022). During the session, I aimed to create a safe and supportive space by setting group agreements of empathy, respect, compassion and confidentiality, while offering participants an opportunity to share their stories privately or opt for a no-questions-asked right to pass. To further mitigate potential risks of emotional harm, that may had been triggered by the participation in the research study, but occurred outside the session, participants were provided with a curated list of free and low-cost professional emotional support resources (e.g. mental health support, crisis line, counselling) – see Appendix 5. Research participants contributed to and agreed to abide by the following set of group guidelines to create a safe space for vulnerable sharing and productive discussion:

- Safe space
- Respect
- Hear and be heard
- Listen to understand, not to respond
- Respond vs react
- Right to pass
- Empathy: What is it like to be you?
- Reciprocity
- Interconnectedness, community
- Assume the best intentions

The *Participatory Food Asset Mapping and Community Dialogue* session on August 17, 2023 engaged participants in knowledge creation for the purpose of data collection. Guided by the research questions, that had been co-created with and approved by the community researchers, participants were invited to engage in participatory mapping activity and a focus group dialogue, guided by the research questions. On printed maps of each neighbourhood of the Westside: Kitsilano, Dunbar, Kerrisdale, Arbutus Ridge, Shaughnessy, West Point Grey, as well as UBC[1] and Fairview, participants identified food assets that they use and described associated values and barriers associated with each.

[1] While UBC, located on the University Endowment Lands is not administratively part of the City of Vancouver, due to its geographical location, it is colloquially often referred to as the Westside – and thus, included in the mapping exercise.

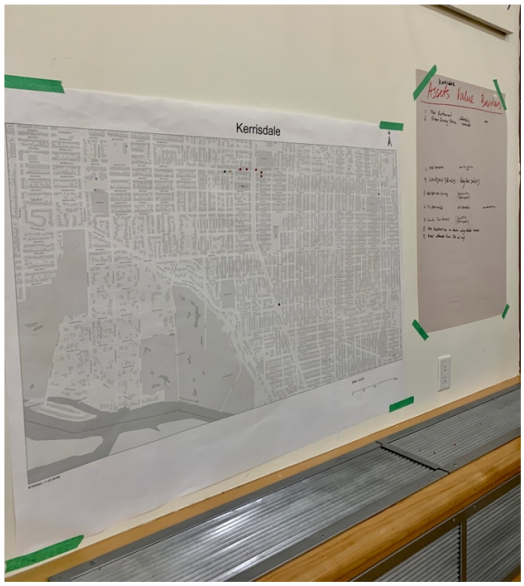

Figure 4. Neighbourhood map of Kerrisdale. August 17, 2023. Kitsilano Neighbourhood House. Photo: Ksenia Stepkina.

Figure 5. Neighbourhood maps of Kerrisdale and Kitsilano. August 17, 2023. Kitsilano Neighbourhood House. Photo: Ksenia Stepkina.

The focus group discussion that followed the mapping exercise helped resurface the deeper meanings behind the points on the map and highlight some common experiences. Participants discussed values of the identified food assets and considered barriers to food access by sharing their personal stories and experiences navigating food system in the Westside. The discussion then centered around the systemic or structural factors that contribute to the current state of affairs, followed by participants offering ideas and strategies to maximizing value of food assets, reducing barriers to local food access as well as tackling some of the systemic factors.

At the *Presentation of Preliminary Findings and Feedback* session on September 21, 2023, I presented the preliminary findings highlighting common themes back to the research participants to confirm their accuracy and to solicit feedback. Through a free-form discussion participants provided more nuanced perspectives that helped enrich the original findings. The focus group discussion responses were audio recorded.

Data Analysis

I digitized the data points identified by the research participants on physical maps to Google Maps, which helped facilitate a dynamic and interactive representation of the spatial distribution of food assets in the Westside. Food assets were organized under the following sub-categories: grocery stores and markets, prepared meals, free and low-cost food programs and urban food forest. Corresponding values and barriers were added to each entry, as well as additional details (e.g. opening hours, contact information, website) that participants deemed important.

The digital audio data collected during the focus group discussion were transcribed utilising Trint digital software and the data were anonymized by removing direct identifiers of the

participants to protect their confidentiality. The process of analysis involved a systematic and in-depth manual examination of the transcribed content, with a focus on recognizing recurring patterns and trends in order to identify common themes, according to the stated research objectives. The combination of digital tools and manual analysis helped enhance the accuracy, rigour, and the depth of the data analysis process. All collected raw data was destroyed after the data analysis was complete.

Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of the research is its strong alignment of the chosen methodology with the purpose of the study. The Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) method of participatory food asset mapping and focus group dialogue supports research objectives of knowledge co-creation, agenda for social change and community empowerment. As participants from equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity directly engaged in deliberation on the issue that affects them, the research process in itself became an exercise in participatory democracy and policy justice. The social change agenda of the action research is rooted in the real community issue, informed by the very people who will benefit from the research. The action orientation of the research study is supported by the structures for implementation, including Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, Westside Food Collaborative and Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks, which may aid in practical application of research recommendations and ensure sustainability and continued impact, far beyond the conclusion of the formal research project.

The time and labour-intensive nature of CBPAR often presents a prohibitive obstacle to academic researchers, particularly as it applies to building relationships and nurturing trust of the community (Minkler, 2014). However, thanks to my social location and embeddedness in the community prior to embarking on the research project, I had already established authentic relationships and built trust with the community, and, thus, was able to defy the main concern of the CBPAR methodology while realizing its many benefits. Another identified strength is that the research process served as a vehicle for building capacity of the participants through facilitating peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and information sharing.

The limitations of the research, characteristic of CBPAR and qualitative methods in general, are the small sample size and the neighbourhood-specific context. These normally prevent extrapolation of the research findings to larger populations and broader contexts. This thesis, indeed, describes an experience of navigating a local food system, unique to the Westside. However, given the systems orientation of the focus group discussion and the systemic nature of the issue at hand, I am confident that the focus group discussion insights will be relevant to other neighbourhoods with similar characteristics (e.g. Canadian, urban, perceived as affluent and lacking diversity). Moreover, the exploration of the relevance of participatory food asset mapping may provide insights on utilizing it as a tool to promote democratic participation. Meanwhile, the context-specific findings of the mapping exercise may serve as a baseline for comparison and further inquiry. Finally, I would like to acknowledge self-selection bias, whereby community members who decided to take part in the research study disproportionately possess certain traits that affect participation (Elston, 2021). As a result, the research sample may not be representative of the wide diversity of the community. While cognisant of this limitation, I am hopeful that the research findings will help demonstrate the insights into participants' motivations to take part in the study, which, could be helpful in designing future research projects facing challenges of participation bias.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter outlines the findings of the participatory asset mapping and focus group discussion over the course of the three research sessions. First, the digitised food asset map showcases the food assets identified by the community researchers through the participatory food asset mapping exercise. The chapter then delves into a comprehensive qualitative account of the values and barriers surrounding identified community food assets, as well as the systemic factors that contribute to the current state of the issue, according to the research participants. The chapter concludes by sharing the dialogue participants' recommendations on bringing the change forward, including improving immediate food access and addressing systemic factors.

It is important to note that while lived and living experience of food insecurity was the main inclusion criteria in the study, participants hold a variety of other social identities and intersecting lived experiences. Participants, in addition to experiencing food insecurity represented a diverse range of intersecting identities: seniors, a single mother with children, youth, students, working adults, individuals with no fixed address, a newcomer. The findings are not intended to present a monolithic picture of the universal experience of food insecurity, but rather demonstrate the diversity of experiences, within a given locale. Participants themselves have remarked on the diversity of the focus group, and shared the importance of highlighting it to demonstrate the fact that the issue of food insecurity is more widespread than people are led to believe and is experienced across different identities.

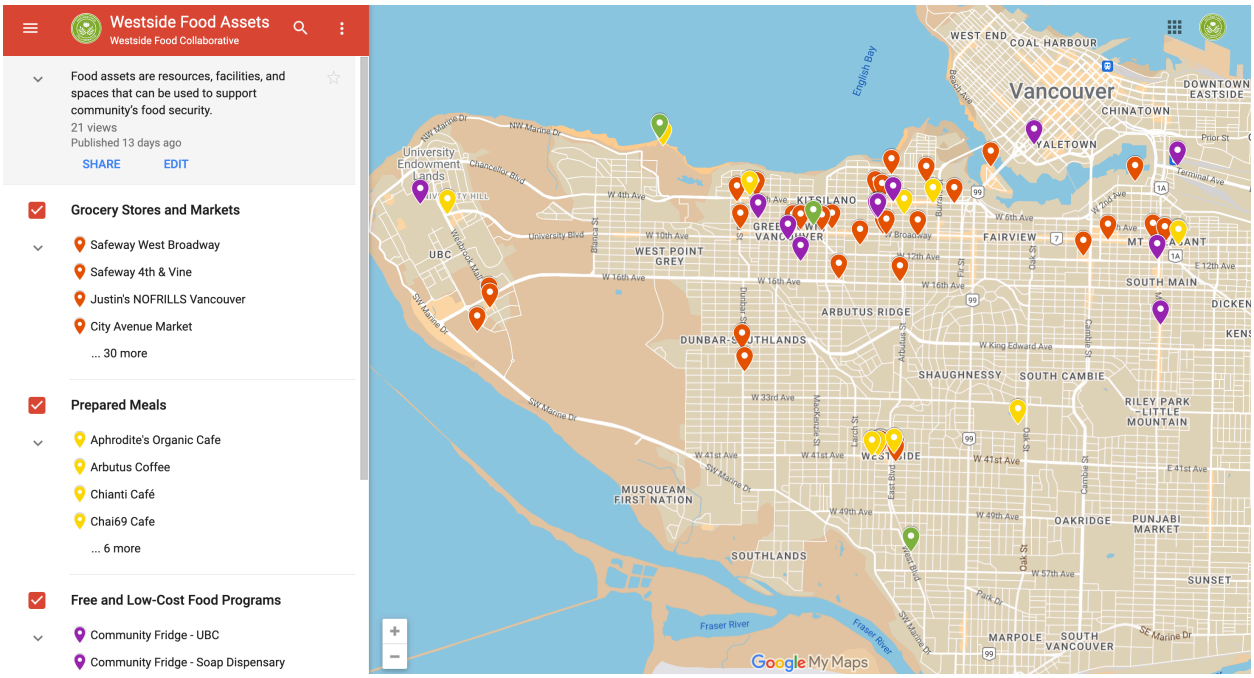

Figure 6. Digitized participatory food asset map of the Westside. Google Maps.

Mapping Food Assets, Values and Barriers

In the academic literature, food assets are defined as resources, facilities, and spaces that can be used to support a community's food security (Soma, Li, et al., 2022). For the purpose of the participatory mapping, the research participants defined food assets, in more simpler terms, as places, where one is able to obtain food. Examples include grocery stores, markets, free and low-cost food programs, urban food forests and community gardens.

Food Assets: Values

Values encompass a range of factors that influence people's choices, behaviours, and satisfaction related to accessing food assets. Values reflect on what participants find important and what they base the decision on when accessing a food asset. The research participants discussed a number of values they are seeking when navigating the Westside food asset landscape.

Affordability

Participants unanimously admitted that they access the majority of their food through grocery stores. Since food insecurity is an issue closely associated with income insecurity, participants are sensitive to the price they are paying for the food – the cost has been named as the single most important factor when making food purchasing decisions.

At one point, as I've seen people walk into Stongs in the Westside, it's a very high-end store and they don't care to follow dollars. They just take out the credit card or whatever. A hundred bucks for a little bag of groceries or whatever. You know what that's like to us. It's like. It's insane!

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Participants are opting for lower-cost grocery stores, such as No Frills, and often compare prices. One participant shared: *I would go to six different stores to find the best deal.* Many dialogue participants make use of coupons, both online and print, as well as take advantage of price matching - while admitting that it is a time-consuming activity, participants are willing to do that since they *have more time than money*. Others make use of technology, for example, Flipp App that features digital flyers and coupons from nearby retailers.

While at the store, participants often look for sales and make their food purchases around sale items, though they admit, the sale items are often subpar quality.

They don't last as they are sitting in a warehouse for weeks before being out on a shelf at a sale price.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Participants also shop at the discounted section, sharing that the stores like City Market, Granville Island Market often offer a bag of imperfect produce for a lower cost. Some participants access low-cost food from the Too Good to Go app that offers unsold food from local restaurants, grocery stores, cafes, and shops at a discounted price – while offering a good deal, the food is often of a subpar quality as it is nearing its shelf life.

All of the participants have had experience accessing low-cost and free food programs that offer food for free or at a below-market price, for example, Kits Cares Café. While extremely valuable, as these programs deliver the best affordability factor by providing access to

food at low or no cost for those experiencing financial hardship and food insecurity, these programs have a number of significant barriers and limitations that were mentioned, including poor quality of food, lack of choice, dignity, stigma and shame that are described in the Barriers section.

Proximity and Physical Access

All participants value the availability of food assets within a convenient walking distance, which is, generally the case for the Westside neighbourhood.

I can get the basics that I might need and it's across the street. Well, I'm thankful for that.
Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Particularly, senior participants found proximity to food assets as one of the critical factors, due to health and mobility challenges. Having food assets in a convenient location within a walking distance, or easily accessible by public transit, was cited as valuable. However, the rising costs of transportation were cited as a barrier.

Quality and Freshness

Quality is important for people; however, it gives way to affordability – in order to afford food, participants are often forced to compromise on quality. Often forced to get free food that is *expiring yesterday*. When it comes to subpar quality, *some things you just don't take the chance on and some things you can.*

I understand that the stores are going to give what is about to go out of date or, you know, they're not going to serve you on a silver platter.. But some of that is given is just, you know.. It's just insulting. Yeah, it's rotten.. And you can see it from here to there. And you think. You know, you wouldn't even put that in the pigs thing, you know? And I just. I wonder about that. Like, if they just think, Oh, well, they'll take anything. They're not worth much. You know, it's really hurtful. It's like that belongs in the garbage. So don't think you can pass that off on us because we don't matter enough that you have food that is.
Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

I try to give them homogenized milk - it's better for their development and stuff. So yes it costs more but I feel like the value for them is a little bit better. So I'll give them that..
Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023

I'm prediabetic and supposed to change my diet. My doctor says the majority of my diet should be fruit and vegetables. And of course, that's the most expensive stuff. I don't eat meat generally. I never buy meat or cook it. I might eat if I go somewhere and somebody else cooked.
Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Dignity and Choice

When accessing food on lower incomes, the importance of dignity is described as a fundamental and intrinsic quality that pertains to the inherent worth and value of every individual, and the recognition of one's humanity. When describing a grocery store, a participant noted *friendly security* as a value factor. In contrast, many food charity programs are described as dehumanizing.

Food banks became dehumanizing. Feels like you are in prison. I'd rather go hungry than go to a food bank.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

With financial constraints, participants' choice in food they can access is limited, while with charitable food programs the choice is virtually non-existent.

With free food, your diet is based on whatever somebody's giving you. You have to take what you get and you have to make it work.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

To illustrate the importance of choice and dignity, one of the participants shared a food program from the UK - free mobile trucks where community members have from 10 to 20 minutes to select what they need.

It's just what struck me is the choice and the dignity and respect that just because you don't have the pounds in your pocket, you're equally able to enjoy the bounty.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Nevertheless, participants universally agree that neighbourhood-based free and low-cost food programs represent a form of community care. The research participants who are accessing such resources express their appreciation for the support they receive.

In such a highly individualistic society. It feels like care.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

They [community programs' staff] don't make you feel like crap. Their heart is in the right place.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Food Assets: Barriers

If full food access refers to the ability of individuals and communities to obtain sufficient, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food supply, factors that prevent or deter community members from realizing full food access are referred to as barriers. Food access is a fundamental component of food security, in line with food availability, utilization and stability. However, in developed countries like Canada, in the midst of plenty, food access is the "weakest link" of food security dimensions: this is the site for inequity to play out.

Unaffordability

Predictably and due to the participant selection criteria, high food costs and lower incomes have been identified as the single most important barrier to accessing food. In fact, one of the participants described food access as *freedom to be able to obtain foods that you want in your area that are available and you shouldn't be locked out because of price. For example, you go to the food store, and you see great food. But, like, who can afford that* (Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023)?

Participants experience that the prices are continuing to rise. Even stores that were known to be "affordable" have tripled in price: *it's not what it used to be.* Food assets that may deliver on other values, including quality, are prohibitively expensive.

Farmers Market – it's just way out there, it's ridiculous. There's nothing there that I can afford. It's not worth it. It's dispiriting. It's discouraging.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Some participants shared that items are now more frequently sold by unit vs weight. Others have mentioned that it is cheaper to buy in bulk or in large quantities – what is known as single's tax, puts additional unnecessary pressure on individuals living alone. Purchasing in bulk also leads to food waste for those who live alone.

Lack of choice

Participants have cited that financial constraints limit the selection of food that they are able to choose from (e.g. in a grocery store). When it comes to free and low-cost food programs, participants noted that the opportunity to choose virtually does not exist. *You have to take it or leave it* (Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023). Inability to choose, in turn, is described as disempowering.

Mistaken perception of affluence

Research participants spoke to the widespread mistaken perception of the universal affluence of the Westside, based on the pockets of wealth and higher incomes in some parts of the neighbourhood. The other source of such misconceptions is the homeownership status: while some community members may own a house, it does not necessarily translate in a higher socio-economic status. These false perceptions, participants noted, have a negative impact on support service availability and accessibility, and serve as a significant barrier to food supports.

If you live in the Westside – that does not mean you are wealthy. But that's just how it's perceived. Just because somebody has a house. Doesn't mean they're wealthy. There might be money in their house, but not in their pocket.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023

Lack of knowledge of what exists and where to find this information

Many participants remarked that it was helpful to hear from others about the resources that exist in the community that they have previously not been aware of or ways to navigate the

local food assets to maximize the value and reduce barriers (e.g. low-cost stores, sales, community food programs). However, they normally find it challenging to find information on food assets that respond to their needs.

I have no way to know what else is out there.
Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Inaccessibility

Distance to reach food assets was cited as a barrier to accessing food. Even when convenient transportation options exist, they add an extra cost to already stretched budgets. Moreover, transiting long-distance is taxing, especially for those with health issues or mobility challenges. Participants noted that, more often than not, community food programs have limited or inconvenient operating hours. Those who are working find daytime opening hours prohibitive, which may result in a missed opportunity to obtain food.

Food bank has the worst opening hours. Who is it serving?
Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Bureaucracy

Lengthy bureaucratic processes accessing charitable food supports or subsidized food programs present obstacles for community members experiencing food insecurity. Means testing and difficulty navigating the enrollment process have been identified as major deterrents in accessing food programs, which could otherwise be valuable.

The process sometimes is just so many steps – at that point, I am just like, forget it, I am not going to travel with two kids to access this free food.
Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023

Policing, Stigma, Shame, Dehumanization

Food insecurity, just like other issues of poverty, is associated with a high degree of stigma and feelings of shame and diminished self-worth.

Admitting that you are so poor that you need a handout – I feel so humiliated. I've done it plenty of times and still feel bad.
Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

People experiencing food insecurity are often met with suspicion and judged by others on whether they are really deserving of help. As the dominating charity approach aims to support those "in most need," the definition of "need" is often open to subjective interpretation. People accessing free and low-cost food supports are continuously scrutinized on the level of the perceived need and deservingness of community supports. However, such an approach is harmful. On one hand, participants assert, everyone deserves food and access to it should not be policed or limited. On the other hand, policing leads to creating stigma and shame – the single significant barrier preventing people from accessing the support they need.

Theft

Participants cited that they find theft and hoarding as damaging to food assets' access. They view it as not respecting the commons or having awareness of the impact. Participants provide examples of breaking off tree branches to get apples off fruit trees grown on public property or stealing food plants from community gardens. Participants have also reported that they increasingly observed theft in grocery stores.

Systemic Factors That Contribute to the Current State of Affairs

Participants acknowledged that food assets do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are a part of a larger structural economic, political, and social context, whereby barriers to food access are symptoms of larger forces at play or consequences of systemic factors. To better understand and effectively address the inequities of food access, it is critical to bring to light the underlying factors that create barriers to food access. Participants' responses are grouped under four themes: corporate control of the food system, economic inequity and social disparities, governance failures, and apathy.

Corporate control of the food system

Corporate greed, driven by the profit motive and coupled with the concentration of corporate power has been consistently cited as a critical factor responsible for driving up food costs and creating inequitable food access. *"Ohh I know where the money is going"* – shared one of the participants (Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023). The commodification of food, whereby food is converted from being viewed as a basic human need to a commodity to be bought and sold in the marketplace allowed corporations to pursue profits. With the profit motive as a driving force of the market and as a good business practice, big food corporations are striving to maximize their earnings, with little regard for the devastating social and environmental impacts of such practices. Participants expressed their indignation at the disconnect that happens when food is treated as a commodity, instead of the basic human need. Food-commodity becomes a vehicle for profit maximization and is subject to the laws of the market, including managing the supply to control the price. While such economic manipulations serve to maximize profits, they produced artificial scarcity and create unnecessary barriers to equitable food access.

Canada has always dumped wheat into the ocean to keep the price up. Milk is always poured down the drain by the gallons.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

The profit motive, or "corporate greed" as participants put bluntly, was identified as one of the key reasons driving food prices up. Most participants attributed the rise in food costs to the big grocery chains' pursuit of profit. Large corporations, including Loblaws, Sobeys, Walmart who control the whole food supply chain, are able to set the price to maximize their profits, while passing down the costs to the end consumers, who, despite being the most impacted, have no say in the matter.

[CEOs of Canada's major grocery chains] were invited to Ottawa to explain themselves again. And they claim it down the line. It's not us, it's the manufacturers. And then it's gas prices.

Excuse, excuse, excuse. And yet they admit that they're making record profits - so something isn't jiving there, people.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

They are passing down the costs. We, ordinary people are at the end of the line.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Multi-billionaires who think they never have enough like Galen Weston - lives in Ireland in the castle and he owns Loblaws and Fortnum Mason. They could give away everything for free for a year or not even feel it, but then prices keep going up.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

In light of dramatic, and often sudden price increases, and recognizing the complexity of the food system, participants agreed that there is a lack of transparency in how the prices are determined, which contributes to distrust, suspiciousness and feelings of despair.

I've been to IGA and Safeway one day apart and prices jumped. Like I was looking at beef and it jumped $12 a pound from one day to the next for the exact same cut. Yeah, same thing with pineapple – prices jump. I saw that they put the dates on it and there were three different dates, three different prices per pound. And so that's really interesting.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

While the majority of the participants attributed the food costs crisis to the corporate food retail industry, others, recognizing the complexity of the food system are hesitant to assign responsibility for the current state of affairs exclusively to a few of the key players, however powerful.

It just occurred to me that (not to defend the corporations, which I would never do), I think you need to understand how the system actually works. Yeah. And that is that the retailer purchased this product from a supplier. And the supplier produces a product based on ingredients they get from their suppliers. And this all adds to the costs that get passed along. And I mean, that leads us to the end of the line. But if you just go to, like the head of Loblaws, you can't control his costs, right? Yes. Yeah. And so if you target his products as being unreasonable, somebody has to do that somehow. Yeah. Then I think you've got some teeth into.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

If you see the larger picture, there are so many factors at play - they can't put the blame on these five people and say, hey, you do something. The issue is larger than five huge grocery stores.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Governance failures

Participants attributed, at least, in part, the current situation to inadequate government policies and lack of government action. Participants strongly feel that the government could be doing more and are frustrated with government inaction that favours large corporations over their own citizens.

I mean, I think 90% of it, to be quite honest with you, I think 90% of it at least is due to the government because they are making the bad choices.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

The laws are made to favour them [large corporations] and stick it to the working people.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

It appalls me that we have a government that won't step in and do something about it. When you have people literally going hungry now in a country as rich as Canada and at the same time, parallel, grocers' profits are huger than they ever have been. And you say that one doesn't affect the other. What the fuck?

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Economic inequality and social disparities

Closely related to the food costs, crisis of affordability, due to high costs of living, inflation, higher mortgage rates, and higher rents, has been cited as the most stark and devastating force that creates the conditions for food insecurity – "*people are living leaner",* remarked one participant. In the current economic climate, people are forced to make difficult choices between the basic necessities.

It's either rent or food - you can't have both. God help you if you need medicine! Do I pay the Hydro bill, or do I get my medicine this month? You know, that's a scary thing to have to live with.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Participants noted that unaffordability is widespread and affects many more people than is commonly believed. One of the participants remarked on the diversity of the research group: food insecurity can impact anyone!

I met a whole bunch of young people who are in their twenties who graduated from university, and they are trying to get to established, but they are struggling [financially]. They are all talking about moving out of British Columbia - except it is happening right across the country. It's happening everywhere. And these are young people who are highly educated and they're just beginning their life. It's really sad.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Discussion on the crisis of affordability and income inequality was infused with feelings of injustice and despair. The common sentiment is that no matter what the participants did, they could not get ahead. And despite their efforts, they did not see a way to break the cycle. Participants painfully noted the ever-increasing gap between the rich and poor: as the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, with little to no prospects to improve their life circumstances, which contributes to the feelings of anger and hopelessness. A young participant shared:

Pretty messed up that I work so much that I'm exhausted and I still can't afford to live. It's unfair.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Apathy and lack of civic engagement

Participants highlighted that there is a lack of awareness of the current issues that serves as a barrier to addressing the issue. Particularly, due to our individualistic culture, participants believe, people choose not to concern themselves with the issues that do not directly impact them, even though their neighbours, community members, are suffering. Some participants mentioned the short-term, scarcity approach that disregards the outcomes that go beyond one's immediate benefit.

A lot of people would listen to the status quo and never question anything, so unaware. Don't notice, don't pay the attention. No critical thinking, no thinking outside the box. Yeah, those people are so myopic.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

The problem is so many people keep kicking the can further down the road. You have to pick the can up and throw it back in. You can't just keep passing the problem on to the next generation.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

From Despair to Hope: The Path Towards Solutions

In light of the persistent and overwhelming challenges, the discussion was filled with the feelings of pain and suffering at the injustice and the loss of power participants are faced with as they navigate the experience of food insecurity in the Westside:

It's ridiculous. Like, that doesn't cover it. Yeah. You know, like, I mean, I've never been this hard off - it's ridiculous. Never had to go to a food bank and basically, you know, feel like human garbage just to ask for food. And, you know, I mean, getting past the pride, it's like.. hurt. It's like, why do I have to do this, you know?

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

It hurts to live in this society.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Beyond the social forces, participants noted the vulnerability of the food system due to climate events and wars and expressed feelings of hopelessness:

Our food system itself is vulnerable. When crops are wiped out because of a hurricane, or a flood, or a fire. Now, that's something that really affects everything and everyone. And we have no control over that. Then you have the wars holding food hostage. Like, what can we do about that? I don't see anything that we could do when that is what affecting the supply. I just don't.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Senior participants, in particular, from the vantage point of their lived experience, shared feelings of despair and hopelessness at the lack of meaningful change. Older adults who participated in the conversation admitted feeling disillusioned and disappointed as their earlier hopes for a better future and attempts at making change did not materialize:

Fills me with despair is when I was younger, I used to believe that if the imperfections were put out there into the public arena, people would recognize that we would correct things. But that's not true. There are shining examples of corruption riding roughshod over the whole world and we're all witnessing it and nothing's changed. I used to believe that if this stuff was brought into the public arena, it would automatically change. That's not true. And I have no solution.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

I was a hippie in the sixties, and I still am. And it's kind of frustrating because we tried all kinds of things to change things. You know, we thought we were to change the world and look at the state we are in, but heartbreaking.. to think that people would be more loving and kinder. And not so materialistic. We thought COVID would do that. Like all of a sudden, we're all in this boat together. You realize how interconnected we are. And, you know, it could have fostered so much more a sense of sharing.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

The light at the end of the tunnel is the great big train coming right at ya. That's what I say– I'll be dead soon.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Despite such discouraging attitudes, senior participants acknowledged their self-location and expressed willingness to adopt a hopeful outlook.

I think it's also an age thing too - I am pretty jaded about the way of the world, but I'm really 80 years old, so I've had a lot of time to get jaded. And I think I would like to hear you say that you have hope..

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Younger adults participating in the study, while acknowledging the existing challenges that at times feel overwhelming, expressed feelings of hope, particularly when coming together with like-minded people: *We're doing things about it right now (*Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023)!

I have hope because this is where the truth is. Like, we're good at this. Like, actually. People are really good at caring for each other - that's how we evolved, how we survived.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Strategies for Change: What Can We Do?

Participants offered a wide range of solutions to improving community food security: from additional suggestions on reducing barriers to immediate food access locally, to ideas on tackling larger systemic factors. The suggested strategies are grouped under four themes: improving community food access, strengthening governance, building a people's movement, and shifting mindsets.

1. Improving community food access

1.1.Improving information on available food assets

Since participants identified the lack of knowledge of available food assets, particularly free and low-cost food resources, as one of the main barriers to secure food access, improving availability of information was recommended. Participants suggested creating a regularly updated consolidated informational resource on available food assets, including grocery stores, free and low-cost food programs and supports. To maximize accessibility and reach, participants recommended the resource to be available via both digital and print media, and distributed through a variety of community channels, including newsletters, community partners, and social media.

1.2.Creating and expanding opportunities for cooperation and mutual support

As participants highlighted, food security is characterized by manufactured scarcity amidst plenty. *It's not that we're short on abundance - the abundance isn't shared,* - remarked one of the contributors. A number of opportunities for cooperation were suggested to share available resources that rest on mutual support and collective power. Participants suggested ways to leverage collective purchasing power of community members who might not have enough on their own, for example creating mechanisms for group procurement and bulk buy.

Community fridges, based on the take-what-you-need-leave-what-you-can model of mutual support, have been recognized as a valuable community food asset. Despite a number of challenges that participants stated, including hoarding and conflict, research participants agreed that fridges help support community food access. Participants suggested expanding the network of community fridges in the Westside to provide more opportunities for food access, while mitigating challenges.

Research participants see opportunities in getting local businesses involved in supporting food access by providing monetary sponsorship or through other collaborative opportunities. Food co-ops were also mentioned as an ultimate way for community members to cooperate for the mutual benefit. By coming together and making their contributions, food co-op members increase community ownership of local food assets, thus increasing community power and autonomy, while supporting access to affordable, high-quality food.

1.3.Expanding local food growing opportunities to support local food production

Expanding and improving access to local food growing opportunities, including community gardens, yard share, urban food forests, and boulevard garden initiatives, were noted as promising ways to increase food access and community food resilience. To facilitate that, access to land was identified as the key consideration. Building on the recommendation for cooperation and mutual support, participants suggested making use of underutilized private land,

including that owned by churches, businesses, or individual community members through yard-share opportunities. One participant suggested turning under-utilized City-owned land into community gardens and food forests:

Would love to see boulevards turned into community gardens. If there were tomato plants on every street, then there wouldn't be the need to steal them.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

2. Strengthening governance: Expanding government's role in supporting food access

2.1. Price controls

Participants strongly felt that governments can and must step in and play a decisive role in correcting the current food affordability crisis. Participants asserted that in order to lessen the power hold of corporations, government officials must intervene to shield their citizens from the profit-hungry grocers. Participants suggested the need for the government to control or fix pricing on staple food items by establishing a price ceiling.

Price fixing on at least a basket of goods like milk, eggs, grain, you know, meats, what have you, protein... So that there is a maximum price perhaps that could be set where there is really, really strong transparency on how those prices are set and why they change.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

When considering the role of government actors in supporting food access, participants drew parallels with the ways in which other public goods are regulated, and questioned why a similar logic did not apply to food, which, as participants agreed, is a human right.

If you take how we treat water in this country… You take that lens and you apply it to this. So water is highly regulated. It is a human right. It is a necessity of life. And when there's an issue, when you can't access clean water, everyone knows. Sadly, Indigenous communities have long suffered. And it's still going on. And it's devastating. So I acknowledge that. But what if we took the same lens as to access to clean, affordable water? It costs a lot of money to treat water to our high standards and regulations, and yet we're doing it. It's not an issue in urban settings. So why is access to food is an issue? Yes, there's all kinds of reasons and all kinds of systemic cogs in the wheel. But I just wonder what it would look like if we could take how we deal with water and access to it, to food.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, September 21, 2023

2.2. Limiting food profits

At the very minimum, participants asserted, to taper off the excesses of the market, the government should be able to put a cap on how much profit big grocers can make off food items. Participants believe that boundless profiting off food – one of the most critical human needs, is immoral and unethical.

It just occurred to me that the government can regulate to a certain degree the cost of electricity. And the cost of like our cell phone.,. When the food costs are so great, government can regulate food profitability - the government can say you're allowed to make 50%, but not 150% profit. That's all you can charge. You can't just go fucking crazy, go wild and charge all you want. Because people have to eat. This isn't a luxury. It's a necessity. It's like electricity, water or other necessity.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, September 21, 2023

2.3. Ensuring price transparency

Acknowledging the complexity of food systems, participants recognized the intricacy of the price setting process. Participants recognized that many factors play a role in determining the end price, including production costs, suppliers' costs, market demand, competition, and profit incentives. Yet, this process remains out of sight and outside the realm of understanding of the end consumers, which further contributes to distrust and frustration. Participants suggested price transparency might help the end users understand and appreciate the factors that influence the price, as well as the price fluctuations:

When you think of gas prices, how people get riled up when the price of gas goes up, and then you have economists and analysts trying to break it down, like, why suddenly are we paying $2 in here? I find this fascinating how the price works in the tops. Is there a way to feasibly communicate between the end user and the producer, you know, who's involved, the suppliers, the distributors, transportation, taxes, etc.?

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, September 21, 2023

2.4. Income supports and universal basic income

Community researchers highlighted the government's responsibility of creating a robust social safety net in the form of income supports. Participants mentioned universal basic income that would guarantee a minimum income floor as a decisive solution to addressing food insecurity for all Canadians. Participants noted that seniors' pensions represent a form of basic income and have been demonstrated to help alleviate severe food insecurity among the senior population.

2.5. Investing in food security

Participants asserted that by supporting community food security, the government will be able to create a long-term impact. Equating food insecurity with a public health issue, participants make a case for government investment, that, arguably, will have a trickle-down effect.

Having not enough food or bad food for any length of time - what does it cost the health care system because, you know, people are not going to be strong. You're not going to be healthy and productive if you are undernourished. And then you turn around and think, well, how much is that costing the medical system, isn't it? It makes a lot of sense to take care of people at the source.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Participants suggested for the governments to subsidize the cost of food for community members in need, as it is done with other basic necessities, including housing and transportation:

You can get a subsidized bus pass, subsidized housing. Yes, terrific waiting list. But why not [subsidized] foods.. Like food gift cards or when you do the checkout, it's handled separately like you're not paying for something, you know.. Because also speaking to the dignity of access, why do you have to go to a food bank?

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, September 21, 2023

2.6. Universal school food programs

One of the participants, a single mother of two children, spoke about the opportunities to provide food supports to children in schools. She described the challenges of ensuring that the kids eat a healthy diet while away from home, including the experience of being shamed by teachers:

You know, I think they should include food programs for kids at school. You know, how many times I have been shamed by their teachers? And I'm just like, well, what do you want me to do?

When I do send vegetables and fruits, they come back home and it's nasty because it's been sitting in their bag all day - I have to throw it in the garbage because I'm not going to eat it, they're definitely not going to eat it. So that was like five bucks I just threw away in the garbage. I know they don't eat their vegetables and fruits at school, but I know at home they'll eat it with me because I'm watching them. I'm doing my best.. It's not like I am giving them sugar all the time. I try to give them one fruit or one vegetable, but it's whatever I know that they will eat.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023

The participant believes that free food programs in schools will provide a significant relief for parents: if kids are fed in school, parents will be freed of the need to seek additional supports through free and low-cost food programs for their families.

I feel like we need free food programs in schools. Free, or a little bit cheaper. I mean, if I know that breakfast or lunch is provided at school - that worry is gone. So all I need to feed my kids is snacks, and a proper dinner because I know they got a good lunch at school. If the kids were fed at school, then I wouldn't need all those other [free and low-cost] food programs, or maybe need them once in a little while. You know how much burden would be taken off? I think a lot of parents and kids would thrive on that.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023

The participant also remarked upon the geographical disparities between school food program provision in the Eastside vs the Westside of Vancouver. Once again, the perception of affluence prevents Westside residents from accessing social supports that are primarily focused on the Eastside, regardless of the actual socio-economic status of the population. The participant underscored the universality of school food programs, which should be available to all families who need them, despite their geographical location.

Yes, the city provides a little bit of money for school lunches for some, but you have to be on the Eastside. That's the thing: because I live on the Westside, doesn't mean I'm wealthy, but if I live on the Eastside, I could be wealthy, but I'm still considered poor. So my kids can get food from there. The kids are suffering because we have to live in this area. So I find it should be everywhere, not just based on where you live.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023

The participant firmly believes that supporting kids' wellbeing through school food programs should be a government's priority, even if it means redirecting funding from other public spending areas:

Why can't we take it [funding] from somewhere? Take it from somewhere else and give it to the kids. Like, do we need so many bike lanes? I feel like kids are the priority. We as adults, we can starve. Yeah, I mean, sometimes I'll eat whatever they don't eat, or I won't eat because I want them to eat. But I feel like kids definitely need to be fed and they [governments] should be doing that instead.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023

3. Mobilizing a people's movement

3.1. Taking radical collective action

Participants, frustrated with the current state of affairs and the lack of government response shared radical sentiments and proposed decisive collective actions to bring the change forward:

It's definitely the time to storm the Bastille again. I've been saying that for quite some time. There's more of us than of them. Let's go. There's been revolutions all through history. And change doesn't come about because they give it to us. You have to take it.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Recognizing that the corporations derive their power from consumers purchasing their products, participants suggested a "buy-nothing week" as a tangible idea for collective action. Since the capitalist system is reliant on the end consumer, the dialogue participants suggested a way to reclaim their power by dropping out of the system altogether.

Stop shopping for a whole week – the economy will collapse. Give them as little money as we can. Let's starve them out. Hippies had it right, fifty years ago: they dropped out of the system.. But then they got back in again and became the biggest consumers in the history of the world... But initially they had it right.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

3.2. Increasing people power

As a discussion throughline, participants touched on a number of themes on the importance of people realizing their individual power and coming together to build their collective power. Participants emphasized the importance of growing the people movement: in

the face of injustice and corporate dominance, participants find hope in coming together, as change will only happen in groups. One participant called for forming a people-led "ministry of food democracy." Participants acknowledged the importance of different demographics, and different generations working together – merging past experiences and expertise of the older generation with the hope, determination, and innovative ideas of the younger.

Start to believe in our own power, our individual power, see other modalities of survival, beyond how we were raised, and how we were encouraged by the government and the media - a lot of which we internalized.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Participants recognize the importance of sharing the truth: the lived experience of ordinary people impacted by the issues of poverty and food insecurity and speaking the truth to power. However, some were sceptical of the effectiveness of such an approach, and even deemed it dangerous.

People in power don't want to hear the truth unless they're good people. There are too many bad people in power. Speaking truth to power can be extremely dangerous in our society.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Yet, others suggested that a group effort might be an effective and safe way to carry the uncomfortable message to the powers that be. Reaffirming the importance of collective action and "power in numbers," one participant remarked:

[When one speaks truth to power]. You're an individual. And they can single you out. But if you're a group of 75,000 people - it's different.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

3.3. Developing capacity to organize

When it comes to community organizing and growing a people's movement, the participants highlighted the importance of education and capacity-building. In their view, pure passion and ideas are not enough to build a successful movement – training on how to collaborate, organize and build an effective collective action is critical:

- *We need to educate people on how to organize. Because most people, in my experience, in most activism groups, don't know how to organize. I've been in groups with activists. Well, I think my idea is a great idea. Why don't we do it my way? The next person, Why don't we do it my way? And pretty soon I think it's done. CEOs of large corporations get hundreds of thousands of dollars of training on how to do this. So you get some passionate food democracy activists up against them. Who's going to win in this battle of David and Goliath?*
- *David won.*

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

3.4.Building coalitions: Role of the non-profit sector

Participants recognized the importance of finding allies. In particular, participants identified the non-profit sector as playing an important role in lending support to the people's movement. The non-profit sector is seen as a natural ally as it is representative of the community impacted by the issue, and often holds trusting relationships with the community members, and is seen as being in service of the people:

The non-profit sector, let's say Kits House and the Association of Neighbourhood Houses, there's very strong power there because they represent the community or interest groups or those who are really struggling with food insecurity. And likewise, [can offer] programming to help with organizing. How is it that you actually organize, how do you build momentum? How do you get communication out? The non-profit sector has a big role to play here - maybe there's a way. Government might not be able to take this on yet because they are friends with corporations and supporting the growth of the economy versus trying to support the everyday Canadian. So I wonder if there's a bigger role for non-profits there.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

3.5.Raising awareness and the art of dialogue

Participants acknowledged the challenges of building a movement and bringing people together for a common goal due to the lack of awareness of the issue, particularly if they do not share similar lived experience. Thus, one of the first steps to increasing power of the people and building a movement is raising awareness around the issue of food insecurity and the current state of affairs.

I think awareness, period. Awareness. Like how bad it really is out there.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Get it on the table. That's the tagline. On the table. Conversation. Awareness. Resources. Options.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Participants noted that there is apathy and even resistance to learning other people's perspectives and considering different points of view:

It's hard to mobilize. A lot of people are just close minded and refuse to listen. And they think you are nuts if you try to tell them anything and they're being closed off and they're not going to hear and keep doing what they're doing and what can you do?

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Participants acknowledged that traditional, top-down awareness-raising techniques are not effective in influencing public opinion and changing mindsets, and called for the need to find innovative ways to raise awareness by meeting people where they are:

A lot of the problem with the way people raise awareness have been the same for the past probably hundred years… It's just a bunch of people yelling at you and handing out pamphlets.

We need a more nuanced way [of raising awareness]. Perhaps not subliminal - that's a little weird. But meet people where they are!

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

The research participants spoke to the importance of building shared understanding by holding civil dialogue and talking to each other. This appeared especially critical when coming together in pursuit of a common goal.

We need to learn how to talk with each other. Talk - not argue.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

4. Shifting mindsets

4.1. From food as a commodity to food as a human right

Participants spoke to the need of reframing the way we think about food.

Food is a human right. Period. We cannot survive without it. Some things are not a right, but privilege, but food is not that. It is a necessity.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Participants assert that food democracy rests on food as a human right. To begin repairing the current dire state of food access, community researchers call for shifting the ways in which we think about food: from food as a commodity to be used as a profit-maximizing tool, or a political issue to be debated over, to food as a human right to be guaranteed for all people.

Either way, we all have to eat. I think that food is a right. We obviously need food to survive. Food should not be a political issue. Otherwise, oxygen becomes that. It's a crying shame, to say the least if you're having a difficult time and you're struggling getting food. It's like, yeah, clearly something has to change.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

4.2. From scarcity to abundance

Participants noted that the capitalistic food system is rooted in the mindset of scarcity, that perpetuates greed and competition. It also has a devastating effect on the people betrayed by the system: unable to get ahead, no matter what they do, they come to see life in terms of lack. Nevertheless, participants remark, there is richness to be found – by shifting our focus to the abundance around us, we may find new ways of approaching our struggles.

I see so much abundance around. We come to event like this. And there's trays of pizza and goodies and watermelon. You know, it made today rich in all kinds of ways. And I think there's lots of places where there's richness to see, like boxes of apples downstairs. I found goji berries on my bike ride today. And so some of it is, I guess, maybe what you bump into. But I see certain amounts of magic out there.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

4.3. From individualism to community care

With food described as an essential necessity or a basic human right, participants suggested appealing to common humanity and care for each other:

- *Need to get out of our individualistic culture – we are all humans who need shelter, water, food.*
- *And honest politicians!*

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Participants suggested moving away from the extractive nature of Western-centric relationships and adopting Indigenous ways of being, rooted in community care. To illustrate, one of the participants provided an example:

The Indigenous people are embracing the water, the land and the environment. They're also building their houses for everybody, not just for rich or poor, everybody in their community. We need to turn to Indigenous people to learn more from them. We really do. Their cultures are very inclusive. I mean, they have rich and poor in their communities as well. But for them wealth, it's not what you take - it's what you give. And that's where we have to change our thinking.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

It is a collective problem, and we need a collective solution.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, August 17, 2023

Summary

This chapter revealed a number of crucial dimensions of the experience of equity-deserving groups navigating local food access. Participants reported that they are guided by the values such as affordability, proximity, quality, dignity, choice, and community care when making decisions on accessing food assets. The identified barriers, ranging from unaffordability, mistaken perceptions of affluence to inaccessibility, stigma and shame underscore the multifaceted challenges that impact food access for people experiencing food insecurity. This chapter also shed light on systemic factors contributing to the current state, including corporate control of the food system, governance failures, economic inequity, and social disparities, as well as the prevailing apathy and lack of civic engagement. Taking a leap from despair to hope, the discussion suggested the path towards solutions and offered strategies for systemic change, from improving community food access, strengthening governance to fostering a people's movement and shifting mindsets. The next chapter provides the discussion and analysis of the findings.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Analysis

This research study aimed to engage community members with lived experience of food insecurity in mapping valuable food assets in the Westside, identifying neighbourhood food priorities, including values and barriers to local food access, as well as considering contributing systemic factors and creating recommendations to the community, non-profit and public sectors to help improve local food access. This research set out to explore the potential of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as a tool for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. In this chapter, I interpret and describe the significance of the research findings.

Neighbourhood Food Priorities: Food Assets, Values and Barriers

The process of participatory food asset mapping in the context of this research study, while capturing experiences of rather diverse community members, represents a small sample of the population and may not reflect the full diversity of experiences and identities of people living with food insecurity in the Westside. The identified food assets are concentrated within the following geographical areas: Kitsilano, Kerrisdale, Dunbar, UBC and Mount Pleasant (which falls outside of the Westside boundaries). Some of the areas, including Shaughnessy and Arbutus Ridge appeared to be lacking food assets, consistent with the earlier observations (Shore, 2012). It is important to note that the geographical distribution of food assets on the map was also heavily influenced by the place of residence of the responders: with proximity acknowledged as a critical factor, respondents tended to favour food assets located within a walking distance of their place of residency or local gathering spots. Recognizing the importance of the neighbourhood scale for increased accessibility, one of the surprising results was that participants identified a number of valuable food assets that traversed the geographical boundaries of the Westside. With affordability identified as one of the important values, participants were still willing to travel outside of the neighbourhood to access food resources.

Participants identified a total of 60 food assets: 34 grocery stores and markets, 10 cafes and restaurants serving prepared meals, 13 free and low-cost food programs, 3 urban food forests, and 0 community gardens. The prevalence of grocery stores and markets as valuable food assets highlights the reliance on the commercial food system in obtaining food sources. This trend underscores the dominance of the industrialized food system, where mass production, distribution, and retail channels play a central role in meeting the dietary needs of the population. The preference for store-bought food may be indicative of several factors, including convenience and accessibility, or lack of alternative food assets, such as local food growing opportunities. Regardless, the reliance on commercial food assets inevitably raises questions of sustainability, food sovereignty, self-sufficiency, food system resilience as well as food affordability, quality, accessibility, and, ultimately, food democracy.

Corresponding values and barriers associated with each entry were added, creating a more nuanced depiction of the community's food landscape and the diverse experiences of equity-deserving groups navigating local food access. Some of the identified values were affordability, quality and proximity, while barriers included high cost, poor quality, stigma, and inconsistency. In considering the values and barriers that participants identified for each food asset, it is important to note that those are subjective and unique to each participant, depending on their lived experience and social location: a value for some may be a barrier for others. For example, proximity may be a value for those who live near a given grocery store, while it may be

a barrier for those located further away. Likewise, such values as affordability and quality may be subjective, depending on an individual's life circumstances and personal preferences. While articulating values and barriers in the process of food asset mapping is critical in order to develop an understanding of the neighbourhood food priorities from the community perspective (Jakes et al., 2015), participatory food asset mapping reflected individual experiences of select community members, and as a result, cannot be generalized as universally shared by the entire community. Focus group discussion provided an opportunity to articulate common values and paint a more objective picture of the shared experience of equity-deserving groups navigating food assets in the Westside.

What do people experiencing food insecurity value when making decisions on accessing food assets? Research participants' experience of food insecurity, as consistent with the literature on the subject, is most strongly associated with the experience of poverty as the food is the first expense to be cut out when one is struggling financially (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012; McIntyre et al., 2014; Men et al., 2021; Tarasuk, 2001). While food secure individuals are able to obtain sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life, those experiencing food insecurity, may not be able to enjoy full benefits afforded by food secure status, and are forced to make trade-offs when making decisions on accessing food assets. What people value helps articulate the factors of importance that people, whose economic access is restricted, must consider when accessing food assets.

Not surprisingly, the main value participants experiencing food insecurity are looking for is affordability, which allows them to gain access to food. To realize this value, participants opt for low-cost grocery stores, compare prices, look out for deals, shop sales and use coupons. Related to economic access, proximity to food assets is important: the cost of transportation adds an additional strain on an already stretched budget. Quality and freshness are the values that the participants most often find themselves compromising on, as foods of higher quality and nutritional value, e.g. protein, fruits and vegetables are more expensive – this is especially problematic for those experiencing health challenges and requiring a special diet. Dignity and choice are other critical factors participants are considering when accessing food assets. Due to scarce financial resources, the choice of food assets for people experiencing food insecurity is nil: whether it is selecting from the limited affordable options at a grocery store or having virtually no choice at the free food programs, participants often feel that they do not have the freedom to choose what is best for them. As a result, participants' sense of dignity and autonomy is undermined. Consistent with the previous findings (Kim & Enckevort, 2020), participants describe food charity programs as dehumanizing: poor quality of food, strict rules, means testing, long line-ups, and policing further undermine self-worth of people experiencing food insecurity. Dignity ranks so high on the priority spectrum of values, that one participant described it as "I'd rather go hungry than go to a food bank". Even in the direst circumstances, when the most basic human need for food is on the line, people choose to preserve their dignity, even if it means going hungry. This should serve as an important reminder to food program coordinators developing supports for people experiencing food insecurity – providing food is not enough, dignity and choice must be at the core of the philosophy.

While values contribute positively to food access, barriers, on the other hand, represent obstacles that impede or limit access to available food assets. The main identified barrier to full food access was, predictably, high food costs and unaffordability. Participants, unable to obtain available food that meets their needs and preferences due to prohibitively high food costs, find themselves in need to make trade-offs and compromise on certain values when navigating food

access, while overcoming additional barriers along the way. Constrained by high food costs, the selection of food assets people experiencing food insecurity are able to access becomes significantly limited, which adds a layer of complexity to navigating local food access. The mistaken perception of the universal affluence of the Westside contributes to the lack of availability of, and, hence, choice of low-cost food assets, particularly free and low-cost food programs.

Participants admitted that they are not fully aware of the programs and supports available in the Westside. When it comes to the available and known food assets, free and low-cost food resources, inaccessibility, bureaucracy, stigma and shame were voiced as impeding access. Food unaffordability as a main barrier to full food access limits available options and produces a trickle-down effect by creating additional barriers by significantly reducing the food assets participants are able to access and forced to negotiate. While we can work on removing or reducing the identified barriers to food access yet, it is clear that insufficient income is at the root of food insecurity. The findings are consistent with the academic discourse on the issue (Ionescu-Ittu, Glymour & Kaufman, 2014; McIntyre et al., 2016; Brown & Tarasuk, 2019; Men et al., 2021), confirming once again, loud and clear, that addressing the lack of purchasing power would be the single most effective way of removing the main barrier to food access.

Neighbourhood Food Priorities: Systemic Factors

Acknowledging that the process of navigating local food assets is a reflection of a larger structural economic, political, and social context, participants uncovered a number of systemic factors which they believe are at the root of creating barriers to food access. These factors include corporate control of the food system, economic inequity and social disparities, governance failures, and apathy.

Participants were unanimous in naming corporatization of the food industry as a key driving force behind the persistent barriers to food access. The commodification of food, profit motive, corporate greed, concentration of corporate power, and lack of transparency were named as key factors responsible for creating inequitable food access. Commodification of food refers to the process by which food is treated as a commodity, subject to the principles of buying and selling in a market economy (Vivero Pol, 2013). As a result, food is treated as a product for trade rather than a basic human need, whereby the cost is determined by the laws of the market with the goal to maximize profit. According to the report by Canada's Competition Bureau, in 2022, Canada's three largest grocers—Loblaws, Sobeys, and Metro—collectively reported more than $100 billion in sales, earning more than $3.6 billion in profits – a significant 50% increase from $2.4 billion in 2019 (Competition Bureau of Canada, 2023).

Figure 7. Canadian grocery stores owned by or affiliated with Loblaws, Sobeys, or Metro. Competition Bureau of Canada, 2023.

While some participants were ready to hold the grocery giants and their pursuit of profit fully accountable for the high food costs, others were cautious about assigning sole responsibility to a few, however large, key players. Acknowledging the complexity of the food system, several participants noted the importance of understanding the whole food system continuum, including food production and manufacturing. However, in *Grocery story,* Jon Steinman (2019) demonstrates just how much control the major food corporations have over the entire food supply chain, from production to distribution. Through vertical integration, whereby food corporations own various stages of the food supply chain, as opposed to relying on external suppliers, grocery giants are able to exert an unparalleled level of autonomy and control (Steinman, 2019). For example, corporations take control over food production and processing through owning the farmland and processing facilities (Steinman, 2019). Where that is not the case, corporations are able to exert significant influence over smaller independent suppliers by negotiating favourable terms, dictating product specifications, and setting the price, often to the detriment of smaller suppliers (Steinman, 2019). Whether through direct control, or an indirect influence, Canada's grocery stores, are, indeed able to wield significant power. While the experts agree that food prices will generally be higher when there is less competition, they emphasize that rising food prices are not always indicative of a competition problem as they can also go up when it costs grocers more to buy the food that they sell (Competition Bureau of Canada, 2023).

Inadequate government policies and lack of government action were named as another set of critical factors perpetuating inequitable food access. Participants are frustrated with government inaction and feel betrayed by the government that favours corporate interests over the basic needs of their own citizens. Indeed, in response to the recent record food inflation, the

federal government has been accused of inaction and called to step in to provide relief for everyday Canadians (Bednar, 2023). While there are some debates on just how much the Canadian government is able to do to reign in the skyrocketing grocery costs, experts agree that there are some steps that the government can take (Von Massow, 2022). In September 2023, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly denounced the record profits of the largest grocery corporations while Canadians are struggling to put food on the table (Burke, 2023). The federal government then called a meeting with the CEOs of Canada's five largest grocery stores to discuss ways to stabilize food prices while threatening them with the possibility of a decisive action, including tax measures (Burke, 2023). As a response, the grocery companies presented plans to tackle rising prices, including discounts, prize freezes and price-matching initiatives, but did not disclose the details of these plans (Al Mallees, 2023). It is also yet unclear whether these moves will make a serious dent in food inflation (Edmiston & Ramzy, 2023).

Economic inequality and social disparities were named as another underlying cause for existing barriers to food access. The affordability crisis, whereby incomes are not able to keep up with the rising costs of basic necessities, including housing, food and healthcare, forces people to make difficult choices. Food is often the first expense to be forfeited when people are struggling financially and one of the strongest indicators of economic deprivation (Loopstra, 2013). The conversation around economic inequality and the crisis of affordability was fraught with frustration and despair: the common sentiment was that no matter how hard participants try, they constantly struggle to make ends meet. The demographic composition of the study group was an illustrative example of just how widespread the issue is and how it impacts people from diverse backgrounds and social identities, including seniors, a single mother with children, youth, students, working adults, individuals with no fixed address, and a newcomer. Participants also shared stories of their friends and neighbours affected by the high costs of living, demonstrating the pervasive nature of the affordability crisis. Indeed, B.C. tops the list of the most expensive provinces in Canada when it comes to the cost of housing, public transportation, healthcare and groceries (Judd, 2023). Vancouver, in turn, is consistently ranked as the worst city for housing affordability (Ruttle, 2023) and the second most expensive Canadian city overall (Chan, 2023). Paired with the record food inflation, where store-bought food prices rose 11.3% over the past year, it is no surprise that economic pressures are becoming unbearable for people with lower incomes.

Finally, participants noted apathy and lack of civic engagement as partially responsible for the current state of the issue. Despite the profound suffering experienced by those living with food insecurity, the general public appears to be unaware that the issue exists, let alone doing something about it. Attributing the lack of engagement in part to the individualistic culture and in part to a scarcity mindset, participants view the population not affected by the issue of food insecurity as complicit with the status quo. Indeed, at the community outreach events hosted by the Westside Food Collaborative, the fact that a number of Westside residents were not aware of the issue of food insecurity, let alone that it is a prevalent issue in the Westside, is surprising (Community member, personal communication, June 2023).

The neoliberal logic would make one believe that those who fall behind are lacking merit and effort, while the grim economic circumstances they find themselves in are their individual fault, and, hence, the sole responsibility. So much so, that "the poor begin to blame themselves for their failures, even when they can do little to change their circumstances" (Monbiot, 2016). Yet, as extensive academic research and personal accounts of people with actual lived experience demonstrate, poverty, and, by extension, food insecurity is not a personal choice or individual

failure, but a symptom of a broken system (Emery et al., 2013; McIntyre, 2016; Tarasuk et al., 2019; Tarasuk et al., 2020). If people are doing their best and nothing changes – who is (emphasis added) responsible for the current state of affairs? Recognizing the complexity of the political, social, and economic systems, it would be simplistic and inaccurate to try to assign sole responsibility to any one actor. Therefore, in an effort to understand and try to address food insecurity and its root causes, we must look at the whole system and consider the variety of actors and forces at play.

It is important to acknowledge the collective feelings of despair and suffering community members share in the face of the injustice they are confronted with on a daily basis when accessing food assets in the Westside. Whether stemming from structural barriers to food access or deep-rooted systemic barriers, the experience of navigating local food assets while balancing other essential needs, is fraught with frustration and hopelessness. Despite their best efforts, it appears impossible for participants to get ahead. The feelings of despair and loss of control are amplified in the face of climate crisis and its impact on an already vulnerable food system. These sentiments are particularly visible among senior participants, who share that they lost hope that change is possible over time.

While participants admit they used to have an encouraging outlook and believed that positive transformation is possible, they became jaded and cynical over time when observing that change is not forthcoming despite their best efforts. Nevertheless, despite their own pessimism, they were pleased to see that the younger participants were full of hope and optimism. Such an intergenerational collaboration appears to be a promising tool to build on the strengths of both groups, bringing together knowledge and experience of the senior population with the passion, enthusiasm, and energy of the youth. Grounded in the shared conviction in the power of people coming together, speaking their truth, and taking action, participants were ready to discuss strategies for change.

Agenda for Change: Strategies Recommended by Community Participants

One of the objectives of the research study was to generate recommendations for the community, non-profit and public sectors in Vancouver, informed by people experiencing food insecurity in the Westside. In addition to maximizing the value of existing food assets and reducing the identified barriers to local food access, participants suggested ideas for tackling systemic factors. This section will discuss the strategies suggested by the research participants for the Westside community, non-profit sector and all levels of government that help support community food security by maximizing value, reducing barriers to food access, and addressing systemic factors. Importantly, participants were interested in considering the roles all actors can play in bringing about the desired change. As one of the participants remarked, *we need everyone: what you as a person can do, what society can do, what communities can do, what the government can do. I think all are different and everyone does something different. But at the end of the day, it all connects because they all come together.*

1. Improving community food access

Recommendations aimed at improving community food access included improving access to information on available food assets, creating and expanding opportunities for cooperation and

mutual support, and developing local food growing opportunities to support local food production.

1.1.Improving information on available food assets

Improving information on available food assets, their values and barriers was one of the recommendations to improving local food access. To maximize accessibility and reach, participants recommended the resource to be available via both digital and print media, and distributed through a variety of community channels, including newsletters, community partners, and social media. This recommendation is consistent with the general community feedback on the lack of coordinated information on services and supports available in the community. Due to the siloed nature of the non-profit model of service delivery, organizations are not engaging in practices of knowledge sharing. Initiatives, such as the Westside Food Collaborative (WFC) that aims to bring together social service providers, non-profits, community groups are working on addressing this gap. Since 2021, WFC has been collating and regularly updating the Free and Low-Cost Community Food Resources Westside list (see Appendix 6) that features free and low-cost food programs, including free hamper programs, a low-cost market, community meals and community fridges. The list is shared, both digitally and in print through the WFC network and partners. The City of Vancouver's Food Policy department maintains the Free and Low-Cost Map – see Appendix 7 ("Free and low-cost resources," n.d.). The program listings are updated regularly in consultation with the program operators ("Free and low-cost resources," n.d.). Despite these commendable efforts, it appears that the information is still not reaching those it is aiming to serve. More efforts are required to maintain the up-to-date information and distribute it widely through a variety of media forms and community channels. Community members, non-profit organizations and the municipal government can support this goal.

1.2.Creating and expanding opportunities for cooperation and mutual support

Participants noted that the Westside is abundant in resources – it certainly does not get its reputation of "the rich Westside" for nothing. The problem, however, as participants observed, is that the abundance is not shared. A number of recommendations for cooperation and mutual support were proposed, including creating opportunities for bulk buying, expanding the community fridges network, involving businesses, and even setting up a food co-op.

Participants suggested increasing their collective purchasing power by pooling their limited resources through food buying groups or bulk buy. Food buying groups allow a group of people (e.g. friends, neighbours, community members) to buy food from the same supplier in bulk at wholesale prices - the large quantities are then split among the members ("Food buying groups," n.d.). These bulk buying clubs are often small, informal, self-organized entities, where a group of friends or neighbours come together to purchase food in bulk and enjoy the savings. Bulk buy programs can also be managed by a third-party agency that buys food in bulk and distributes food boxes to members for a fee ("Start your own," n.d.). Britannia Community Centre (located in the Eastside of Vancouver) runs a monthly Britannia Bulk Buy Food Club. They buy fresh produce in bulk at wholesale prices and split the cost across the participants: for $15, members receive a box of assorted fruits and vegetables (Britannia Community Centre, 2023). The bulk buy food boxes are also supplemented by rescued and donated food from the local farms and businesses (Britannia Community Centre, 2023). The program is incredibly successful and provides dignified food access to 140 individuals and families in the Grandview-Woodland neighbourhood (Britannia Community Centre, 2023). Vancouver's Westside can draw

inspiration from these successful models of cooperation: whether it is community members who decide to come together to set up an informal bulk buying club to share the cost, or a local non-profit organization that is willing to organize a more formal food box program for the community, the suggested bulk buy models appear to be a promising way to increase access to more affordable, good quality food.

Participants recognize community fridges as a valuable community food asset and an effective model of cooperation and mutual support and call for expansion of the community fridges network. Mutual aid, or community care, while not a new concept, has proliferated since the pandemic. In mutual aid systems, people come together to meet each other's needs, without relying on the formal social support systems or government assistance (Izlar, n.d.). Mutual aid, based on principles of solidarity and cooperation, recognizes the abundance that exists in the community and facilitates ways to share in the abundance. Run by community members, operating outside of the formal power structure, relying on everyday actions of everyday people to improve their life circumstance, the mutual aid model runs a strong parallel with the very definition of community development. In particular, it mirrors the Asset-Based Community Development - a strengths-based approach that turns community members from helpless clients and recipients of charity into empowered citizens who take responsibility for their own well-being (McKnight & Russell, 2018). Community fridges in the Westside are part of the Vancouver Community Fridge Project (VCFP) - a decentralized food distribution network and mutual aid initiative created to provide healthy, free food and essential supplies to communities across the Lower Mainland ("About the Vancouver Community Fridge Project," n.d.). VCFP upholds the "right to food" principle and operates on a strict no policing, no-shame policy, which aims to reduce shame and stigma often associated with accessing free food resources ("About the Vancouver Community Fridge Project," n.d.). Each fridge is independently organized and managed by community volunteers, who take it upon themselves to source a donated fridge in a good working condition, find a site to install the fridge (usually on private property), source food donations (often from local businesses), coordinate volunteers to transport donations and maintain the cleanliness and working order of the fridge (M. Grenier, personal communication, 2023). Despite the ongoing challenges of community organizing, community fridges represent an innovative and effective model of food access, rooted in dignity and community care. There are currently two community fridges operating in the Westside. Expansion of the community fridges network, as recommended by the research participants, will require active community leadership to organize and maintain the fridges as well as partnerships with non-profit organizations (e.g. to provide space and administrative support) and local businesses (to provide food donations). Most critically, community fridges, representing an alternative to the dominant (and familiar) top-down charity model, rest on wide community support of the mutual aid approach, which, in turn, may require a significant mindset shift (described later in this chapter).

Research participants recommended getting local businesses involved in supporting community food security. There already exists a strong foundation of business-community partnership in the Westside, as evident in the collaboration of local grocery stores, cafés and restaurants with non-profits and community groups. Local businesses donate unsold food items (whether regularly or on occasion) to support free and low-cost food programs in the community, either directly or through partnership with the Vancouver Food Runners – a food recovery organization that connects food donors with non-profit partners and mobilizes volunteers to efficiently transport food between locations ("What we do," n.d.). In 2022, the Westside Food Collaborative launched a business outreach campaign (see Appendix 8) to engage more local

businesses in supporting community food security, whether through food donations (in partnership with Vancouver Food Runners) to a local non-profit of their choice, monetary contributions, or through active involvement in the work of the collaborative. Unfortunately, the campaign did not have a significant uptake. However, in 2023, the West Broadway Business Improvement Association has expressed interest in supporting community food security by facilitating connections with the local businesses. WFC is looking forward to continuing exploring opportunities for cooperation.

While bulk buying groups in their approach represent the simplest form of food co-operatives, participants explicitly mentioned food co-ops as a powerful tool to improve community food access through cooperation. Food co-ops, democratically owned and controlled by the members of the community, represent a decisive alternative to the corporate retail industry. In *Grocery story: The promise of food co-ops in the age of grocery giants,* Jon Steinman (2019) suggests that food co-ops may be the answer to overcoming some of the failings of the dominant corporate food industry. By emphasizing community ownership, local sourcing, and commitment to sustainability, food co-ops promise to foster connections between producers and consumers, promote price transparency, and contribute to a more resilient and equitable food system, while supporting and empowering community (Steinman, 2019). Steinman (2019) acknowledges the challenges of operating a food co-op in the current socio-economic climate, including financial viability, often due to the unfair competition with large grocery chains, member engagement and wider community support. Unfortunately, food co-ops in Vancouver were not able to overcome these challenges, and Vancouver's last food cooperative closed its doors in 2022, after serving the Grandview-Woodland community for nearly 50 years (Little & Bala, 2022). To realize the promising potential of food cooperatives, while managing to mitigate the significant challenges in an increasingly uncertain socio-economic climate, it will take a significant collective effort, including, but not limited to strong community support, secure funding, established supplier relationships, and government incentives. Nevertheless, however distant, the dream of a Westside food co-op embodies the ideals of the neighbourhood food democracy: community empowerment, participation, transparency, accountability, equity, and food sovereignty.

1.3.Expanding local food growing opportunities to support local food production

To improve immediate food access, participants suggested supporting local food production by significantly expanding opportunities to grow food locally. As it currently stands, participants noted, growing their own food (e.g. on a balcony or in a community garden) would not make a meaningful difference to their food security situation, given the considerable resources (e.g. time, knowledge, supplies) required to partake in gardening activities and the reliance on the commercial retail industry. Participant observations are consistent with the literature on the subject: research studies, time and again, demonstrate that individual community gardens, sporadic in nature, are not effective at meaningfully supporting community food security as they often operate on a limited scale, while equity-denied groups face barriers accessing them, particularly lack of time and resources (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013; Huisken et al., 206; Du Toit et al., 2022). By developing a concerted effort to significantly increase local food production by greatly expanding food growing opportunities community-wide, participants believe, we will be able to meaningfully support local food access and improve community food resilience. Participants suggested a variety of ways of greatly expanding food growing opportunities, including community gardens, yard share and urban food forests and boulevard gardens.

While the Westside boasts a rich network of community gardens, there exist significant barriers that prevent community members from meaningfully getting involved, and, as a result, realizing the potential benefits of the food growing opportunities. Due to the high demand and limited availability, there are often long waitlists to join a community garden. The lack of information on gardens available and ways to get involved serve as a barrier to participation. Efforts are currently underway by WFC to consolidate existing information on available food assets, including community gardens. Nevertheless, many community gardens are focused on recreation, developing gardening skills, and community building, as opposed to food production. Community gardens are often erected short-term as the land is awaiting a predetermined real estate development. Such a model has been criticized due to its impermanent nature, which does not allow the land to be effectively cultivated and produce a substantial harvest. Participants of the community dialogue on seniors' food security noted a limited growing season in Vancouver, which undermines consistent and reliable access to locally produced food year-round. A community greenhouse was proposed to overcome this limitation (Stepkina & Giesbrecht, 2023).

The City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Park Board support local food growing opportunities through community gardens as part of their commitments under the Vancouver Food Strategy and the Local Food Action Plan ("Community Gardens and Orchards," n.d.). Community gardens and orchards operate in City parks, on schoolyards, and on private property in Vancouver ("Community Gardens and Orchards," n.d.). Gardens on City land and in parks require a rigorous approval process and are operated by non-profit organizations through operating agreements with the City or Park Board ("Community Gardens and Orchards," n.d.). Community gardens on private property do not require development permits and are managed by the property owner, sometimes in partnership with community organizations ("Community Gardens and Orchards," n.d.). Collaborations between private property owners and non-profit organizations present a promising opportunity for expanding local food growing. There are some notable examples in Vancouver that take advantage of the available underutilized private land, supported by the robust infrastructure of a non-profit partner. In the Riley Park- Little Mountain neighbourhood in the Eastside of Vancouver, the *Yard Garden Harvest Project* is a community food security project of Little Mountain Neighbourhood House that is growing food in private yards generously shared by neighbours ("Yard Garden Harvest Project," n.d.). The produce is donated to the Neighbourhood House's Food Distribution program that serves individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, while providing meaningful volunteer opportunities and equipping community members with the knowledge and skills of sustainable farming ("Yard Garden Harvest Project," n.d.). In 2022, the initiative produced an impressive 1,266 pounds of produce in 6 urban yards ("Yard Garden Harvest Project," n.d.).! In the Westside, *Food 4 Thought Garden Matching Project* is pairing apartment dwellers who have a desire to grow an organic vegetable garden but do not have access to a garden space with homeowners who have an under-utilized yard to share ("Food 4 Thought," n.d.). By building on principles of mutual support and Asset-Based Community Development (discussed earlier) the project mobilizes community's assets to expand local food growing opportunities.

Figure 8. Yard Garden Harvest Project. Photo: Little Mountain Neighbourhood House.

Urban food forests are systems of perennial crops, primarily fruit and nuts, that represent open-access public spaces where people can pick food for free (Kimbrell, 2023). In addition to providing a source of food for people, urban food forests offer food and shade for pollinators and other wildlife and serve to capture water in the landscape (Kimbrell, 2023). A report by Stanford-based Natural Capital Project (NatCap) looked at the many benefits of urban food forests (Guerry et al., 2023). While focused on the San Antonio context, the report has clearly demonstrated that urban food forests (and farms) are extremely productive (Guerry et al., 2023). For example, if all publicly owned underutilized land across the city - 16,800 acres – were converted to urban food forests they could produce an estimated 192 million pounds of fruit and nuts annually (Guerry et al., 2023). In addition to fresh food, urban food forests were demonstrated to provide other key ecosystem services, including urban cooling, carbon storage, flood retention, and green space (Guerry et al., 2023). The report concludes that even in areas of the city with limited underutilized land available, there is still ample opportunity to address local demand with hyper localized food production (Guerry et al., 2023).

Food forests in Vancouver are gaining prominence. The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation works with community groups to support food growing spaces on the City and Park land ("Local food systems," n.d.). Recognizing the importance of stewardship for the longevity and sustainability of the food forests, the Parks Board is working closely with non-profit organizations (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 2021). Since 2020, the Vancouver Urban Food Forest Foundation (VUFFF) has been on a mission to "transform Vancouver's neighbourhoods into the nourishing spaces we need them to be" ("About us," n.d.). VUFF aims to prioritize Indigenous ways of knowing and center marginalized voices in the public parks and green spaces ("About us," n.d.). VUFF, in partnership with the Vancouver's Parks Board, is currently operating two Indigenous food forests: the Chéńchenstway Healing Garden and Indigenous Food Forest and Hastings & Kamloops Plaza, and recently got a proposal approval for a new food forest in the Burrard View Park ("About us," n.d.).

The research participants repeatedly suggested turning city boulevards into food gardens. The City encourages residents to turn boulevards - the area between the street curb and the sidewalk that is typically planted with grass, into plant and food gardens as one of the key strategies under the Greenest City 2020 Action Plan ("Boulevard Gardening Guidelines," n.d.). While the Plan has concluded, boulevard gardens continue to play an important role in creating opportunities for local food production. In contrast with developing a community garden on City land, starting a boulevard food garden does not require approval from the City. Besides adhering to general recommendations and guidelines, e.g. soil quality, watering and maintenance, and year-round aesthetics, growing food on City boulevards appears to be a low-barrier way to expand local food production ("Boulevard Gardening Guidelines," n.d.).

Growing your own food is often considered to be a revolutionary act in the context of the industrialized capitalist system of food production (Cox, 2021). Expanding local food growing opportunities is a direct challenge to the tight hold of the dominant system that creates inequity and perpetuates injustice. Promoting hyper-local food production through community gardens, yard share, urban food forests, and boulevard garden opportunities by mobilizing community, fostering community-non-profit partnerships and taking advantage of municipal support enables community members to practice food democracy and inch closer to realizing their food sovereignty.

2. Strengthening governance: Expanding government's role in supporting food access

In the current neoliberalist context, the government's regulatory role to protect the right to food is virtually absent in the modern food system governance. This laissez-faire approach supports the idea that a self-regulating market will ensure efficient food production and distribution, while the food prices are expected to be fairly determined by the interaction of supply and demand forces for the benefit of all. As we have seen, the market fails to deliver on its promises, while benefiting a select few, but betraying the majority. This is why the research participants repeatedly called for the government, entrusted with ensuring the wellbeing of its citizens, to play a more decisive role in food system governance by supporting food access. Access is achieved when individuals and households have adequate resources to obtain appropriate food, which is dependent, most notably, on affordability and purchasing power (FOA, 1996). Both affordability and purchasing power refer to the amount of goods and services one can purchase with their money. By definition, affordability and purchasing power have two critical elements: costs and income. Only when income is sufficient to pay the price of food can we talk about a secure and reliable food access. Consequently, there are two ways to achieve

food affordability: reduce the food costs or increase the income. The research participants suggested a number of ways for the government to play a role in controlling food costs, including price controls, limiting food profits, ensuring price transparency, as well as providing income supports. Beyond stabilizing costs and incomes, participants suggested the government invest in supporting community food security by providing food subsidies and universal school food programs.

It is important to note that while all levels of government recognize food security as a policy priority, costs and income regulation policies fall within the federal and provincial levels of government. Nevertheless, the municipal government should not be absolved of the responsibility to support community food security through available policy tools, including land use and zoning, taxes, and grant-making. Municipal governments can also play a crucial role in advocating to the higher levels of government to support policies that may help improve community food security, including income-based policy solutions.

2.1.Price controls

Participants suggested the need for the government to control or fix pricing on a basket of staple food items by establishing a price ceiling. Drawing parallels with the ways in which other public goods are regulated, participants asserted that food should be considered as a public good and treated as such. Price controls refer to the legal minimum (price floor) or maximum (price ceiling) prices set for specified goods and are implemented to manage affordability of certain goods (Kenton, 2023). While price ceilings have been historically adopted primarily in developing countries (Von Massow, 2022), in recent years, a number of developed countries turned to price fixing to regulate food costs, including Argentina, Hungary, France, and Greece (Riley, 2022; Bednar, 2023). Although price controls may achieve their goals of supporting affordability and economic stability in the short-term, most economists speak against government setting price controls (Riley, 2022; Von Massow, 2022; Kenton, 2023; Walkom, 2023). In the long run, economists argue, price fixing in the context of free market may have the opposite effect and bring about some unintended consequences (Riley, 2022; Von Massow, 2022; Kenton, 2023; Walkom, 2023). Price controls would quickly be overwhelmed by the free market forces of supply and demand (Kenton, 2023). On the supply side, capping prices will create a disincentive for companies to sell the product in a regulated market (Walkom, 2023): imported items will go to other markets, while domestically produced products will likely leave the country in search for higher returns (Von Massow, 2022). On the demand side, the price ceiling will inevitably make the product more attractive to consumers (Walkom, 2023). The reduced supply, paired with increased demand will result in product shortages (Riley, 2022). The problem with price controls, Dr. Michael von Massow a food economist and associate professor at the University of Guelph, posits, is that this approach takes money out of the system without replacing it (2022). In a free market economy, which continuously strives towards equilibrium, forces of supply and demand will correct the imbalance, resulting in product shortages, as described above. If the money isn't replaced through a subsidy from the government, price controls do not bring about a sustained cost relief for the consumers (Von Massow, 2022). In other words, food price controls alone in the free-market context are not sufficient in effectively reducing the costs of food items. Government subsidies, as described in a later section, might prove to be a more promising approach to supporting food access.

2.2.Limiting food profits

Participants suggested the government put a cap on the excess profits of the big grocers. In economics, this represents a revenue cap regulation that seeks to limit the amount of revenue that can be earned by a firm, particularly with no or few other competitors (Kenton, 2022). As we have seen, the food retail industry in Canada, described by high market concentration and limited competition, whereby a few large corporations are controlling the market, fits the definition. Revenue cap regulation is common in industries that provide essential services, such as gas, water and electricity (Kenton, 2022). Governments, recognising the critical importance of these goods to the wellbeing of the population, utilize revenue cap regulation to ensure their affordability (Kenton, 2022). By comparing food with other essential goods, the research participants suggested applying a similar approach of regulating profits to food items.

Indeed, calls for a form of a revenue cap – a windfall profit tax, have been gaining in popularity in the past year. The tax was one of the thirteen recommendations of the report by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food made to the House of Commons, titled "Grocery affordability: Examining rising food costs in Canada" as part of an investigation into the rising cost of food in Canada (Labbé, 2023). While some are supporting the windfall tax on excess corporate profits, others are contesting the accusations of profiteering in the first place (Labbé, 2023). Even the release of the highly anticipated Market Study on Competition in Canada's Grocery Sector reporting "modest but meaningful margins" was not able to put the debate to rest (Competition Bureau of Canada, 2023). Some commentators interpreted the results as confirming excess profits, intensifying the calls for taxation to deter corporate profiteering (Cochrane, 2023). Others are ready to put the 'greedflation' myth to rest, referencing the lack of evidence found in the report (Littler, 2023). Of course, such a difference in opinions may be attributed to the professional affiliations of the authors: D.T. Cochrane is an economist advocating for progressive tax reform, while Karl Littler is senior vice-president for public affairs at Retail Council of Canada. The Bureau acknowledges that based on the limited data and information provided to the Bureau by the grocery corporations, they were limited in the conclusions they were able to make regarding the corporate profits (Competition Bureau of Canada, 2023). The Bureau called for additional analysis that would help better understand grocers' profitability (Competition Bureau of Canada, 2023). Despite the inconclusive findings on the extent of the profit margins of the largest grocery giants, the Bureau's main conclusion was that in order to lower food prices, Canada's grocery sector needs more competition (Competition Bureau of Canada, 2023). The report calls for the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to encourage the growth of independent grocers and the entry of international grocers into the Canadian market.

2.3.Ensuring price transparency

Recognizing the complexity of the global food retail sector and acknowledging the many factors at play in determining the end price, including production costs, suppliers' costs, market demand, competition, and profit incentive, the research participants highlighted the importance of price transparency. Even if understanding the factors that influence the food costs will not, in itself, make food any more affordable, it will help contribute to improving people's trust in the food system. Research by Dalhousie University's Agri-Food Analytics Lab supports this finding, reporting that 44.2% of Canadians expect more transparency, which is believed to be a key to rebuilding trust between grocers and consumers (Canadian Grocer Staff, 2023). The report on grocery affordability, prepared by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

highlights the need to increase transparency in the grocery sector (Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, 2023). The committee recommends the federal government collect and make the data public on the costs accumulated through the food supply chain, from farms to processing and retail sales that contribute to the final cost passed on to the end consumer (Labbe, 2023). Despite some reservations (Labbe, 2023), the government appears to be taking decisive steps towards ensuring price transparency. Following the series of meetings with the CEOs of Canada's largest grocery chains, the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry announced plans to improve the availability and accessibility of data on food prices and the cost breakdown throughout the Canadian agri-food supply chain ("Minister Champagne reports on the initial commitments from the five largest grocers to stabilize food prices," 2023). Building on existing data collection efforts, the plan includes a launch (through government-industry partnership) of a food price data hub to share existing data and new research on the food prices in Canada ("Minister Champagne reports on the initial commitments from the five largest grocers to stabilize food prices," 2023). The plan also aims to accelerate the establishment of a Grocery Code of Conduct that will further support fairness and transparency across the industry ("Minister Champagne reports on the initial commitments from the five largest grocers to stabilize food prices," 2023). The highly anticipated code that promised to provide more certainty, stability and transparency, which will help bring down food costs, ultimately benefiting all Canadians was ready to launch in the fall of 2023 (O'Neil, 2023). However, the progress on adopting the Code of Conduct came to a stalemate as Loblaws and Walmart expressed their unwillingness to sign the document, citing concerns over the potential impact of the code on costs for Canadian consumers (Saba, 2023). Without the full participation of all major grocers, however, the implementation of the Code will not only fail to deliver on its promises but will pose a risk of creating unintended consequences by creating an uneven playing field and competitive disadvantage (Saba, 2023). Industry leaders are now turning to the federal government to ensure industry's full participation (Saba, 2023). Time will tell whether the government and the industry will be able to come to an agreement on such a promising opportunity to ensure price transparency for Canadian consumers.

2.4.Income supports and universal basic income

Increasing incomes is another way to ensure food affordability. The research participants highlighted the importance of increased income supports to improving food access and improving food security. These findings are consistent with the dominant academic discourse that sees food insecurity as a money problem and calls for social policies aimed at improving financial circumstances of lower-income households (Ionescu-Ittu, Glymour & Kaufman, 2014; McIntyre et al., 2016; Brown & Tarasuk, 2019; Men et al., 2021). Federal income transfer programs, including the public pension system and child benefits were found to have a positive effect on reducing food insecurity (Men et al., 2021). The Canadian federal pension system is widely acknowledged as one of Canada's major social policy success stories (McIntyre et al., 2016). After the Old Age Security (OAS) was introduced, the poverty rates among seniors dropped substantially, which led to a sharp decline in the rates of food insecurity among the senior population (McIntyre et al., 2016). Provincial income support programs, including increase in minimum wage, increased social assistance rates and childcare support were also associated with lower odds of experiencing food insecurity (Men et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the existing patchwork of social federal and provincial support programs is quite complex and often challenging to navigate (Forget, 2020). Strict eligibility requirements, means-testing and

clawbacks are not contributing to the feelings of safety and security these programs are intended to create.

The research participants mentioned the universal basic income (UBI) as a way to provide a social safety net for all. Universally available, UBI is a no-strings-attached cash transfer that establishes an income floor and eliminates the risk of falling into poverty (Forget, 2020). The amount of the guaranteed income is typically set at a level that ensures that every person has enough to cover their basic needs, such as food, housing, and healthcare (Forget, 2020). While UBI appears to be a radical idea, Canada is not a stranger to basic income. The UBI pilot project was introduced in Manitoba in the 1970s and demonstrated that such a policy significantly improves the lives of people living in poverty (Tomchuk, 2022). The more recent basic income pilot project in Ontario, despite being cancelled by the Conservative government 10 months after its launch in 2017, showed that basic income works: people were getting better food, stayed longer in school, upgraded their education, got better-paying jobs, launched their business, while their physical and mental health improved (Forget, 2020). A recently published University of British Columbia basic income study also confirmed that unconditional cash transfer works, despite the public perceptions and biases (Dwyer et al., 2023). Over the course of the study, 50 individuals experiencing homelessness in Vancouver received a one-time unconditional cash transfer of $7,500 and were followed for a year (Dwyer et al., 2023). Compared to the control group, cash recipients spent 99 fewer days homeless, increased their savings, increased their working hours, and reduced reliance on other social services, generated societal net savings of $777 each (Dwyer et al., 2023). Contrary to the public biases, they did not spend more money on tempting goods, like drugs or alcohol (Dwyer et al., 2023).

The research participants drew parallels between the Canadian pension system and basic income. Indeed, they do share a number of similarities, including their universality, meaning these programs are accessible to all Canadians, without the need to meet strict eligibility requirements (McIntyre et al., 2016). Most recently, the success of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) introduced by the federal government to provide an immediate economic relief to those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, made a strong case for UBI as a promising policy tool for addressing economic, and, as a result, food insecurity, in the long run (Olive, 2021). The momentum is building, and recently, there has been some decisive progress in the basic income movement in Canada: Prince Edward Island running a basic income pilot project, provinces actively encouraging the federal government to collaborate on the basic income policy for Canada, and Bill S233 - National Framework for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income Act is being considered in the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance (S. Regehr, January 22, 2024, Tamarack Institute webinar).

People are struggling, and there is urgency for a decisive government action to support income security through robust income policy. We find ourselves in a polycrisis – a convergence of multiple crises, including housing, affordability, mental health, climate change, and, of course, food insecurity, that carry significant and devastating social costs (E. Forget, January 22, 2024, Tamarack Institute webinar). While income insecurity feeds all of those intersecting crises, income security, on the other hand, allows people to be a part of the solution (E. Forget, January 22, 2024, Tamarack Institute webinar).

2.5. Investing in food security

In addition to demonstrating a strong commitment to supporting food access through tempering food costs and improving incomes, participants called for the government to play a

more decisive role in supporting immediate food access by increasing investment in food security initiatives. Viewed through a public health lens, participants make a case for increased investment in supporting food security, including through providing food subsidies for lower-income individuals.

The research participants view the issue of food insecurity as a public health issue, consistent with the dominant literature that highlights the devastating effects of food insecurity on the health of the population. Food insecurity is found to be associated with a number of negative health effects, including increased risk of diabetes (Gucciardi et al., 2009), cardiovascular disease (Fowokan et al., 2018), elevated risk of mental illness (Martin et al., 2016), and mortality rates (Gundersen et al., 2018; Men et al., 2020). The research participants posit that investing in food security will have a trickle-down effect on the public health outcomes: targeting the root cause of many health issues at the source will result in significant cost savings for the public health system in the long run. Indeed, all levels of government recognize food security as an important social determinant of health. Health Canada (the department of the Government of Canada responsible for national health policy) acknowledges that household food insecurity is a key predictor of unhealthy eating and an important determinant of health ("Household food insecurity in Canada: Overview," n.d.). Health Canada developed tools to measure and monitor household food insecurity in Canada ("Household food insecurity in Canada: Overview," n.d.). The BC Government recognizes food insecurity as a key public health issue and includes it as one of the core public health programs, aligned with the Healthy Living and Healthy Communities goal of the BC's Guiding Framework for Public Health ("Food security," n.d.). The City of Vancouver includes "Feeding ourselves well" as one of the goals of the Healthy City Strategy aimed at supporting the well-being of the City and its people ("Healthy City Strategy," n.d.). With the vision of a healthy, just, and sustainable food system, the Healthy City Strategy food security goal is focused on increasing citywide and neighbourhood food assets ("Feeding ourselves well," n.d.). However, despite such substantial statements on the importance of food security for the health and well-being of the population, public investments in supporting immediate food security often miss the mark.

Despite the universal consensus on the need for income supports as a way to address food insecurity (Tarasuk, Fafard St-Germain, & Loopstra, 2019; Li, Dachner & Tarasuk, 2016; Brown & Tarasuk, 2019; Men et al., 2021, Deaton & Scholz, 2022), governments fail to explicitly connect income policy with addressing the root cause of food insecurity. While long-term income policy solutions are necessary to bring about transformative change, acute food security needs of the population require immediate intervention, therefore balancing "transformation" with the "next meal" (Vibert et al., 2022). Since emergency food provision will remain a critical need in our communities, we must consider the most efficient and dignified way to get food to people who need it.

The default approach to investing in direct food provision still appears to take the form of funding charity models of food distribution, most notably food banks. Food banks, as intended, are an appropriate response to acute food insecurity during emergencies. This was the case with the Emergency Food Security Fund that allowed the Government of Canada to invest a total of $330 million over the course of 2020-2021 to support food banks and other national food rescue organizations to help improve access to food for people experiencing food insecurity in Canada due to the COVID-19 pandemic ("Emergency Food Security Fund," n.d.). While the food banks' networks are highly efficient operations, making them an ideal as an emergency response measure, they have been criticized as creating unnecessary barriers to access for participants,

lacking choice and agency, ignoring differing cultural and dietary preferences, and significantly impacting feelings of dignity (Kim & Enckevort, 2020). A number of alternative community-centered models of food provision have emerged. Rooted in the principles of food justice, they aim to overcome some of the gross critiques of a food charity model (Tarasuk, 2001; Yan & Sutherland, 2019). The government is starting to recognise the importance of these community food hubs, as evident by the BC Government's support as part of the "historic" investment of $200 million in supporting a broad range of food security initiatives throughout the province ("Historic investment in food security supports British Columbians," 2023). However, these programs are resource-intensive, requiring significant staff and volunteer power to transport, sort and distribute food. The research participants are suggesting a more efficient and dignified model of supporting the acute food security needs of the population.

Drawing parallels with other basic necessities, such as housing and transportation, participants suggested the governments subsidize the cost of food for community members in need through gift cards or food vouchers. From the economic perspective, food subsidy represents a form of price control, whereby certain products will be priced at lower costs and made available to those who qualify for subsidies, while the government subsidy will re-inject the money back in the system to correct the disequilibrium in the context of the free-market economy that strives for balance. In the United States, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is the largest federal nutrition assistance program that helps eligible low-income individuals and families afford nutritious food ("Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)," n.d.). SNAP provides benefits to eligible low-income individuals and families via an Electronic Benefits Transfer card, which can be used like a debit card at authorized retail food stores to purchase eligible food items, including fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy products, bread, and non-alcoholic beverages ("SNAP," n.d.). The Government of BC is investing in the BC Farmers' Markets Nutritional Coupon Program - a healthy eating initiative that provides market coupons to lower-income families, pregnant people, and seniors (BC Ministry of Health, 2023). In 2022, the BC government invested $12 million to support over 10,000 households (BC Ministry of Health, 2023). While the Nutritional Coupon Program represents a form of subsidy and provides healthy, fresh, local, and seasonal food in a dignified way to community members experiencing food insecurity, unfortunately, spaces for the coupon program are limited and most community partners are at capacity. A petition has been put forward to the House of Commons, encouraging the Government of Canada to create a national nutrition coupon program fund that will strengthen and grow all provincial and territorial farmers' markets nutrition coupon programs across Canada to help meet the demand (Cantafio, 2023). Such an initiative could be a step in the right direction in providing food to people who need it in an efficient and dignified way.

2.6. Universal school food programs

One of the participants, a single mother of two, spoke about the importance and opportunities to supporting food security through provision of the universal school food program. The participant described the challenges of ensuring that her kids eat a healthy diet while away from home, exacerbated by feelings of exclusion and shame. The Single Mothers' Alliance (SMA), a collective of woman-identifying and gender-diverse lone caregivers advocating for policy solutions to end lone caregiver family poverty in BC produced a report, titled *A Universal School Food System for BC* sharing the results of the research and making a case for the universal school food program (Single Mothers' Alliance, 2022). Caregivers

surveyed in the report share about their similar experience of stigma and shame associated both with the inability to provide healthy school meals for their children, or accessing food supports for low-income families (Single Mothers' Alliance, 2022). The research participant strongly believes that free food programs in schools will not only provide direct benefits to children, but also a significant relief for parents. Likewise, the SMA report posits that the universal school food program can address a range of personal, financial, and social needs of families by providing stigma-free access to healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food to children regardless of their family's income and status (Single Mothers' Alliance, 2022).

Citing the disparities between school food program delivery in the Eastside vs the Westside of Vancouver due to the perceptions of socio-economic status, the participant underscored the need for the universality of school food programs, which should be available to all families who need them, regardless of their geographical location or the general socio-economic status of the population. The City of Vancouver supports school meal programs through the Vancouver School Board and other community partners through a limited number of School Food Grants ("School food grants," n.d.). Understandably, such a competitive process does not allow for equal access to school food programs. The existing school food programs in Canada, funded by provinces, territories, municipalities, charities, communities, families, schools, or the private sector, may be run at a classroom, school or school district scale - the piecemeal funding and disparities in school food programming do not meet the needs of all students (Stepkina, 2022).

Canada ranks 37th out of 41 countries when it comes to providing healthy school food for children and remains the only G7 country without a federally funded or regulated national school food program (Coalition for Healthy School Food, n.d.). The momentum is building for a Canada-wide universal school food program. The Coalition for Healthy School Food advocates for the creation of a universal cost-shared school food program for Canada, that would see all K-12 students having daily access to healthy meals at school (Coalition for Healthy School Food, n.d.). In 2020, the Vancouver City Council endorsed advocacy work of the Coalition for Healthy School Food by passing a motion demonstrating its strong support for the universal school food program for Canada (Stepkina, 2022). The research participant firmly believes that supporting kids' wellbeing through school food programs should be a government priority. And it appears that the Government of Canada is taking decisive steps towards building a National School Food Policy. As the recently released *National School Food Policy Engagements – What We Heard Report* shows overwhelming support for a National School Food Policy, the Government of Canada is committing to working with Indigenous partners, provinces and territories and stakeholders on the development of the policy that can pave the way for the universal school food program for Canada (2023).

3. Mobilizing a people's movement

Just as during the focused group discussion, the research participants felt encouraged by coming together to share their struggles and offer ideas for change, they saw hope in mobilizing a real people's movement towards a radical collective action to move these ideas forward. Frustrated with injustice, in the face of overwhelming structural forces, the research participants saw the only hope in coming together to demand change. Participants suggested building an organized movement by increasing people power, developing capacity, building coalitions, and raising awareness.

3.1. Taking radical collective action

Participants, disappointed with the lack of government inaction, feeling betrayed by the system and outraged by the loss of power they experience in the face of blatant injustice, are ready to resort to a radical action to bring about transformative change. While a full-scale revolution might not be a feasible or the most effective prospect, the research participants suggested a tangible and viable idea for a direct action – a buy-nothing week. Acknowledging that the corporations rely on the end consumers to keep the wheels of commerce spinning, the participants proposed reclaiming their power by dropping out of the system and exercising collective agency to take away what corporations are pursuing the most – dollars. To make a perceptible impact, however, such a direct-action initiative requires a significant collective effort.

3.2. Increasing people power

Uniting and coming together were the consistent themes as an antidote to injustice and helplessness and a path toward meaningful change. The research participants also acknowledged their lived experience of food insecurity as a source of power: by speaking their truth, they are able to shed light on the dire state of the issue while pointing towards solutions. However, some participants noted the potential risks of sharing the truth with those resistant to change. Coming together and "power-in-numbers" were acknowledged as a way to avoid potential risks.

The concept of power ran as a consistent throughline in the focused group discussion: corporate power, loss of personal power, people power, and it is worth a closer examination. Power, defined in simple terms, is the ability to influence the outcome in the direction you want it to go (A. Reimer, Lecture at the United Way Public Policy Institute, March, 2023). Andrea Reimer, a former City of Vancouver Councillor and a current Adjunct Professor at UBC's School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, describes the types of power, based on the seminal work of French and Raven's (1959) as applicable to the public policy sphere. When the research participants shared that they often feel powerless, they speak of the formal power - positional, reward and coercive, which is usually exclusively reserved for the governments and corporations and community cannot access (A. Reimer, Lecture at the United Way Public Policy Institute, March, 2023). However, there exist informal power that ordinary citizens do possess, can tap into and grow, and which cannot be taken away (A. Reimer, Lecture at the United Way Public Policy Institute, March, 2023). Reimer describes referent and expert power, and power of the powerless that accurately capture the types of power the research participants were alluding to when discussing the hopeful agenda for change (A. Reimer, Lecture at the United Way Public Policy Institute, March, 2023). Referent power is the power of numbers, networks and relationships; expert power stems from the knowledge and skills people possess, including valuable lived experience and community knowledge; and the power of the powerless refers to sharing the truth and speaking truth to (formal, coercive) power (A. Reimer, Lecture at the United Way Public Policy Institute, March, 2023). The research participants emphasized the importance of coming together (referent power), speaking their truth (power of the powerless) and bringing diverse skills and knowledge (expert power) to make change happen.

3.3. Developing capacity to organize

While inspired by the prospect of growing a people's movement towards taking a collective action, the research participants underscored the importance of developing skills and capacity, particularly in community organizing. Organizing is defined as leadership that enables people to turn the resources they have into the power they need to make the change they want

(Sinnott & Gibbs, 2014). This definition of community organizing describes the very process proposed by the research participants, and echoes the fundamental tenets of community development, whereby ordinary citizens tap into community strengths to achieve the outcomes they envision. Community organizing is a promising tool to bring about change, yet it does require knowledge and concerted effort. Marshall Ganz is the Rita E. Hauser Senior Lecturer in Leadership, Organizing, and Civil Society at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a leading voice on community organizing, credited with developing an organizing strategy that contributed to Barack Obama's win in the 2008 U.S. presidential election ("Marshall Ganz", n.d.). Building on his experience and community organizing best practices, Ganz developed an approach to grassroots community organizing, based on key practices: telling stories, building relationships, structuring teams, strategizing, and taking action (Sinnott & Gibbs, 2014). It is critical that community members are supported in building knowledge and developing capacity in these key areas. While this organizing framework is a helpful theory, Ganz (2006) reminds us that organizing is also a practice, which requires learning from the experience of acting, which, in turn, requires the courage to take risks – and it is the deep care and commitment to the cause that gives people the courage to act.

3.4.Building coalitions: Role of the non-profit sector

Participants identified the non-profit sector as playing an important role in lending support to the people's movement. The non-profit sector is in service of community, attuned to and representative of community's interests, and holds trusting relationships with the community members. Naturally, participants see the non-profit sector as a viable ally to help advance their cause. Participants suggested tapping into the resources and networks of community-serving organizations to help support community's efforts in addressing the issue that impacts them. One participant proposed exploring the role the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of BC (ANHBC), and in particular, Kits House can play in supporting the community's organizing efforts. Neighbourhood Houses (NHs) are unique social service organizations: beyond creating a welcoming space and providing direct services and supports to meet the individual needs of the population, NHs also strive to empower community members to address the collective needs of the neighbourhood (Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia (ANHBC), n.d). Combining services, community building and social change activities, neighbourhood houses aim to support the community's participation in the decision-making affecting individuals' lives and the community as a whole (ANHBC, n.d.). Kits House's new strategic plan 2022-2025 has seen a renewed commitment to supporting community-led efforts, particularly around food insecurity – the issue that has gained prominence and urgency in the past few years in the community (T. Chan, personal communication, December 2022).

3.5.Raising awareness and the art of dialogue

The research participants acknowledged that raising awareness around food insecurity will help increase the support for the cause and bring more people to join the collective action. Currently, participants observed, there is a lack of consciousness and understanding around the issue of food insecurity in the Westside. This is particularly true for the segment of the population who do not have the first-hand lived experience of food insecurity and do not realize its prevalence in the community and the severe impacts on their neighbours. However, participants remarked that there is often apathy, or even resistance to understanding different points of view, which results in inaction. The research participants noted that the traditional, top-

down methods of raising awareness are not effective in influencing public opinion, and called for the need to find innovative ways to change people's mindsets by meeting people where they are. Finally, participants highlighted the critical importance of civil dialogue to build a shared understanding and solidarity.

Raising awareness, indeed, is the first step in building a people's movement towards collective action. It is only when people care enough about an issue are they motivated to act on it. In *ABCD: When people care enough to act*, a practical guide on community organizing through the Asset-Based Community Development approach, Green et al. (2006) posit that it is care that brings people together towards a common cause and motivates them to take action. To inspire care, mere facts, reason, and logic (which are the basis of the traditional top-down awareness raising techniques, mentioned by the participants) are not enough. It is by appealing to people's hearts and emotions that we are able to move them to care and act. And there is nothing more effective to touch people's hearts and evoke emotions than human stories. The human brain is hard-wired for storytelling: concrete, personal human stories are much more powerful than facts and figures in inspiring emotions (Rutkowski, Lecture at the United Way Public Policy Institute, March, 2023). Whether it is empathy, compassion and hope, or anger and outrage – these strong emotions are what inspires people to care and motivates them to act.

Art is another powerful medium that evokes emotions and moves to action. Wyman (2023) highlights the role of arts and culture in reviving compassion in our society and restoring a sense of a common purpose. Art derives its power in its ability to persuade without preaching Wyman (2023) - exactly that "subliminal" way of raising awareness that one of the research participants alluded to. All forms of art, including visual arts, theater, dance, are able to translate a complex social issue into a vivid, personal and relatable narrative. Wyman sites David Suzuki, who posits that "reason and facts alone no longer suffice to move people and society to action" (p. 117 in Wyman, 2023). Moreover, engaging with art breaks the moulds of the individualistic experience: the arts and culture allow people to come together to share a moving experience even if they see the world in radically different ways, it helps us identify with one another and expand our notion of the shared struggles (Eliasson, 2016). Arts-based forms of engagement and awareness-raising must be incorporated in the organizing efforts.

As suggested by participants, civic dialogue is integral to building solidarity. In *Dialogue and the art of thinking together,* Isaacs (1999) conceptualizes dialogue as a shared inquiry that involves suspending assumptions and listening deeply to build a shared understanding. The author highlights the significance of suspending assumptions, which requires individuals to be open-minded and willing to question their preconceived notions (Isaacs, 1999). The dialogue process must be inclusive of diverse voices and experiences. Finally, Isaacs (1999) emphasizes the role of a skilled facilitator, to create a safe space, communicate principles and values, and supports participants in navigating tensions and conflicts. As a result, the art of dialogue has the potential to shift mindsets and lead to innovative solutions (Isaacs, 1999).

4. Shifting mindsets

Finally, the research participants emphasized the need to shift our mindsets – the set of core beliefs or mental models that shape how we make sense of the world. These mental models or paradigms play a critical role in systems change theories. Systems thinking pioneer Donella Meadows (1999), as well as the contemporary systems thinking and social innovation scholars John Kania, Mark Kramer and Peter Senge (2018), give critical importance to the potential of shifting mindsets to bring about transformative change. According to Meadows (1999),

paradigms are the very foundations of the systems: these shared social agreements on the nature of reality give rise to the goals and rules of a system. Changing mental models poses a direct challenge to the power structures that have defined, imposed, and perpetuated those models in the first place (Kania et al., 2018). Understandably, shifting paradigms is not an easy feat. Meadows (1999) suggests a few strategies: exposing anomalies and failings of the old paradigms, acting from the new one, while inserting people with the new paradigms as change agents in places of power. To radically change the system and redefine its goals, the research participants proposed a number of mindset shifts: from food as a commodity to food as a human right; from scarcity to abundance and from individualism to community care.

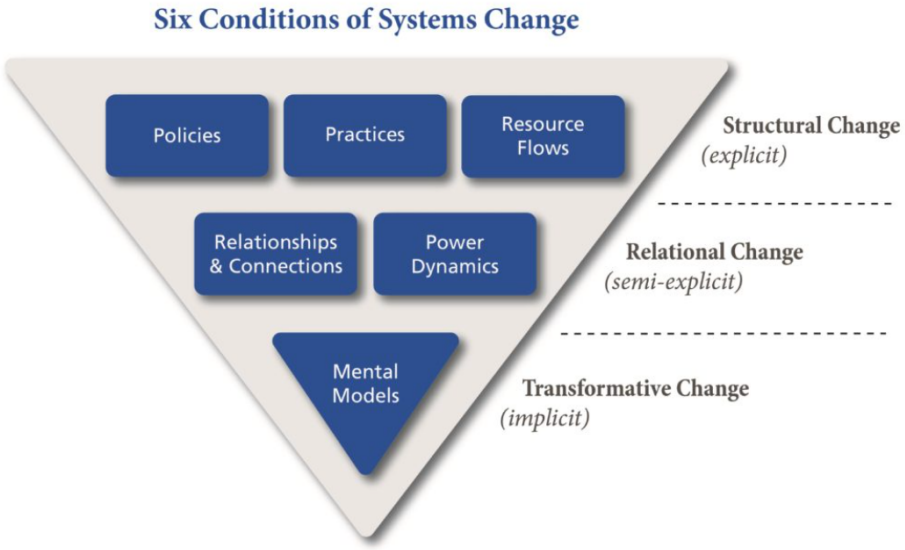

Figure 9. Six conditions of systems change. Kania et al., 2018.

4.1.From food as a commodity to food as a human right

To radically change the way in which we approach addressing the issue of food insecurity, the research participants called for shifting our conception of food as a commodity to food as a human right. Participants assert that the very essence of food democracy rests on the understanding of food as a right, guaranteed to all people. Currently, food is being treated as a commodity, whereby the value of food is determined by the market price (Vivero-Pol, 2017). In the capitalist economy, the food-commodity is the means to maximize profit. The profit maximization goal of the current system privileges those with greater purchasing power while creating barriers to access for those who are unable to pay the market price. Considering food as a human right, on the other hand, creates a very different system: instead of pursuing profit, the food-as-a-right system strives to ensure that everyone has equitable access to healthy and nutritious food.

Food as a human right was first recognized in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and in 1966, *the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* enshrined the right to food as an integral part of the right to an adequate standard of living (OHCHR, 2010). The right to food requires States to respect and protect the right to food, including against violations by third parties (OHCHR, 2010). In addition, the Covenant also

stipulates the obligation of states to fulfill the right to food that incorporates both an obligation to facilitate and an obligation to provide (OHCHR, 2010). These obligations include the responsibility to: pro-actively engage in activities intended to strengthen people's food security and to provide the right directly when an individual is unable, for reasons beyond their control, to enjoy the right to adequate food by the means at their disposal ("About the right to food and human rights," n.d.). One of the common misconceptions is that the right to food equates with a right to be fed, which presumes that the Governments are obliged to hand out free food to anyone who needs it (OHCHR, 2010). Instead, the right to food is the right to feed oneself in dignity, whereby individuals are expected to meet their own needs, through their own efforts and using their own resources (OHCHR, 2010). Critically, one of the key elements of the right to food is accessibility, including food affordability, whereby individuals must be able to access adequate food without compromising on other basic needs, such as housing or medication (the research clearly demonstrated that the opposite is true for the participants) (OHCHR, n.d.). To be able to do this, a person must have access to resources, whether land to grow food or money to purchase it – and the States are required to provide an enabling environment in which people can utilize their full potential to produce or procure adequate food in a dignified way (OHCHR, 2010). Only when a person, for reasons beyond their control, is unable to secure their own food, is the State required to provide food directly through food assistance or ensuring social safety (OHCHR, 2010). Lack of meaningful employment opportunities, low wages, high cost of food and other basic necessities, and weak social security programs are hardly the "enabling environment" to enjoy of the right to food. An argument can be made that the current state, described by the research participants, who are unable to gain access to adequate food resources due to forces beyond their control, should oblige the government to provide the right to food directly.

There are some heated debates on the state's role in securing the fulfillment of positive rights, including the right to housing, food, and education (David, 2014). Unlike negative rights – rights to be protected *from* something, positive rights presuppose rights *to* something (Taylor, 2023). Or, put another way, "rights that shield you from threats versus rights that grant you what you need" (Taylor, 2023, p.58). The positive conception of rights is premised on an active understanding of the state's role, which obligates governments "to act, whether by providing services, money or other benefits" in order to fulfill those rights (David, 2014, p.41).

Currently 29 countries give explicit protection of the right to adequate food through constitutional recognition, including Belarus, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, and Philippines ("The right to food around the globe," n.d.). The Constitution of Canada does not contain provisions related to the right to adequate food ("The right to food around the globe," n.d.). In 2012, then-UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter visited Canada over a growing concern over food insecurity in one of the wealthiest countries in the world and to examine the way in which the right to food is being realized in Canada ("The right to food," n.d.). De Schutter concluded that Canada was not meeting its international human rights obligations and made a number of recommendations (De Schutter, 2012). The recommendations include the need to formulate a comprehensive rights-based national food strategy, delineating the responsibilities of the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments, as well as revision of social assistance levels to correspond to the cost of basic necessities (De Schutter, 2012). In response, the Canadian government issued a statement challenging the Special Rapporteur's recommendations ("The right to food," n.d.). The Government of Canada is working on launching the *Food Policy for Canada*, aimed at increased integration and coordination of food-related policies and programs toward a better food system for all, where all people are able to

access a sufficient amount of safe, nutritious, and culturally diverse food ("The Food Policy for Canada," n.d.). The right to food is not mentioned in the development of the *Food Policy for Canada.*

While political debates continue and the governments show their resistance to embracing the right-based approach to addressing food insecurity, the public need not wait to shift the mindset to treating food as a human right. Adopting the mindset of food as a right will reaffirm the inherent dignity of every individual and their right to have access to adequate food, be free from hunger and enjoy a fulfilling life. Treating food as an innate right for all, as opposed to a privilege of a few, emphasizes its natural abundance, as opposed to manufactured scarcity. It fosters a sense of solidarity and collective responsibility to ensure that everyone is able to enjoy their right to food.

4.2.From scarcity to abundance

The next paradigm shift that the research participants called for was moving from a mindset of scarcity to abundance. The mindset of scarcity, participants noted, is at the root of the capitalistic food system. The modern economy, by definition, is a science of managing limited resources, while increasing one's utility. It is no wonder that such a scarcity-based system perpetuates greed and competition, like participants noted; as economic actors, motivated by the enlightened self-interest race to the bottom in this zero-sum game. As participants highlighted, food insecurity is characterized by manufactured scarcity amidst plenty. Indeed, scarcity is the precondition for the economic behaviour in a capitalist system. In *Sacred economics: Money, gift and society in the age of transition,* Charles Eisenstein (2011) makes a case for the artificiality of the scarcity we experience. This is made possible, he posits, through turning something that was once abundant in the context of free exchange and community care into an object of commerce in the context of the market economy, with childcare being a good example (Eisenstein, 2011). "When everything is subject to money, then the scarcity of money makes everything scarce, including the basis of human life and happiness" (Eisenstein, 2011, p. 30). The illusion of scarcity also has a devastating effect on the people betrayed by the system: unable to get ahead, no matter what they do, they come to see life in terms of lack, which often results in greed, competition and hoarding.

Likewise, the dominant institutional approach to addressing pressing social issues, including food insecurity, is rooted in the scarcity mindset, whereby community members are seen as clients with needs to be addressed, as opposed to capable community members with gifts to contribute (Russell, 2020). Such a scarcity-based approach is disempowering and oppressive: institutions often see themselves as experts tasked with providing services to clients in need. Oftentimes, assumptions are made, and labels are assigned, which is short-sighted, focused on addressing immediate and acute needs. While critical, such an approach fails to lead to sustainable outcomes.

Nevertheless, participants remark, there is richness to be found – by shifting our focus to the abundance around us, we may find new ways of addressing our struggles. A strengths-based approach is rooted in the mindset of abundance. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is an example of the strengths-based approach. In contrast to the needs-based models, ABCD focuses on the assets of the community, including gifts, skills, knowledge and experience of community members (McKnight & Block, 2010). While acknowledging the needs and limitations, ABCD emphasizes identifying and leveraging the assets that communities already possess (McKnight & Block, 2010). This, in turn, empowers communities to take ownership of

their development processes: community members transform from passive recipients of services to active participants in their own development (Russell, 2020).

Adopting an abundance mindset and applying strength-based models of development in the context of food security can be truly transformative, both on programs and policy level. The mindset of abundance, by its very nature, is the mindset of possibility: instead of focusing on the current grim state of affairs and narrow, reactive, short-term fixes, it creates room to envision a brighter future, which, in turn, brings forward creative, sustainable and long-term solutions. The abundance mindset encourages generosity and collaboration: there is enough for everyone! It supports community empowerment by valuing diverse contributions and creating meaningful opportunities for everyone to share their gifts.

4.3. From individualism to community care

Finally, participants highlighted, we must move away from the paradigm of individualism towards the mindset of community care. To begin addressing food insecurity, research participants posit, we must recognize our shared struggles and rediscover our commonalities, since we all need food for our very survival. Unfortunately, the prevalent mindset in the modern Western society is one of hyper-individualism, born out of neoliberal ideas aimed to support a capitalistic, free-market economy. Neoliberalism places a high value on individual freedom, autonomy, and personal responsibility (Monbiot, 2016). According to the neoliberal logic, each person is responsible for securing one's own wellbeing, which usually happens through the marketplace. The commercialization of community care leaves us "helplessly independent" – the term Charles Eisenstein (2011, p. 78) coins in *Sacred Economics*: "independent of anyone we know, and dependent on impersonal, coercive institutions that govern from afar." Community care and support, once freely exchanged through the networks of reciprocity, have now transitioned to the realm of transactional service delivery - "caring neighbours" are now replaced by "salaried strangers" (Russell, 2020, p.2). Such a reliance on the market to solve all our problems creates an illusion of control, which further reduces the need for interdependence, while, in reality, it makes us more vulnerable. In every pre-agricultural society, susceptible to the external environment, humans owed their very survival to the dense web of social connections and the vast number of reciprocal relations (Hari, 2018). The urban environment severs human connections with nature, creating a false sense of control and protection, while perpetuating individualism. That is why disasters are characterized by "great social solidarity, generosity and self-sacrifice" (Alexander, 2007, p. 97): they serve as powerful reminders of the supremacy of nature and our shared humanity (Solnit, 2016). Humans, like many other species, are innately social, reciprocating, and interdependent (Raworth, 2017). The very term "mutual aid" comes from 19th-century anarchist Peter Kropotkin, who observed animals united against common struggle in the Siberian wilderness: "In the long run, the practice of solidarity proves much more advantageous to the species than the development of individuals endowed with predatory inclinations" (Arnold, 2020). Yet, the free-market economy has us convinced that it is the enlightened self-interest that is the path to survival and to a bright future.

In *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible,* Eisenstein (2013) argues that the modern society is rooted in the mindset, or a story, of Separation, whereby humans are viewed as disconnected, autonomous entities, separate from each other and from nature. By seeing the world through the lens of separation, humans prioritize their own self-interest, often at the expense of the collective wellbeing, which, in turn, perpetuates inequality, injustice, and environmental degradation (Eisenstein, 2013). A story of Interbeing, on the other hand,

recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans among themselves and with nature (Eisenstein, 2013). Transformation and healing will happen when we embrace this alternative paradigm (Eisenstein, 2013). The Indigenous worldview that the research participants spoke about, embraces the story of Interbeing: it centers relationships and focuses on "mutual benefit between all the humans, the non-humans, the unborn generations and our Earth Mother" (Goodchild, 2021, p.99). Ife (2016) calls this an expansion of the self to include the other, as one's wellbeing is intimately connected to the well-being of others and the natural world (Ife, 2016). Goodchild posits that "a mindset of connection rather than separation allows us to access our deepest capacities for unconditional love," which gives hope for the much-needed change (2021, p.84).

The question, of course, is how do we make the shift from individualism to community care? How do we rebuild trust and reciprocity? How do we bring back empathy and compassion? While the source of generalized trust is still the basis of much debate, research suggests that civic engagement and participation in community activities, especially those that provide interaction with people of diverse social backgrounds, work to strengthen norms of reciprocity (Macias & Williams, 2016). Eisenstein (2013) suggests that it is through acts of service and solidarity, that we will be able to co-create a more beautiful caring world, rooted in empathy and compassion. To begin, we must recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every individual and acknowledge our common struggle. As the research participants expressed, *It is a collective problem, and we need a collective solution.*

Community Empowerment: Engaging Equity-denied Groups in a Democratic Process

The primary purpose of this research study was to explore the potential of the CBPAR methods of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as tools for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. In order to analyze the efficacy of these methods, it is important to explicitly identify the criteria that contribute to supporting public participation in democratic processes.

To bridge the gap of democratic participation, whereby citizens feel far removed from the issues at hand, authors universally call for creating low-barrier local opportunities for participation, where citizens can exercise their power and observe the more immediate impacts of their actions (Pitkin, 2004; Merkel, 2014; Ife, 2016; Russell, 2020; Santos & Avritzer, 2005). The CBPAR methodology, by definition, and the selected methods of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion in particular, represent a place-based, hyper-local opportunity for participation. The research participants were investigating the issue of importance in the context of their own neighbourhood - Vancouver's Westside, which was the chosen locale of the research inquiry.

In order to create meaningful spaces for engagement, it is critical to center the conversation on the issues of importance to the community. More often than not, the issues of importance are the ones that have a direct impact on the community members. Not only does it help inspire commitment to the process, but it may also lead to more democratic processes and more just outcomes. A number of authors speak to the importance of centering voices of community members directly affected by the issues at hand (Johnson, 2015; Moscrop & Warren, 2016; Levac & Wiebe, 2020). And including diverse people, knowledge systems and forms of evidence in the decision-making process may lead to more just policy outcomes (Levac & Wiebe, 2020). One of the criteria for participation in this research study focused on discussing

the issue of food insecurity, was lived experience. As a result, all the research participants deemed the topic important as it had a direct impact on their lives.

While general public participation is in crisis, equity-denied groups experience additional barriers to participation, most prominently, material inequalities, including those related to income, education, food security, flexibility of time, and access to childcare (Johnson, 2015; Moscrop & Warren, 2016; Levac & Wiebe, 2020). In order to support participation of equity-denied groups, it is imperative to create intentional spaces for engagement that would remove or minimize these structural barriers. The current research study was intentionally designed to help reduce barriers to participation. The research sessions were held at a convenient central location during after-work hours. Participants were provided with meals at each session, as well as offered honoraria for their time and contributions. Participants with children were invited to bring their kids to the sessions: a child-play area was set up with kid-friendly activities, while children were supervised by registered Kits House volunteers. The research participants were also offered other accommodations on a case-by-case basis, including a modified sign-up process and oral consent. By meeting people where they are, such intentional efforts to minimize barriers allowed creation of equitable opportunities for meaningful participation.

Supporting participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in a democratic process, by definition, pursues the ultimate goal of giving back power to the people, or community empowerment. Empowerment refers to practices of bringing people into positions of agency to articulate their concerns (Bornemann &Weiland, 2019). Community empowerment is often discussed as a critical prerequisite to the democratic process - democracy and empowerment are thus linked by the concept of political power (Bornemann &Weiland, 2019). Community empowerment pursues emancipatory goals through development of informal counter-power ('power to') that liberates individuals from the domination ('power over') by the formal power structures (Bornemann &Weiland, 2019). This echoes earlier discussion on the importance of growing informal power (expert, referent, and power of the powerless) as a resistance to the dominant forces of formal control (A. Reimer, Lecture at the United Way Public Policy Institute, March 2023). Throughout the research study, by engaging in the participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion, participants were growing their informal power. By coming together, the research participants strengthened their referent power, by sharing their lived experience and speaking their truth, they tapped into power of the powerless, and finally, by bringing together diverse skills and knowledge, and exchanging information, participants increased their expert power. Many participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to come together around a topic of a shared concern, exchange ideas and information – in other words, they found the research process, in itself, to be a valuable and empowering experience. Over the course of the group discussion, participants shared ideas and suggestions on other ways to grow the informal power, including building coalitions and a collective movement (referent power), raising awareness (power of the powerless), and developing capacity (expert power). The research process, in itself, is a mere point of departure - in order to fully realize the potential of the CBPAR methods of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as tools for empowerment and engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process, the research recommendations must be implemented in practice.

To further analyze the efficacy of the community-based participatory methods in supporting meaningful participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in a democratic process, let us refer to the goals of the research, based on the CBPAR methodology outlined earlier, as well as lean into the normative framework for food democracy, proposed by

Hassanein (2008). The distinct features of the CBPAR methods: participation, research and action, closely align with the goals of the current research: community empowerment, knowledge co-creation and agenda for social change. While these goals are not necessarily linear, a case can be made that the process of co-creating knowledge and developing an agenda for social change are prerequisites for community empowerment, and, thus, a critical prerequisite to the democratic process, as described earlier. By utilizing the normative framework for meaningful participation, proposed by Hassanein (2008), to assess the democratic quality of local food initiatives, the knowledge co-creation and action orientation also come to the fore as critical elements. Food democracy, according to this framework, must be based on a collective action, which enables people to gain knowledge about the food system, share ideas about the food system with others, develop efficacy with respect to the food system and acquire an orientation toward community good (Hassanein, 2008). Analyzed through this framework, the research process effectively activated food democracy, and, as a result, supported community empowerment, through knowledge co-creation and collective action. Participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion enabled research participants to gain knowledge, share ideas and develop efficacy with respect to the food system (knowledge co-production), and supported the acquisition of an orientation toward the community good through collective action (action orientation). While the very process of participating in the research supported knowledge co-production and action orientation, the resultant findings of the research also focused on ways to increase knowledge and to take action, including improving information on available food assets and mobilizing radical collective action. Viewed through the lens of the principles of the CBPAR methodology and the normative framework of food democracy by supporting knowledge co-production and collective action, the CBPAR methods of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion demonstrate their promising potential as tools for empowerment and engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. However, once again, to maximize the benefit of these methods, the research recommendations must be applied in practice.

So far, the discussion on supporting participation of equity-denied groups in democratic processes, as well as the main focus of this research study, was upholding the right to speak of equity-denied community members directly affected by an issue. However, it is important to acknowledge that the right to speak does not necessarily translate into the right to be heard – according to Dreher (2017), voices that are not heard or recognised cannot fully achieve the promise of meaningful democratic participation. Only when both the right to speak and the right to be heard are meaningfully and equally honoured, is when the promise of democracy will be fulfilled (Dobson, 2014). Dreher (2017) highlights listening as a key intervention to addressing the crisis of modern democracies by shifting power imbalances between those who speak and those who listen, as listening and the withholding of listening can be viewed as exercises of power in themselves (Dobson, 2014). Listening shifts the focus from access for the marginalised voices to the responsibilities of those in power to engaging in listening practices (Dreher, 2017). In other words, in addition to creating opportunities for the marginalized voices to speak, the responsibility must be shared by setting the conditions for the privileged ears to hear. Just as ‘voice’ has been used as the key metaphor for democratic participation and citizenship, 'listening' must be recognized as a set of practices that embody agency (Dreher, 2017). It is important not to view ‘listening’ as a passive practice, but rather as an active engagement and a form of agency (Dreher, 2017).

Key characteristics of political listening include receptivity, openness, attention, engagement, and recognition (Bickford, 1996). The receptivity characteristic of political listening requires relinquishing of control and embracing the possibility of persuasion or change (Bickford, 1996; Dreher, 2017). This form of 'radical' or 'deep' listening creates space for the listener's views and opinions to be challenged and changed (Dreher, 2017). The main goal of radical listening is to come to a shared understanding rather than reach a consensus (Dobson, 2014; Moore, 2018). Instead of seeking to overcome difference, this dialogic approach aims to maintain connection and engagement (Dreher, 2017). Goodchild refers to 'generative listening' - the Indigenous view on listening and dialogue, which is described as the sacred space that enables a mindset of connection rather than separation (2021, p.87). One must enter this space, detached from one's own mental models with the intention that one may no longer be the same person before (Goodchild, 2021).

Such political, radical, deep listening can have a profound impact on strengthening democracy by reducing polarization, empowering marginalized communities and building shared understanding. This approach to listening, through receptivity and radical openness to being exposed to difference, may lead to greater shared understanding and less polarized political viewpoints (Eveland et al., 2023). In turn, being listened to helps build trust, and encourages vulnerability and honesty (Eveland et al., 2023). Since there is an immense power in being listened to (Dobson, 2014), radical listening holds emancipatory potential by creating a public realm where plurality of voices and ways of knowing can be heard and recognized (Bickford, 1996; Thill, 2018). Together, listening and being listened to holds the potential of normalizing differences, reducing polarization, empowering marginalized voices, building shared understanding and orientation towards the common good.

Political listening is described as 'a complex art' that calls for 'flexibility, curiosity, patience and a little vulnerability' (Coles, 2004, p.685). More critically, such an approach requires taking responsibility for listening, relinquishing control, and embracing the possibility of changing one's own perspectives (Dreher, 2017). Such a set of requirements, however, may appear next to impossible for those in power, who are firmly entrenched in their own agenda with a strong grip on the status quo. As we cannot rely on the individual capacity (or willingness) of an individual listener, Dobson (2014) argues for structuring the political encounters in particular ways to ensure consistent, reliable and effective listening. First, Dobson (2014) distinguishes cataphatic and apophatic listening: the former occurs when the listener interprets what is being said through the lens of their own view, opinions and categories, while the latter lets go, as far as possible, of their own assumptions and allows the words they are hearing speak for themselves. Apophatic listening represents true radical listening, as we observed in the earlier discussion, characterised by a high degree of openness and receptivity. Dobson (2014) argues that deliberative methods of public decision making is a promising pathway towards institutionalizing radical listening. Deliberative methods, such as citizen assemblies, consensus conferences and participatory budgeting support fair and competent debate, where the government is ceding a degree of power by exposing itself to the possibility of a decision it might not favour (Dobson, 2014).

Chapter 7: Conclusion

"The medium is food, but the theme is democracy."
Hamilton, 2004, p. 15

Neighbourhood Food Democracy: Participatory Food Asset Mapping in Vancouver's Westside was inspired by some big questions we, as a society are grappling with in these current times of increased uncertainty. How do we, as a society, address the most pressing and complex issues of our time? How do we stand against inequity and injustice, when the status quo is only serving a privileged few, while the rest are left to bear the devastating consequences? Do ordinary people have any say in influencing their life circumstances? Can those most impacted make a difference in the face of overwhelming power?

This research study is a fitting vignette to begin to consider potential pathways for supporting participation of equity-denied groups in addressing the issue that directly impacts them. The research topic, food insecurity, represents a complex systemic issue that has a devastating population impact, yet seemingly no one-size-fits-all solution. The modern-day food system is highly influenced by big corporations, wielding their concentrated power, while governments adopt the conventional neoliberal laissez-faire approach. Ordinary people, especially those most impacted by the failings of the food system, have no say in its governance. Food democracy aims to support regaining of the democratic control of the food system and enable its transformation by promoting active citizen participation in the decision-making processes on the issues that affect them.

This thesis proposed the conceptual framework of neighbourhood food democracy as an approach to advancing participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in a democratic process of addressing the complex issue that directly impacts them. The conceptual framework underpinning this study rests on theories of community development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Ife, 2016; Meade et al., 2016), participatory democracy (Pitkin, 2004; Johnson, 2015; Moscrop & Warren, 2016) and policy justice (Levac &Wiebe, 2020) as applied to addressing a complex issue - food insecurity, set in a neighbourhood context. The research adopted a Community-Based Participatory Action Research methodology to create low-barrier opportunities for participation of equity-denied groups in a democratic deliberation on a complex issue that affects their lives. CBPAR aims to shift power dynamics between the researcher and the community by involving community members throughout the research process, starting with the research design.

The purpose of this research was to explore the potential of CBPAR methods: participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as tools for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. The goal of the chosen methods was to serve as a vehicle of neighbourhood food democracy, and work to support research objectives of community empowerment, knowledge co-creation and setting an agenda for social change. This research study engaged community members with lived experience of food insecurity in mapping valuable food assets in the Westside, identifying neighbourhood food priorities, including values and barriers to local food access, as well as considering contributing systemic factors (knowledge co-creation) and creating recommendations to the community, non-profit and public sectors to help improve local food access (agenda for social change). This research also explored the potential of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as a tool for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process (community empowerment).

In identifying neighbourhood food priorities, research participants considered both values and barriers to local food access, as well as contributing systemic factors. Not surprisingly, the main identified value was the affordability of food, followed by physical access, including proximity and ease of transportation. Research participants attached a high degree of importance to food quality and freshness – the value that, due to economic constraints, they are often forced to compromise on. Finally, and above all, dignity and choice were the essential factors participants considered when accessing food assets. Dignity ranks so high on the priority continuum of values, that in the direst circumstances, people would choose to preserve their dignity, even if it means going hungry. This should serve as an important reminder that providing food is not enough - dignity and choice must be at the core when it comes to food access. The identified barriers to accessing local food assets included high food costs and unaffordability, limited choice, and either lack of local free and low-cost food resources, or lack of information, inaccessibility, bureaucracy, and stigma associated with those supports that are available. Acknowledging that the process of navigating the trade-offs between values and barriers of local food assets is a reflection of a larger structural economic, political, and social context, participants uncovered a number of systemic factors which, they believe, are at the root of creating barriers to food access. These factors include corporate control of the food system, economic inequity and social disparities, governance failures, as well as apathy and lack of civic engagement.

The research participants expressed collective feelings of despair and suffering they experience in the face of the injustice they are confronted with on a daily basis when accessing food assets in the Westside. Whether stemming from structural barriers to food access or deep-rooted systemic barriers, the experience of navigating local food assets while balancing other essential needs, is fraught with frustration and hopelessness. Despite their best efforts, it appears impossible for participants to get ahead. The feelings of despair and loss of control are amplified in the face of the climate crisis and its impact on an already vulnerable food system. These sentiments were particularly visible among senior participants, who share that they lost hope and became jaded when observing that change is not forthcoming despite their best efforts. Nevertheless, research participants found hope in the prospect of intergenerational collaborations: bringing together knowledge and experience of the senior population with the passion, enthusiasm, and energy of the youth. The research participants, grounded in the shared conviction in the power of people coming together, speaking their truth, and taking action, suggested strategies for change.

The research participants suggested strategies for the community, non-profit sector and the different levels of government that help support community food security by maximizing value, reducing barriers to food access, and addressing systemic factors. The recommended strategies included the following general categories: improving community food access, expanding government's role in supporting food access, mobilizing a people's movement, and shifting mindsets. To strengthen immediate community food access, research participants called for improving access to information on available food assets through diverse media, and a variety of community channels, with the support of non-profit organizations and the municipal government. In order to create and expand opportunities for cooperation and mutual support, participants suggested a number of food co-operative models: from food buying groups and bulk buy to food co-ops. Recognizing community fridges as a valuable community food asset, rooted in the dignified mutual aid approach, participants proposed to expand the community fridges network. Participants suggested getting local businesses involved in collaboration to support

community food security. Finally, to improve immediate food access, participants suggested supporting local food production by significantly expanding opportunities to grow food locally. The recommendations included: supporting community gardens and yard share and expanding food forests and boulevard food gardens. While in the current neoliberal context, the government's regulatory role to protect the right to food is virtually absent, the research participants repeatedly called for the government to play a more decisive role in food system governance by supporting food affordability. The research participants suggested a number of ways for the government to support food access: introducing price controls, limiting corporate food profits, ensuring price transparency, as well as providing income supports, including the Universal Basic Income. Beyond stabilizing costs and incomes, participants suggested the government invest in supporting community food security by providing food subsidies and universal school food programs. In addition to community, non-profit and government action, the research participants suggested mobilizing a people's movement towards a radical collective action by increasing people power, developing capacity, building coalitions, and raising awareness. Finally, recognizing the importance of collective consciousness, participants suggested a number of mindset shifts that promise a transformative change: from food as a commodity to food as a human right; from scarcity to abundance and from individualism to community care.

The research study aimed to explore the potential of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as tools for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. Based on the research design, chosen methodology and conceptual framework, the research study demonstrated its efficacy in supporting participation and empowerment of marginalized groups. The research process and outcomes, including knowledge co-creation and agenda for social change, further supported the goal of community empowerment. The relevance and importance of the topic to the research participants and intentional efforts to minimize barriers to participation created meaningful space for engagement.

By engaging in the participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion, participants grew their informal power. Through coming together, the research participants strengthened their referent power, by sharing their lived experience and speaking their truth, they tapped into power of the powerless, and finally, by bringing together diverse skills and knowledge, and exchanging information, participants increased their expert power. Finally, the chosen methodology of CBPAR with a focus on participation, research and action, is closely aligned with the goals of the research: community empowerment, knowledge co-creation and agenda for social change. Analysed through the normative food democracy framework, the research process effectively supported community empowerment, through knowledge co-creation and collective action. Participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion enabled research participants to gain knowledge, share ideas and develop efficacy with respect to the food system (knowledge co-production) and supported the acquisition of an orientation toward the community good through collective action (action orientation).

While the research validated the promise of CBPAR methods in supporting participation of equity-denied groups in a democratic process, there exists an opportunity to further expand our understanding of CBPAR methodology, community development theories and their practical applications through future CBPAR studies in activating neighbourhood food democracy. Future CBPAR research that creates meaningful opportunities for local participation, where community members, directly affected by the issue, can come together, grow their power and make their collective voice louder, may be an effective next step in strengthening neighbourhood food

democracy in a sustainable manner. In order to fully realize the potential of the participatory methods as tools of empowerment and engagement of equity-denied groups, the agenda for social change, proposed by the research participants must be implemented in practice.

Immediately, and most critically, there exists an incredible opportunity to build on the momentum and continue supporting active participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in mobilizing a people's movement. The existing institutional structures, including the Westside Food Collaborative and Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks, Kitsilano Neighbourhood House and the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of BC may serve as effective platforms to support community members' capacity to organize, raise awareness, increase their power, and take collective action on the issue that affects them. These non-profit partners may also help engage community members in lending their voice to existing municipal, provincial and federal political advocacy campaigns, calling for expansion of government's role in supporting food access by limiting food profits, investing in food security, introducing universal school food program, and providing income supports and universal basic income.

Local non-profits and the municipal government can play a decisive role in supporting community food access in the Westside by improving information on available food assets, creating opportunities for mutual support, and greatly expanding neighbourhood food growing opportunities in a coordinated fashion. In the long-term, a collaborative concerted effort that includes community members, non-profits and all levels of government is required to shift dominant mindsets from food as a commodity to food as a human right, from scarcity to abundance and from individualism to community care.

Research participants' contributions of personal stories, describing the impossible challenges and unsurmountable barriers to food access, have expanded my view on the issue of food insecurity as the inability to acquire food. Food insecurity, rooted in poverty, is more accurately understood through a food justice lens, that recognizes food as a right and aims to address structural barriers to food access, including issues of inequality and injustice that often go beyond the issues of the food system and include broader social and economic factors. Viewed through such lens, food insecurity cannot be effectively addressed through food-based solutions but must include a systemic approach targeting structural social, political, and economic inequities. Given the strong hold of corporate power highlighted throughout the research study, the concept of food sovereignty that emphasises the rights of communities to control their food systems, is critical to understanding the scope of the issue. Food sovereignty's resistance to corporate power, in turn, expands the scope of the issue outside of the food system and brings forth the importance of considering, once again, social, political, and economic systems.

While the research set out to tell a story of neighbourhood food democracy, food became a medium to the much larger conversation on systemic inequities and people power. As the research participants shared their feelings of anger, frustration, and despair in the face of overwhelming injustice, and as they found hope in coming together, growing collective power, and taking action, perhaps we can find inspiration for tackling other complex pressing issues of our time? This is a story of hope – of ordinary people deciding to influence their life circumstances, reclaiming their voice, and finding their power to make change, starting in their neighbourhood. This is a story of neighbourhood democracy.

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Appendix 1

Human Research Ethics Board's Certificate of Approval # 23-0085

University of Victoria

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	**Sarah Marie Wiebe** (Supervisor)	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER** Expedited review - delegated	**23-0085**
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT:	**Ksenia Stepkina** **Master's student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	27-Jun-2023
UVIC DEPARTMENT:	**Public Administration PADM**	APPROVED ON:	27-Jun-2023
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	26-Jun-2024

PROJECT TITLE: **Neighbourhood food democracy: Participatory food asset mapping in Vancouver's Westside**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: **None**

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING:
University of Victoria (UVIC), Kitsilano Neighbourhood House

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
23-0085_Stepkina_tcps2_core_certificate.pdf - 08-May-2023
23-0085_Proposed Research Questions.docx - 08-May-2023
23-0085_Neighbourhood Food Democracy_Withdrawal of Consent.docx - 09-May-2023
23-0085_Letter of Confirmation_Honorarium_KNH_Ksenia Stepkina.pdf - 09-May-2023
23-0085_Community Partner Letter of Research Permission.pdf - 16-Jun-2023
Neighbourhood Food Democracy_Poster Revised.pdf - 16-Jun-2023
Emotional Support Resources.pdf - 16-Jun-2023
23-0085_Neighbourhood Food Democracy_Consent Form_V2.docx - 18-Jun-2023

Conditions of approval

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Amendments
To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

Appendix 2

Research co-design

The final research questions are the product of co-design between the researcher – me, and the research participants– community members with lived experience of food insecurity. In this appendix, I share the original purpose, objectives, and research questions, initially suggested by the researcher, and describe how they evolved during the research co-design process.

Researcher-Proposed Purpose of the Research

The original purpose of the thesis was to explore the potential of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as a tool for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. The original purpose of the proposed research study was to engage community members with lived experience of food insecurity in mapping valuable food assets in the Westside, identifying values and barriers to local food access, and creating recommendations to municipal policy to help improve local food access.

Researcher-Proposed Research Objectives:

1. Identify neighbourhood food priorities in the Vancouver's Westside from the perspective of equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity (knowledge co-creation)

2. Generate a list of recommendations for municipal food policy in Vancouver, informed by people experiencing food insecurity in the Westside (agenda for social change)

3. Analyze the efficacy of the participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion to promote participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in a democratic process (community empowerment)

Researcher-Proposed Research Questions and Sub Questions

1. What are neighbourhood food priorities in the Vancouver's Westside from the perspective of equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity?
   - 1.1 What valuable neighbourhood food assets do community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity identify in Vancouver's Westside? Why?
   - 1.2 What barriers to accessing food assets do community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside experience? Why?
   - 1.3 What gaps in food access do community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity identify in Vancouver's Westside?
2. What are the evidence-based recommendations for municipal food policy in Vancouver?
   - 2.1 How can municipal food policy help support food assets, identified as valuable by community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside?
   - 2.2 How can municipal food policy help reduce barriers to access to food assets, identified by community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside?

2.3 How can municipal food policy help close the gaps in food access, identified by community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside?

3. How might participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion serve as a tool to promote participation of equity-denied groups in the process of development of evidence-based municipal food policy?
   3.1. How did participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion help contribute to promoting participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside in the process of development of evidence-based municipal food policy?

Co-creation and Co-Design

Participants for the research study were recruited through an open call advertisement through the Westside community channels, with the support of the WFC community partners. Participation was open to all residents of the Westside of legal age who self-identified experiencing or having experienced food insecurity. Three community members representing diverse identities and experiences, took part in the first research session, *Info Session and Research Design,* hosted on July 17, 2023, at Kitsilano Neighbourhood House. The researcher-proposed research purpose, goals and research questions were shared with the research participants, and they were invited to discuss and suggest changes or additions.

Participants agreed that it is important to know about the existing food assets, including such details as the location and the opening hours (Personal communication, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023). Participants, recognizing the challenges they face navigating the food system and the lack of stability they experience, were interested in knowing all the options available so they could adjust their plans, according to their changing needs (Personal communication, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023). Participants were particularly interested in considering barriers that create tension between availability and access (Personal communication, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023). One of the participants described the importance of considering barriers to access:

It's like having the asset [availability] doesn't mean you can access it [access]. Yeah, you have all this good food that's out there [availability] but you have all these barriers [access] – mostly cost, that stops you from getting the good stuff. And then you have all those other free low-cost food assets, but there are other barriers…

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023

Given the barriers community members experiencing food insecurity face in freely accessing available food assets, they must consider the tradeoffs in making decisions as they navigate local food access. Participants recognize the role of values in informing their choices. When (often or always!) finding themselves in need to compromise, it is values, or the degree of importance given to a particular factor, that help people make a decision that maximizes the benefit they receive. Participants agreed on the usefulness of surfacing values that guide them in navigating neighbourhood food assets (Personal communication, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023).

Participants acknowledged that the issue of local food access is situated within larger social, political, economic, and cultural systems. Beyond determining neighbourhood-specific

food priorities and examining local food assets, pertinent values and barriers, community members were interested in taking a critical look at the larger systemic and structural factors that contribute to the current conditions (Personal communication, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023).

Finally, and most crucially, participants were eager to discuss ways to take action that would help alleviate some of the challenges of local food access by increasing value and reducing barriers, as well as ideas to potentially address some of the deep-rooted structural issues (Personal communication, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023). While the original research questions proposed generating recommendations for municipal food policy, based on the research findings, participants were committed to consider all actors who might take action, including, themselves, which speaks to the very definition of food democracy!

I think we need everyone: what you as a person can do, what society can do, what communities can do, what the government can do. I think all are different and everyone does something different. But at the end of the day, it all connects because they all come together, but yeah, we need everyone.

Research Participant, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023

Notably, participants were keen to see the question of "what can be done" as a through-thread. Whether examining values and barriers to local food access in their neighbourhood, or considering systemic factors of global scale, it was important for community members to apply solutions-oriented inquiry throughout the conversation. While participants acknowledged that the research set out to pose some complex questions, they felt hopeful that by bringing together a diverse group of people, someone might have an idea that they did not think about, and, collectively, they would be able to find the answers (Personal communication, Kitsilano Neighborhood House, July 20, 2023).

Participant Co-Designed Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the thesis is to explore the potential of participatory food asset mapping and a focus group discussion as a tool for engagement of equity-denied groups in a democratic process. The research study aimed to engage community members with lived experience of food insecurity in mapping valuable food assets in the Westside, identifying values and barriers to local food access, considering contributing systemic factors and creating recommendations for community, the non-profit and public sectors to help improve local food access.

Participant Co-Designed Research Objectives:

4. Identify neighbourhood food priorities in the Vancouver's Westside from the perspective of equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity (knowledge co-creation)

5. Generate recommendations for community, the non-profit and public sectors in Vancouver, informed by people experiencing food insecurity in the Westside (agenda for social change)

6. Analyze the efficacy of the participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion to promote participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in a democratic process (community empowerment)

Participant co-designed research questions

- **Food assets, values, and barriers**
    - What valuable neighbourhood food assets do community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity identify in Vancouver's Westside?
    - What values related to accessing food assets in the Westside community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity identify as important?
    - What barriers to accessing food assets in Vancouver's Westside do community members from equity-denied groups with lived experience of food insecurity face?
- **Systemic factors that contribute to the current state of affairs**
    - What systemic or structural factors contribute to the current state of affairs?
- **Strategies for change: What to do about it?**
        - What can we do?
        - What can community do?
        - What can non-profits do?
        - What can governments do?
- **Participation of equity-denied groups in a democratic process**
    - How did participatory food asset mapping and focus group discussion help contribute to promoting participation of equity-denied groups experiencing food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside in a democratic process?

Between the first research session, *Info Session and Research Design* (July 17, 2023) and the main session, *Participatory Food Asset Mapping and Community Dialogue* (August 17, 2023), twelve more community members had joined the study. They were provided with an opportunity to review the research questions, co-designed during the first session and offer feedback. All new participants validated and were in support of the research questions.

Appendix 3

Neighbourhood Food Democracy **research recruitment poster**

Appendix 4

Meals and refreshments provided to the participants of the Neighbourhood Food Democracy research sessions. Photo credit: Ksenia Stepkina.

Appendix 5

List of free and low-cost emotional support resources shared with the research participants

Emotional Support Resources

310Mental Health Support
Call 310-6789 for emotional support, information and resources specific to mental health

1-800-SUICIDE
Call 1-800-784-2433 if you are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including thoughts of suicide

KUU-US Crisis Response Service
Call 1-800-588-8717 for culturally-aware crisis support for Indigenous peoples in B.C.

Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service
Call 1-800-663-1441 to find resources and support

REACH Medical Clinic
Offers free virtual counselling sessions covered by MSP. Call 604-216-3134

Wellness Together Canada
Access free counselling and support.
www.wellnesstogether.ca

Access and Assessment Centre (AAC)
Helps individuals and families access mental health and substance use services in Vancouver. Services include referral intake, on-site assessment, crisis intervention, and short-term treatment.
Walk-in: 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. 7 days a week
Phone availability: 7:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. 365 days a year
Phone: (604) 675-3700
Fax: (604) 675-3705
Address: Joseph & Rosalie Segal Family Health Centre 803 West 12th Avenue, Level 1

New Tides: Low Cost Counselling Program. Kitsilano.
1892 West Broadway #200
Low cost counselling and sliding scale counselling therapy with interns for a reduced rate, and are supervised by experienced Registered Clinical Counsellors. www.newtides.ca

Jewish Family Services
Offers counselling and therapy services on a sliding scale for the Jewish and broader community. Contact the JFS care line at 604-558-5719 or communitycare@www.jfsvancouver.ca.

WESTSIDE FOOD COLLABORATIVE

University of Victoria

KITSILANO Neighbourhood House

Appendix 6

Free and low-cost community food resources in the Westside. Westside Food Collaborative.

Appendix 7

Free and low-cost food map, the City of Vancouver.

Free and Low Cost Food Programs in Vancouver - Last updated November 10, 2023

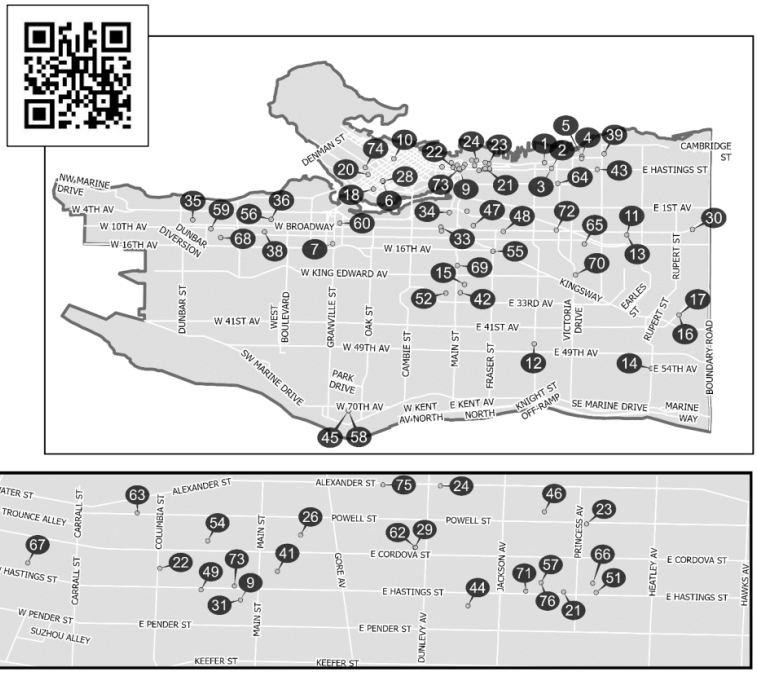
Unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and sel̓ilwətaɁɬ / səl̓ilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations

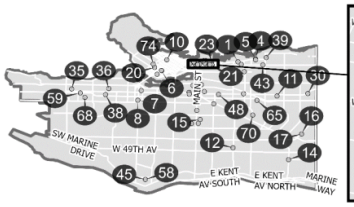
The City of Vancouver gratefully acknowledges the support provided by these programs, and recognizes that systemic change is required to address the root causes of food insecurity. For information on work towards a just and sustainable food system, please visit www.vancouver.ca/people-programs/food

CITY OF VANCOUVER

How to use this guide

- Access a PDF of this document or a map-based version by scanning the QR code on the right or visiting https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/free-and-low-cost-resources.aspx
- This guide is updated regularly but we recommend contacting organizations directly to verify the listings.
- Programs are numbered in alphabetical order based on the organization's name
- Unless otherwise stated, programs are open to anyone.
- A table showing days of the week each program operates on is on p.2. Full program details are listed on p.3 onward.
- To report errors or program changes, provide feedback, or add a program you operate, please contact foodpolicy@vancouver.ca





Appendix 8

The Westside Food Collaborative's business outreach campaign

We believe in the power of community coming together to help address the most pressing issues facing our neighbourhood and to improve the place we call home, together. **We are the Westside Food Collaborative (WFC)** - a neighbourhood food network based out of Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, comprised of non-profit organizations, grassroots groups, and individual community members working to address food insecurity and build a just and sustainable food system in the Westside. We raise public awareness around the issues of community food insecurity, coordinate efforts to build collective capacity to improve food access for the most vulnerable community members and form a unified voice to advocate for systems change. While Vancouver's Westside is typically thought of as an affluent neighbourhood, food insecurity is a real issue in our community!

Today we are reaching out to you, as a valuable member of our community, to invite you to join our collaborative effort to help address food insecurity in the Westside. Here is how you can make a difference:

Donate Surplus Food to Support Food Security Programs in the Westside

We are partnering with Vancouver Food Runners to offer a free and convenient way to donate your surplus food to benefit many food security programs in the Westside. Vancouver Food Runners (VFR) is a food recovery program, and a long-standing member of the Westside Food Collaborative. VFR launched in Spring 2020, and has already re-directed over 1.5 million pounds of food: simultaneously reducing food waste and mitigating hunger. VFR currently works with over 150 businesses in Vancouver, including Whole Foods, Safeway, Nature's Path, Purebread, Terra Breads, Fresh Prep, Tractor Foods, Grounds for Coffee, and many more.

All food donors are covered by the BC Food Donor Encouragement Act and VFR can provide detailed reports to help measure your impact, including pounds of food donated, CO_2 mitigated, and the community agencies supported. With over 400 registered volunteers in the Westside, VFR is able to offer convenient weekday and weekend donation pickups. Learn more about the program: Food Donor Basics and 2021 Impact Report. Your food donations can help support local food security initiatives, including Kitsilano Community Pantry and Fridge, Seniors Lunch at Kits House, food programs at Steeves Manor, Kits Cares Café and more – see more information below.

If you are interested in donating your surplus food to support community food security initiatives in the Westside, please, contact Ksenia, Community Food Developer at Westside Food Collaborative
ksenias@kitshouse.org

WESTSIDE FOOD COLLABORATIVE

Donate Funds to Support Food Security Programs in the Westside

While donating surplus food is a great way to directly support charitable food programs while reducing food waste, monetary donations are critical, especially for food providers in the Westside, who are struggle to meet the ever-increasing food security needs of our community. It is been demonstrated that monetary donations have a significant impact for organizations delivering food programs to vulnerable community members, by improving efficiency, contributing to higher purchasing power and increasing nutritional quality of the food. Your monetary donations can help support local food security initiatives, including Jewish Family Services, Westside Family Place, Farm-to-Plate Marketplace and more – see more information below.

If you are interested in making a monetary donation to support community food security initiatives in the Westside, please, contact Ksenia, Community Food Developer at Westside Food Collaborative ksenias@kitshouse.org

Join Westside Food Collaborative to Support Our Collective Efforts Towards Food Security in the Westside

If you are passionate about food security and believe in business as a force for good, we would like to invite you to join our network to contribute to our collaborative effort to addressing food insecurity and building a just and sustainable food system in the Westside.
Our members include food program providers, community organizations, grassroots community groups, and individual community members. We meet monthly to share resources and opportunities, collaborate on projects, form partnerships and continue a dialogue on ways to strengthen our local food system and support our community.
If you are interested in joining the conversation to support the collaborative effort, please, contact Ksenia, Community Food Developer at Westside Food Collaborative ksenias@kitshouse.org

Thank you for being an integral part of our community!

Kindly,
Ksenia Stepkina
Community Food Developer
Westside Food Collaborative

WESTSIDE FOOD COLLABORATIVE

KITSILANO Neighbourhood House