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## Pathways towards food sovereignty: Reconnecting individuals, food, nature and community in the inner city in Winnipeg, Manitoba

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### *Abstract*

This case study research documented 15 interviews with inner-city residents of Winnipeg, Canada, concerning their experience of food swamps and struggles for food sovereignty. Community members from diverse cultural backgrounds reported coming together to adopt practices towards food sovereignty in their urban environment of West Broadway, historically characterized with inadequate housing, crime and poverty. This community and community organizations like West Broadway Community Organization (WBCO) response to the lack of access to healthy food choices in their neighbourhood but also to build community and agency. The programs of WBCO include community gardens, Farmer's Markets, good food boxes and local farm field trips, which positively impacted the citizens of West Broadway. 'Community spirit' is forming in a community that only years earlier was known more for violence and crime. Many participants made positive comments about grassroots initiatives and advocated for more community gardens. WBCO is connecting people to grow, share and organize around food, as well as connect them with farmers and the food system to provide many elements of food sovereignty. However, to address food insecurity and health in West Broadway more needs to be done to provide better food infrastructure in boarding houses and local healthy grocery stores. Furthermore, action for food sovereignty requires more programming and organizing for community food planning.

Keywords: food justice, food sovereignty, food access, First Nations, European, Caribbean, newcomers, immigrants, community development, traditional knowledge, inner-city

### *Résumé*

Cette étude de cas a documenté 15 entrevues avec des résidents du centre-ville de Winnipeg, Canada, concernant leurs expériences des « déserts alimentaires » et les luttes pour la souveraineté alimentaire. Des membres de la communauté issus d'horizons culturels divers ont déclaré s'être rassemblés pour adopter des pratiques de souveraineté alimentaire dans leur environnement urbain, tel le quartier de West Broadway caractérisé par des logements inadéquats, la criminalité et la pauvreté. Cette communauté et les organismes communautaires comme West Broadway Community Organizations (WBCO) répondent au manque d'accès à des choix alimentaires sains dans leur quartier et contribue à bâtir la communauté. Les programmes de l'organisme WBCO inclus : des jardins communautaires, des marchés fermiers, de boîtes de nourriture saines, et des sortie agricoles locales. Ces activités ont un impact positif sur les citoyens de West Broadway. Un esprit communautaire est en train de se former dans une communauté qui, quelques années auparavant seulement, était davantage connus pour sa violence et sa criminalité. De nombreux participants ont fait des commentaires positifs sur les initiatives locales et ont plaidé pour plus de jardins communautaires.

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Grâce à l'organisme WCBO, celui-ci relie et organise les gens autour de la nourriture, ainsi que les connecter avec des agriculteurs et le système alimentaire. Cependant, pour lutter contre l'insécurité alimentaire et la santé à West Broadway, il faut faire davantage pour fournir une meilleure infrastructure alimentaire dans les maisons de pension et les épiceries locales saines. En outre, l'action pour la souveraineté alimentaire nécessite davantage de programmation et d'organisation pour la planification alimentaire communautaire.

Mots-clés: justice alimentaire, souveraineté alimentaire, accès à la nourriture, Premières Nations, Européen, Caraïbes, nouveau arrivants, immigrants, développement communautaire, savoir traditionnel, centre-ville, West Broadway, Winnipeg

## Introduction

How does food sovereignty interconnect with individual food and family social practices and grassroots community initiatives? Food sovereignty occurs when people produce healthy and culturally-appropriate food through ecologically sustainable methods, in food and agriculture systems they determined. But doesn't this happen at the national and global levels where food policy is made and not at the neighbourhood level? As food systems are planned at local, regional, as well as national and global levels, food sovereignty can occur at all levels. But how can people at the community level reclaim their decision-making power in their food system to embrace holistic and long-term food security (Wittman 2009)?

Food systems may be planned at all geographical scales but not necessarily planned by autonomous, sovereign people who are most affected by that system. Food systems and agriculture play a large role in the creation and development of the world capitalist economy that oppresses many. People often depend on the very same systems for food which oppress, disempower, and disengage them (Shiva 1988). However, marginalized people empower themselves by engaging with food systems beyond the corporate-driven one that often restricts their agency. Some marginalized communities purposefully disengage from oppressive systems as a form of resistance (Hayes 2010; Tursunova 2012; Tursunova 2013; Tursunova 2014). This study seeks to analyze how people in West Broadway resist corporate "food regimes", a term coined by Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael (Friedmann 2011; Friedmann and McMichael 1987).

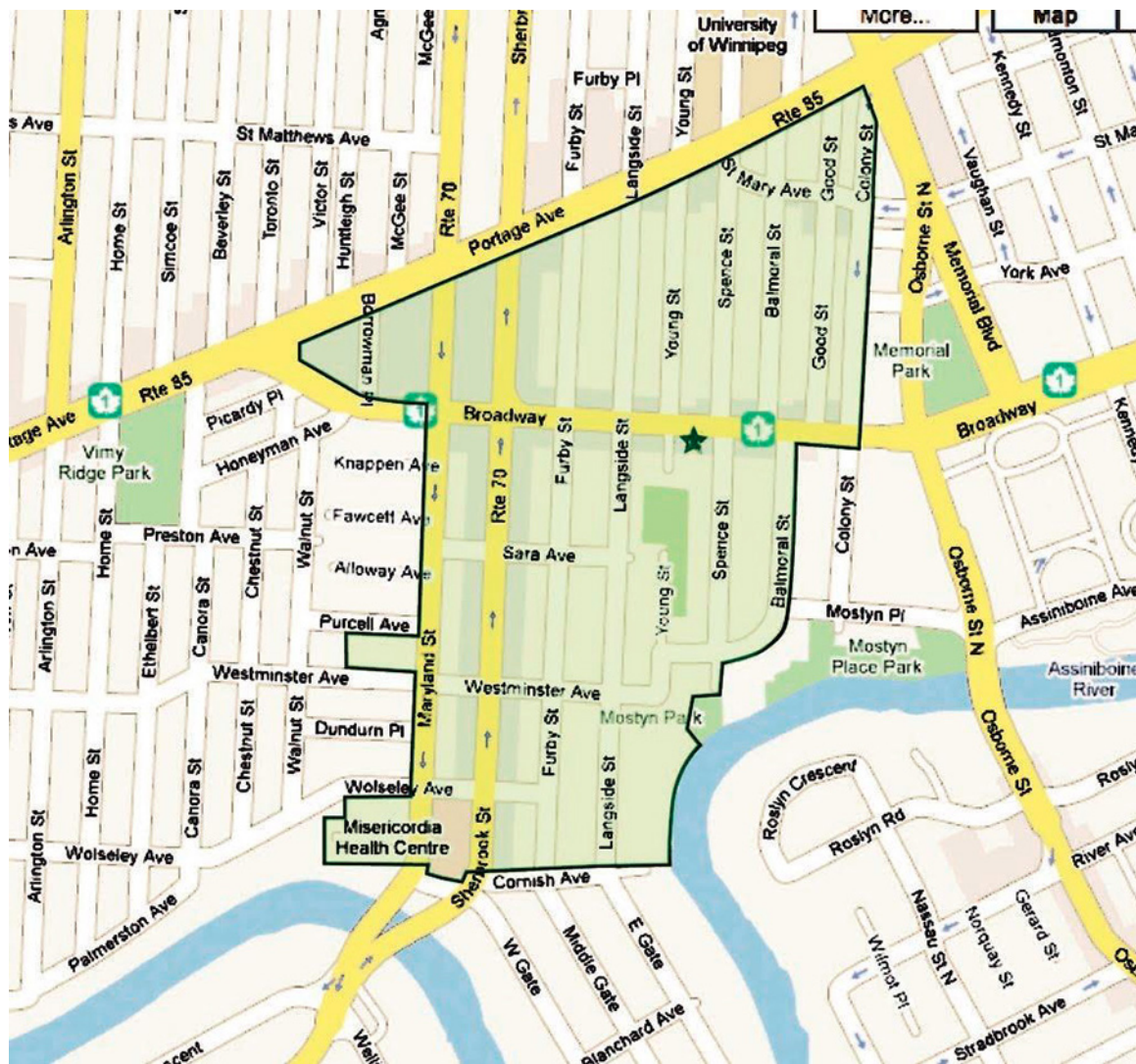
This article provides a case study of food sovereignty in a low-income neighbourhood in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Peoples' relationships to food is discussed and the impact of West Broadway Community Organization (WBCO) through the Good Food Club, cooking classes, and gardening initiatives. The paper first provides information about food and demographics in West Broadway. The theoretical framework of food justice and food sovereignty applied to urban environments is reviewed. Then the case study method is described before the findings, conclusion and recommendations are provided.

## Background

West Broadway is located in the downtown core of Winnipeg (Figure 1). The average household income of downtown residents is \$23,847, which is approximately one-third the income for the City of Winnipeg (\$63,023) with 11,000 people living in low-income households (Statistics Canada 2016). Other statistics show the economic poverty, including a high unemployment rate for people 25 years or older of 11%, almost three times higher than in Winnipeg (3.9%).

This economic poverty poses high risk for food insecurity and diet-related illness, which combines with food infrastructure poverty with limited nearby grocery stores with healthy food choices. The food assessment conducted by Food Matters in downtown Winnipeg revealed three key challenges, namely geographic food access; economic food access and lack of food skills and training related to healthy eating and nutrition. The residents living in downtown have higher rates of diabetes at 10.3% in comparison to the city average of 8.2%. For downtown residents, distance to grocery stores has risen by 50% since 2011. One thousand sixteen hundred downtown residents, students, workers spend about \$35 million on groceries annually; however, only 15–20% is spent in the downtown where they live (Food Matters Manitoba 2013).

West Broadway's historical, political, and socio-economic context explain the root causes of food insecurity in the neighborhood. Prior to the 1960s, West Broadway was a relatively high-income Winnipeg neighbourhood, with



**Figure 1**  
Location of West Broadway (in green)  
Source: Google Maps

multiple local gardens and grocery stores. When suburbs expanded on the outskirts of Winnipeg in the 1970s and 1980s, many of West Broadway's high and medium-income residents left to pursue a suburban lifestyle. This exodus shifted socio-economics towards lower-income residents taking residence here starting in the 1970, so that in 1981, the average household income was \$12,578, or roughly half that of \$23,208 for the rest of the city (Anderson, Butler, Chorney, Funk, Grant, Platt, and Skelton 2004). This trend continued so that in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, West Broadway experienced high crime rates, lack of resources, inadequate housing, job insecurity, poverty, and declining income among Indigenous people (Characterized West Broadway 2004). However, in the last decade West Broadway has moved towards gentrification, which make it unaffordable to the poor residents living there (Silver 2006). The budget of low-income community members is largely food and housing, with food often being compromised by spending too much on housing.

Food access declined in West Broadway following a similar trajectory. Independent food retailers fell from 47% to 33% in 1990s. The Canadian food trend was towards large and larger food retailers setting up shop in the suburbs, namely Loblaws, Sobeys, Metro, Safeway, Costco and then in 2006, Walmart entered the food business (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2007). Access to these corporate chains requires a personal vehicle, taxi, or public transportation. These shifts that aligned with global food regimes built on colonialism, industrialization, and neoliberal policies made healthy food difficult to access in West Broadway (McMichael 2009). West Broadway became dominated by fast-food chains and convenience stores (Shell, D's Market, Colony Food Market, Helen Grocery, and Korner Stop)

or small grocery stores (Food Fare and Pal's Supermarket) with high-priced processed low-nutrition food and few fruits and vegetables (Minaker 2016). A small number of specialty shops in West Broadway, such as a Halal Meat Market and Stella's Bakery, offer very costly healthy options, unaffordable to people living there. These "food swamp" characteristics of West Broadway reveal a significant barrier in achieving food justice. As Leia Minaker (2016) and Martine Balcaen and Joni Storie (2018) specify, food swamps are described as marginalized communities dominated by fast-food chains and/or convenience stores with processed low-nutrition food.

However, different grassroots movements fostered grocery co-operatives, community gardens, smaller stores, and chains to meet the needs of diverse communities in West Broadway. Community organizations such as West Broadway Community Organization (WBCO), Wolseley Place, Resource Assistance for Youth (RAY), Klinik on Broadway, and church driven initiatives, such as Agape Table, soup kitchens, and food banks, run initiatives to address food insecurity and food sovereignty. The WBCO works with residents, community-based organizations, businesses, government, and other partners to coordinate and support neighbourhood renewal and commitment toward the environmentally sustainable, social, and economic revitalization of the West Broadway neighbourhood (WBCO 2018). The WBCO implements programs such as community gardens, The Good Food Club, which offers fresh produce at reasonable prices as well as trips to the Wiens and Buys organic farms, community cafes, and skill-building workshops.

## Theoretical background

Two key concepts of food justice and food sovereignty are considered in this paper. Food justice strives to provide equal access to healthy food. Food access speaks to the ability to acquire and consume healthy food or food security. Food security is the physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet people's dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2012). Food justice is a movement of low-income communities and communities of colour that while harmed by the existing food system, are often dismissed by the dominant food movement narrative. Food injustice relates to broader political, economic, and cultural systems that often generate environmental degradation and racial and economic inequalities (Hope and Agyeman 2011).

Food justice considers the health implications of food insecurity as diet plays a critical role in the development, management, and prevention of diabetes and mental health issues such as depression, schizophrenia, Alzheimer disease, and related dementia (Muldoon, Duff, Fielden, and Anema 2013). Individuals with low income are likely to report heart disease, high blood pressure, and food allergies (Vozoris and Tarasuk 2003). People with mental health issues may experience social isolation, struggle with poverty, and food insecurity. The Community Food Centre in Toronto, Canada addresses the needs of individuals facing challenges to their mental health and well-being by providing community programs including: "Food, Family, Fun," "Men's Cooking Classes," and also "Shovel and Spoon," and "Boost". The critical elements in the community food centre are access to food, education and engagement, skills development, and building a sense of belonging and community (The Stop Community Centre 2004).

The term food sovereignty evolved as a response to unfair political and economic power structures ingrained in the food and agricultural sectors and food sovereignty and called for a radical transformation of food systems whereby food sovereignty is a prerequisite to food security. La Via Campesina, a global peasant movement, proposed the concept of food sovereignty at its second International Conference held on April 18–21, 1996 in Mexico. A foundational aspect of food sovereignty is food security (Shattuck, Schiavoni, and VanGelder). but also the right to food that incorporates the power relations of food with "a vision that aims to redress the abuse of the powerless by the powerful, wherever in the food system that abuse may happen" (Patel 2012).

Wiebe and Wipf (2011) found that Canada provides an interesting case study regarding food sovereignty due to its increasing food exports contrasting with distressing reports of escalating food bank use, food shortages, and food insecurity. Although these authors challenge us to look at the destruction that the food on our tables brings to communities, environments, farm families, and our physical and cultural health "to actively engage in the exploration of food sovereignty as a viable and sustainable, life-giving alternative." At the level of community this paper takes up that challenge in line with the local community level approaches of food sovereignty in practice named by Engler-Stringer who profiles community kitchens, collective kitchens, food hubs, farmers' markets and urban agriculture. By integrating food sovereignty principles into community nutrition practice and research, she concludes

that “the focus of our field will expand to include the systemic factors that lead to many of the nutritional health disparities we currently encounter” (Engler-Stringer 2012).

Similarly, Hansen considers the positive social, environmental and political goals of community gardens for food sovereignty and community gardens. Hansen using three community gardens in Saskatchewan as case studies, she finds that:

These urban spaces reconnect people to their sources of food and the natural environment, offer an empowering space for community building and participatory decision making, and spark personal politicization as a place of resistance to an industrialized and globalized food system (Hansen 2011).

Hansen (2011) concludes that community gardens “fit well within the food sovereignty framework of active participation, control over the food system and the right to produce”, and thus have the potential to be a strong player in the Canadian food sovereignty movement, particularly with respect to urban areas. Another aspect of practicing food sovereignty is connecting community food programming to build relationships and support systems. A study based on focus groups conducted in the North End of Winnipeg revealed significant relationships between nutrition, emotional well-being, food security, and community programming (Zurba, Islam, Smith, and Thompson 2012). The Youth for EcoAction (YEA) program in Winnipeg applies urban agriculture and community gardening work training involving at-risk youth with building skills, enhancing self-esteem, increasing environmental awareness, reducing food insecurity, and creating social networks to limit the affiliation with gangs and to deal with social issues constructively (Fulford 2012). Friedmann (2011) considers what food sovereignty requires of urban dwellers pointing to the need for supportive “relations between countryside and city, and between farmers and urban dwellers.”

Food sovereignty is based on six pillars for: ensuring people’s need for food, building of knowledge and skills, working with nature, valuing food providers, building self-sufficiency of food systems, and localizing control (La Via Campesina 1996). Another principle of food sovereignty is the ability to harvest, share, and consume “country foods” that are critical to Indigenous peoples’ culture and health (Power 2008; Morrison 2011; Dieterly 2015; Thompson, Gulruk, Ballard, Beardy, Islam, Lozeznik, and Wong 2011). A substantial number of studies document barriers for Indigenous communities to country foods and high food insecurity rates in northern Manitoba communities due to high transportation costs, and regulations that restrict sales of wild meat and fish caught by Treaty People (Fieldhouse and Thompson 2012; Thompson, Gulruk, Ballard, Beardy, Islam, Lozeznik, and Wong 2011).

For First Nations, studies found three essential aspects of food sovereignty are: 1) growing, harvesting, preparing and consuming food as a cultural ceremony, and, 2) cultural food as a critical connection to the land through reciprocity, and 3) relearning food sovereignty to deal with food insecurity (Cidro, Adekunle, Peters, and Martens 2015). Food sharing is important within family, friends, and community members of Fort Albany to address food insecurity issues, according to a case study. Revitalizing traditional food acquisition was linked to improved self-sufficiency, sustainability, and reduced dependence on imported food (Skinner, Hanning, Desjardins, and Tsuji 2013). Food practices and traditional knowledge are critical components of health and well-being that are vital in adapting to a changing socio-economic context. Indigenous food sovereignty considers food as sacred and a component of a web of relationship with the natural world that maintains culture and community (Food Secure Canada 2018).

The study aimed to understand the actions and pathways of community residents and community organizations towards food sovereignty.

## Methodology

Merriam (1998) offered direction for this case study research design and definition. There are two levels of sampling inherent in the design: first is the selection of the case to be studied due to its leadership in food programming and willingness of community group and members to work with students on exploring food sovereignty in the context of its programming; and, second is the sampling of the people by network sample.

The Principal Researcher, Zulfiya Tursunova, collaborated with the Women’s and Gender Studies program at the University of Manitoba (UM) and the WBCO to conduct 15 interviews. Nine students of the course, *Food Sovereignty, Gender, and Development* taught by Dr. Zulfiya Tursunova conducted nine semi-structured interviews with the residents of West Broadway recruited by the WBCO’s programming staff. Subsequently, two research assistants from the class conducted six additional interviews with participants who were recruited through word of mouth and

by speaking with people attending the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre. The interviews took place at the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre, in participants' houses, and public spaces in West Broadway such as restaurants and churches.

The 15 people chosen for interviews that were involved with either the WBCO programs (e.g., good food box, community gardens, etc.) or the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre and based on their interest in food sovereignty issues. The 15 interviewees filled out a demographic questionnaire stating their cultural background, education, age, gender, occupation, employment, and the number of individuals living in the participant's home. A semi-structured interview asked questions about food practices, food access and food sovereignty according to the community food assessment (CFA) survey. The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board approved the research. The participants signed a consent form and received \$30 honorarium. The CFA framework is a methodological tool which helps to assess household food security, food accessibility, availability, affordability, and community food systems (Cohen, Andrews, and Scott-Kantor 2002).

As dictated by Yin's (2002) rigorous data collection involved the use of multiple sources of evidence, the creation of a case study database, and the maintenance of a chain of evidence. Multiple data sources of data (interviews, notes, documents, observation, etc.) allowed the researchers to cover a broader range of issues, and to develop converging lines of inquiry by the process of triangulation. The data analysis had specific analytic techniques that included pattern-matching (finding patterns and building an explanation of these patterns) to identify codes and meaning (Stake 1995) of the activities and statements within the boundaries of the case.

In line with Stake, the role of the case study researcher was that of interpreter to build a clearer view of the phenomenon under study through explanation and descriptions, using "not only commonplace description, but 'thick description' to organize around complex, situated, problematic issues (Stake 1995, 102). We apply the approach of Stake to ground this case study in an interpretivist paradigm to make meaning of the findings within a bounded context. The researchers attempted to understand participants' perspectives and challenges that they experienced as well as the decisions they made regarding their food choices. The researchers used content analysis to code and identified the main themes that emerged from the transcribed interviews (Reinhartz and Davidmann 1992). Member checks with participants took place two months after the interviews were completed to obtain their feedback, clarify any misunderstandings in the data, and to check on the accuracy of information captured in the transcripts. All respondents are referred to with pseudonyms in the text.

Of the participants, six identified themselves as Aboriginal or Metis, seven of European descent (Dutch/German/Russian Mennonite, Scottish and Irish, English and French, and British), and one person as Scottish and African-American descent. One person preferred not to report their descent. The participants came from diverse educational backgrounds ranging from junior high attendance to graduate professional training. Ten participants

**Table 1**  
Socio-economic characteristics of participants

Cultural or ethnic background	Aboriginal or Metis – 6 respondents European descent (Dutch/German/Russian Mennonite, Scottish & Irish, English & French, and British) -7 respondents Scottish & African-American descent – 1 respondent Preferred not to report their descent – 1 respondent
Age:	from 21 to 71 years old
Gender:	Male: 5 respondents Female: 10 respondents
Occupational status	Part-time: 3 respondents Casual: 1 respondent Student: 2 respondents Medical leave: 3 respondents Stay-at-home parent: 3 respondents Unemployed: 2 respondents Preferred not to answer: 1 respondent

identified as female while the remaining five identified as male. Their age ranged from 21–71 years old. Three respondents were employed part-time, one had casual employment, two were students, three were on medical leave, three were stay-at-home parents, two were unemployed, and one preferred not to answer. The majority of participants lived with at least one person, and four participants lived alone.

## Results

Through the framework, semi-structured interviews and surveys helped us to examine a wide range of food issues and to assess West Broadway's community food resources. Four main themes surfaced throughout the interviews: 1) food practices, 2) feeding health and spirit, 3) food access, and 4) pathways towards food sovereignty.

### Food practices

Food was considered an integral part of culture, by bringing people together. All the participants touched on sharing food and connected food with special occasions. For example, some participants who grew up in Winnipeg described a typical Sunday dinner would consist of a meat source such as beef, chicken, ham, wild meat, or lamb along with potatoes and a vegetable, which they would refer to as “meat and potatoes.”

Indigenous participants recalled wild meat from big game hunting like deer, moose, and small game hunting such as ducks, geese, beaver, muskrat, partridge, fish (pickerel, jackfish, sturgeon). Shirley, who lived in the city her whole life, recalls her grandfather bringing home various wild meats he trapped and watching her grandmother prepare it. On the other hand, George grew up on what he refers to as the “trap lines...out in the bush [so he could] fish and hunt.”

The terms, “home-cooked meals” “traditional meals” and “meals made from scratch,” were typical of the way participants remembered meals in the past. The most discussed special meals revolved around events, such as naming ceremonies, Pow Wows, feasts, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and Chinese New Year. These meals involved a more substantial amount of food and far more preparation. Specific cultural dishes were cooked during these celebrations, including stew, bannock, dumplings, turkey, cabbage rolls, haggis, and homemade noodles. Mennonite borsht recipes were shared with beet leaves, farmer sausage, and potatoes garnished with cottage cheeses instead of sour cream. Perogies, a Ukrainian dish made of dough and filled with potatoes and spices, were hand-made. Desserts included shortbread, jams, and mousses.

The participants remembered childhood memories surrounding their personal and cultural connections to food growing up. The majority of the participants expressed a positive connection to food, noting that food was always present at a celebration. However, two interviewees relayed scarcity and inaccessibility in describing food. One participant recalled how their mother put a bike chain on the fridge, and another young person shared how her parents controlled food intake based on their normative assumptions of the ideal body image. The participants who were excited and eager to discuss their cultural connections to food recalled their childhood memories as nostalgic. Karla (pseudonym), identified the “very special” traditional Chinese food she misses:

I grew up in east China... Our main food is called jianbing, which is just like a ... paper. We cook like a paper. You use corn, wheat, and the wheat to do it. Or you can put some soy, soybeans .., like the flour to make a wrap. We wrap some vegetables, fruit (laughter), fish, or meat.

Karla reported that “special” Chinese food, such as moon pies and steamed dumplings, are hard to find and prepare. For some newly arrived immigrants, finding culturally appropriate food sources and utensils is difficult in a food system that often privileges “modern food.” Other participants, who were a second or third generation, knew where to find samosas and roti sheets, a traditional Caribbean bread, made out of flour, water, salt, and grainy cornmeal.

The interrelationship of culture, food, and memory enable people to connect to past experiences, senses, emotions, feelings, and embodied experiences (Sutton 2001). Almost all participants identified cooking influences from their mother. Many participants continued to cook similar foods that their mother prepared years before. Mary showed her gratification towards her mother for teaching her skills, saying, “I am appreciative that my mom did teach me the basics of you know, cooking and housework type stuff...” Another participant revealed that she “... learned healthful eating habits from her mother” and further, one participant exclaimed, “It was from the joy of watching [my] mother in the kitchen that [I] found [I] was so attracted to homemaking.” Many participants noted that they

subsequently modified cooking skills learned from their mothers using various sources such as on-line resources, recipes, and cooking classes. The respondents developed their food knowledge and skills across generational lines, which contributed to greater control of their food use and therefore, overall food sovereignty.

### Feeding health and spirit

The 15 respondents were asked about healthy eating and their health status in general compared to that when growing up. A majority of participants acknowledged that they used to eat healthier compared to now. Many of them used the phrases “fast food,” “junk food,” “packaged,” “processed food,” or “bachelor food” to indicate that they were no longer eating healthy. Their current food choices and practices had severe implications on participants’ holistic well-being, quality of life, and health outcomes. Seven reported that their health decreased, five said they are more healthy, and three believed their health remained the same. The seven participants who reported their health decreased included comments about eating more healthy when growing up or that the quality of their diet had significantly decreased. They defined healthy eating as eating traditional wild meat, vegetables, and having meals together as a family. Of the five participants who answered they were more healthy than when growing up, two reported having a wider variety of vegetables offered and cooking more culturally diverse dishes but others attributed reasons other than food for their improved health. For example, one participant who had food allergies and “wheat” sensitivities found herself eating healthier, less processed food. Another person with “stomach problems” changed from a heavily processed diet to a more healthful diet. Similarly, a participant with Crohn’s Disease increased his consumption of fruit and vegetables under a new diet regime.

A few non-Indigenous participants stated that they have healthier choices than in their childhood. Some appraised making homemade yogurt, bread, and hummus from scratch, and buying unprocessed foods when possible such as fresh vegetables, beans, nuts, eggs, and milk. Christopher, of Scottish and African descent, pointed out that he cooked more Caribbean food and was brought up with a Caribbean lifestyle but also celebrates traditional Scottish food such as haggis when the time comes for Robbie Burns:

Haggis traditionally is, and [is] still cooked in a sheep’s stomach lining. And, it is traditional foods of the parts of the sheep and stuff that you won’t eat on a normal, everyday, like the liver, um... the heart, some oats, very little meat, and it has more organs.

The Scottish poet, Robert Burns, wrote a poem to show appreciation for haggis. At Burns Night suppers, haggis is traditionally brought in on a silver platter at the start of the ceremony. Before the meal, the poem is recited, which structures the evening into a ceremonial ritual (Alexandria Burns Club 2018). These foods suggest that many childhood foods came with personal stories which reflect cultural traditions, belonging, identity, and survival, all of which require nourishment.

Shannon, who has chronic pain in her feet and arms, shared how her grandmother would boil fish, put it in a cup and give to children once a week for what she called “fish juice” for the “multivitamin purposes.” Florence’s grandmother used to feed her grandchildren cod liver oil, a healthy natural fat with many nutritional properties. Florence also remembered how her grandmother prepared the meat: “My grandma used to dry the meat, put it in the smokehouse, and she used to tie it up and keep, store that.” Eating soup, was a typical dish for participants, because they often had carrots, potatoes, and corn from the garden in the backyard.

Wild meat connects Indigenous people to the land and health. Florence, like many other Indigenous participants, no longer consumes wild meat and currently makes turkey on special occasions:

However, when I make my stuffing, I crunch up my bread real good (she is gesturing the crunching of bread in her hand). Whatever I have then I’ll [add] my meat. But I fry it. And then you know the liver that. Cut it up fine and fry it up with a little bit of onion. Cause people like the onion taste. I put very little onion ‘cause I can’t eat it.

Despite Florence’s attempts to preserve her traditional knowledge and practices, she no longer had access to wild meat. George described the abundance of food around him when he went “harvesting” on the trap lines near The Pas, Manitoba. Instead of hunting or killing animals, George used the word “harvest” when he referred to hunting game and wild meat to show respect to living beings that become someone’s source of food. He stressed: “Always gotta



respect, be thankful. Be respectful towards living things and, on this earth, but you don't see that in the city, man." George suggested that the younger generations are not prepared to hunt and survive on the trap lines or in the bush and maintain relationship to the living things and the environment. He shared:

And after the moose takes his last breath, I always do a little prayer to thank him for giving himself up. Um, I know you hardly ever hear that anymore. Cuz nowadays, it just drops em, skin em, throw em on a truck and take them wherever ... It is when I was with the Elders, wherever. And I did that out in the Yukon. When I shot a moose, I did my ritual. Said my little prayer and the young guys were wondering what I am doing.

Being thankful to the Creator for the harvest, respectful towards living things and Earth were the basic tenets of Indigenous teachings emphasized in the interviews around wild food. Food is an intimate connection between individuals, living creatures, and nature. Monica, a young Indigenous woman, shared that feasts were held for the spirit name ceremony where tobacco was offered. Pow Wow and singing at events always had an active spiritual component to food. For Indigenous participants, food was sacred and part of the web of connections and relationships with the natural law and nature that was maintained in ceremonies and sustained by care. Indigenous people in Canada developed the People's Food Policy and added a seventh pillar to food sovereignty; that Food is Sacred. Food sovereignty acknowledges Indigenous peoples perspective that food is sacred and stresses the role of Indigenous Peoples as nurturers of a food system that has been just and ecologically sustainable for thousands of years. Food, water, air, and soil are not considered "resources" but sources of life (Food Secure Canada 2011).

Cultural identity, relationship to others, the past, and present were evident in their food stories. Through social practices such as family food preparation, community members reinforce their sense of community and their participation in the broader society that is at the core of the food sovereignty paradigm. These food practices build resilience against corporate-driven food monoculture as the neighbourhood is gentrified.

### Food access and community food system

Community members described facing many challenges accessing food which negatively impacted their food sovereignty. From the interviews, many participants shared how they frequently chose the cheaper and more accessible junk food, fast food, and processed food over healthy food. One woman reports, "It seems like junk [food] is cheaper than healthy food, so I buy more of it." Some participants stated that their traditional foods were difficult to find. Several participants chose their food on affordability and availability. Few of the participants have the funds to purchase their preferred foods. Many participants were able to quickly list many fast food places that were available within the community. However, when asked where they would have to find certain foods to make a meal, this often required planning and travel.

All of the participants reported having to leave their community in order to access certain foods that were otherwise not available within their community. The participants who owned a vehicle struggled less to access healthy food compared to their counterparts who relied on other modes of transportation such as public transit, walking, biking or relying on a friend for a ride. A couple of participants mentioned that the cost of a cab fare between the grocery stores to home would be far too expensive and was not an option. The majority of participants reported shopping for groceries at Safeway, Superstore, and Wal-Mart as their key grocers after the larger grocers nearby shut down. Other stores, such as Pal's Supermarket, Food Fare, Giant Tiger, Dollarama, and other small convenience stores, were also mentioned. These stores were visited for smaller purchases or when in a "pinch," as one woman comments. These stores were not favored because of the quality concerns, especially for meat, with meat being sold after the expiry date on many occasions.

Without grocery stores with healthy food choices in the neighbourhood, people were required to travel long distances to shop. For example, a trip to the grocery store typically consumed an entire afternoon. Bronwyn uses a wheelchair in order to travel. She spoke of the snowy uncleared sidewalks during winter months (lasting up to six months) and expressed frustration about how that limited her access to food. She could not understand why "they," the policymakers, were taking away the few grocery stores making the West Broadway community a food desert. Several participants discussed the inconvenience of having to travel for groceries. Also, Susan described how she could only hang a few grocery bags on her wheelchair arms, which limit the number of groceries she buys.

High cost and the poor quality of food available in West Broadway deepened food insecurity among families in

the West Broadway community. Several interviewees agreed the prices for food were far more costly in West Broadway than in other areas within the city. For instance, one man felt that "...there [was] an unjust division of prices between communities that struggle with low socioeconomic factors compared to those who do not face the same challenges." He reported that convenience stores in lower-income neighborhoods take advantage of people stating, "they're gouging the community."

Many of the participants reported living on a fixed income, so that money as well as distance to shop was a barrier to food access. Poverty meant that food selection was limited to sales or deals rather than purchasing preferred foods they could not afford. Shopping often required visiting several stores in order to acquire specific products on sale. Meat and produce were the most expensive items to buy. Large corporate chains were seen to be cheaper and provide all their needs, according to interviewees but were not within walking distance. The lack of available healthy food contributes to increasing rates of diabetes, especially among Indigenous and immigrant communities in Manitoba.<sup>1</sup>

Housing conditions in West Broadway also limited participants' access to food. Those who lived in rooming houses without a standard size refrigerators and stoves or correctly wired electrical systems were not able to store much food or cook nutritious meals. Without access to safe and secure housing, which serves as a meeting place for sharing meals, passing knowledge, and building social networks, participants were unable to contribute consistently to their emotional and physical health.

### Pathways towards food sovereignty and social changes

Despite the various challenges that West Broadway community members face, the community has coping mechanisms to pursue paths towards food sovereignty. This small community is coming together to create better food choices. Various organizations and WBCO members are working together and in doing so, have several food projects underway. The WBCO employs projects that embody food sovereignty. For example, by establishing community gardens, residents seek to localize food systems and access to healthy foods and by visiting family farms regularly, relationships between consumers and food producers are created.

The majority of interviewees were aware of the benefits of community gardens. Some of the respondents made use of the gardens and found them to be great sources to access fresh produce. One woman gave high praise to the food from community gardens: "They are really cool cause it's like, really, really fresh, really good groceries." People saw community gardens as a step towards food sovereignty but not one that everyone could participate in. Participants with physical disabilities reported that community gardens in West Broadway were not accessible to them. People in wheelchairs wanted raised garden beds, which were currently not available in West Broadway.

Aside from the community gardens, people were aware of other food sovereignty shifts taking place in West Broadway. The Good Food Club, a project of the WBCO aims to build knowledge and skills through field trips during the summer to nearby farms where participants assist in planting and harvesting and earn sweat points. The vegetables harvested at the farms by volunteers are sold at the market by the WBCO. The Good Food Box provides fresh, local organic produce at affordable prices in the summer. For the winter, the Good Food Club buys wholesale conventional produce from chains. The individual box costs \$8, an individual box with beans and rice is \$10, medium box is \$15, a medium box with beans and rice is \$17, large box is \$20, and a large box with beans and rice is \$23. When volunteers work at the community dinners, farmers market, or farm trips, they earn "sweat points." These sweat points can be traded in for fresh produce, making food very cheap. With sweat points, an individual box is \$2, an individual box with beans and rice is \$3, a medium box is \$3, a medium box with beans and rice is \$4, a large box is \$4, and a large box with beans and rice is \$5. Four participants accredited the Good Food Box for increasing their produce consumption. In 2013, the total number of Good Food Boxes ordered was 1,088 (West Broadway Community Centre 2015).

Other programs are offered in West Broadway by organizations such as Art City, Winnipeg Harvest, and Nine Circles to address food insecurity. A handful of participants benefited from food banks at Winnipeg Harvest, and Nine Circles Community Health Centre. Children receive a free healthy snack at Art City, and St. Matthews Church operates as a soup kitchen and offers free cooking classes along with the WBCO. Agape Table at All Saints Church also sells groceries at cost to limited income families.

These projects are bringing community members together. Many participants discussed "sustainable communities," "wild foods," and "non-GMO foods," which is indicative of the food sovereignty paradigm and knowledge of food systems. Karen tends to her garden, on which she and her husband heavily rely. A few participants canned,

fermented, and prepared food for storage in order to minimize their purchases from grocery stores. Most participants were proactive in their approach to living healthy lifestyles. They seek to increase their knowledge and to nourish themselves using natural food ingredients, especially locally grown produce.

## Conclusion

Community members with diverse cultural backgrounds reported coming together to adopt practices towards food sovereignty in their urban environment of West Broadway. This action is in response to the lack of access to healthy food choices in their neighbourhood but also to build community and agency. WBCO's programs such as the community gardens, farmer's markets, and local farm field trips have positively impacted the citizens of West Broadway. 'Community spirit' is forming in a community that only years earlier was known more for violence and crime. Many participants made positive comments about grassroots initiatives and advocated for more community gardens.

Participants recommended continuing efforts in renewing communities through grassroots community initiatives. The WBCO is constructing communities through food sovereignty rather than through market controlled accessibility (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2013; Dieterly 2015). Community organizations like the WBCO take proactive steps through community programs to address challenges residents face. Actions towards food sovereignty require both resistance and building alternatives by grassroots movements (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010). The food sovereignty paradigm is representative of people's abilities to choose healthy and culturally acceptable food that is produced, distributed, and consumed in a manner that respects and builds connections between individuals, communities, and nature

West Broadway, both benefits and is challenged to plan food sovereignty that is equitably accessible, sustainable, and rooted in the autonomy of community members. Low income and other marginalized populations continue to face more significant disparities, which further threatens their health, sense of agency, and cultural identity. Food sovereignty efforts face barriers institutionalized at local and global levels. The entire food production system requires a transformation into a more just, equitable, and truly democratic system in which people reclaim their decision-making power to make food choices (Tursunova, Z. and Lobchuk, M. 2016).

As diet plays a critical role in physical and mental health issues—food sovereignty has to be part of health programming, educational programming and considered a right. The critical elements for food sovereignty in West Broadway, similar to The Stop in Toronto, is providing access to food, education and engagement, food skills development, and using food to build a sense of belonging and community (The Stop Community Centre 2004). By the WCBO connecting people to growing food, sharing food and connecting them with farmers and the food system—many elements of food sovereignty are being undertaken in West Broadway.

## Recommendations

Complex preventive measures need to be in place in the community to address food insecurity and health in West Broadway. West Broadway can learn from the Community Food Centre in Toronto, Canada by providing additional community programs.

The community members all wanted to see more grocery stores with local and organic produce as well as more community gardens. People living in the community have diverse needs, and people living with disabilities face extra challenges which need to be addressed. For example, participants suggested having accessible roads and sidewalks with snow shoveled more frequently. Future research related to food sovereignty and the unique needs of people living with disabilities is needed to understand the issues involved and supports required to ensure the full involvement of people living with disabilities in the food sovereignty movement.

To allow people to grow and harvest food, community food gardens and transportation to family farms are good starts but could go further. The WCBO and other community organizations should organize regular outings to gather wild food, including fishing, trapping, sharing and wild plant harvesting can occur with First Nation organizations. In order to allow further food production in the city, the bylaw that prevents chicken for eggs being raised in the city should be challenged.

Community members are concerned about the lack of affordable housing, stating that more efforts are needed to improve living conditions and housing to address emotional and physical health. Also, improving living conditions in the many rooming houses in West Broadway is necessary to meet the needs of single people living with low-in-

comes, particularly those living in rooming houses, to eat and cook with no or inadequate kitchens to cook. Another recommendation stemming from the interviews was to develop programs to address safety due to crimes that limit people's access to obtain food from grocery stores safely.

The authors advocate for funding programs to educate, advocate and implementing food sovereignty strategies. Designing food programming that connects teaching with individuals, communities, and nature and having awareness about our food is critical in fostering change.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> National survey data indicate that the national age-adjusted prevalence of diabetes is 3 to 5 times higher in First Nations than in the general population. As in most populations where incidence and prevalence rates are higher, the age of diagnosis is younger in First Nations peoples. In a profile of health status, Métis, aged 19 years and older, were found to have age and sex-adjusted diabetes rate of 11.8% compared to the provincial rate of 8.8% in Manitoba (Canadian Diabetes Association 2013).

In Manitoba in 2009/2010, 90,005 people lived with diabetes, comprising 7.5 % of the total population. The number of people living with diabetes rose from 5.2% in 2000/2001 to 7.5% in 2009/2010 (Manitoba Health 2011; Canadian Diabetes Association 2013 ).

In Canada, ethnicity factors into particular behavioral risk for type 2 diabetes. Compared to Caucasians, Filipino, Chinese, or South Asian descent or other races or ethnicities, First Nations people tend to have higher rates of physical inactivity but less likely to be obese (between -1.6 to -6.0 times). All ethnicities, but particularly Chinese and Filipino, consumed an inadequate amount of vegetables and fruits compared to Caucasians. Immigrants to Canada from South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa in contrast with immigrants from Western Europe, often have higher rates of diabetes. Age, immigration category, education, income, duration of stay, low incomes, and poorer access to health services than the general Canadian population are risk factors for diabetes. Immigrants, who have lived in Canada for over 15 years, experience higher proportions of type 2 diabetes than recent immigrants, accounting for a "negative acculturation effect" (Public Health Agency of Canada 2015).

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