To fight for collective food security and social dignity

The role of participation in a community-based organization in shaping community food security: a qualitative analysis

Linnea Plez

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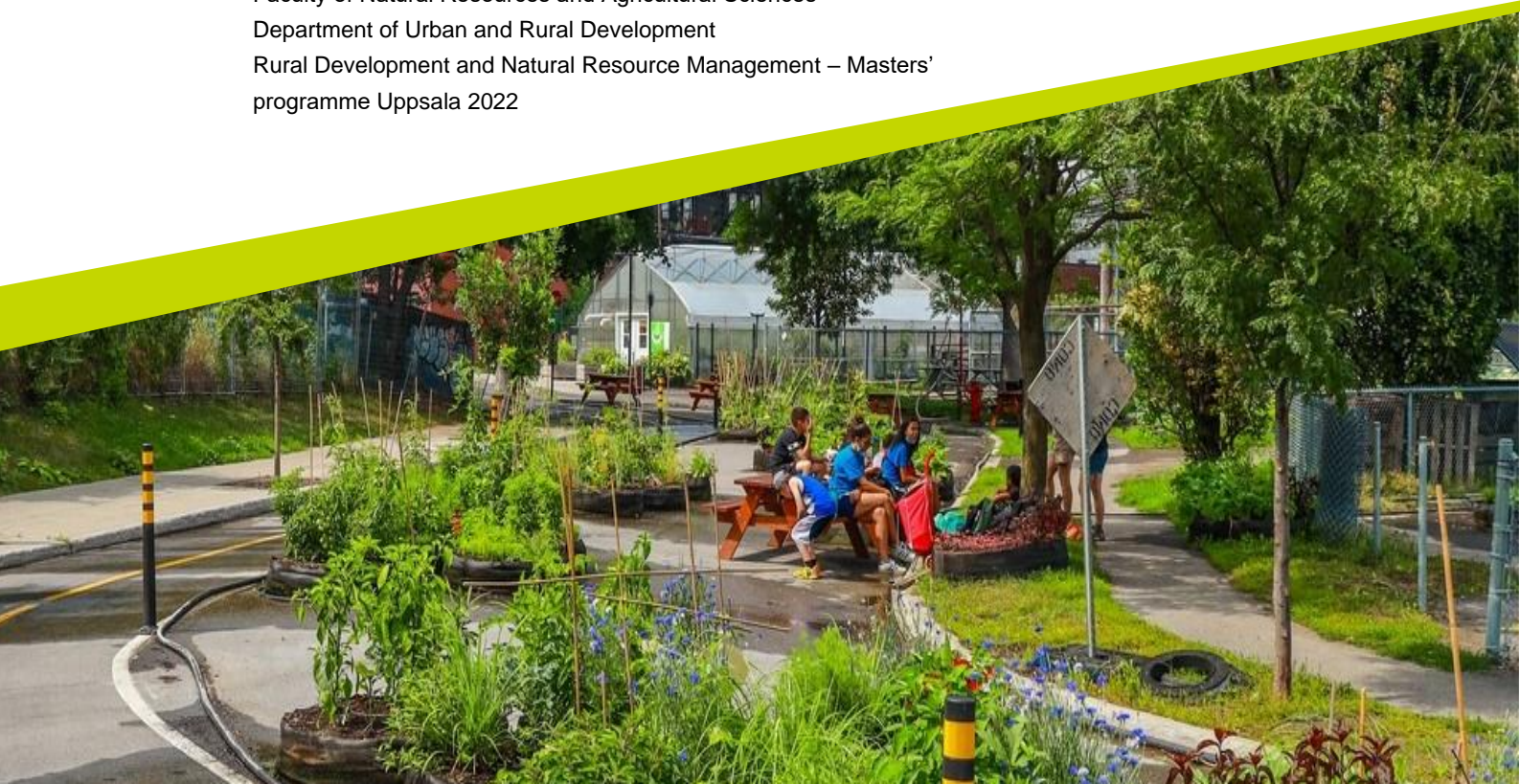
Linnea Plez

Abstract

The numerous downsides of the global food system lead alternative food systems to try to find other ways to produce and distribute food in rural and urban settings worldwide. Many of these alternatives have been criticized for not considering food injustices which are commonly based on systemic social injustice. Placed alongside food justice and food sovereignty, community food security is a movement characterized by a focus on the community to improve the production of, and the access to fresh foods in a way that is inclusive and long-sighted. This thesis poses the questions of why people participate in community-based organizations (CBO) and how this participation allows the community to gain control over their food. The study wants to elucidate the role of the community in community food security and the ways in which CBOs can help resolving growing food insecurity. The qualitative methods focused on a case study and produced empirical material with semi-structured interviews (8) with active members and employees of a CBO in Montreal, Canada, and observations in the CBO. This study finds that participation in the CBO is fostered by different reasons encompassing the wish to socialize, to garden or to cook, to gain skills, to be part of a community, and to act for ideological and political purposes. By participating in the CBO's activities, the community gains more control over their food because (1) people get access to fresh foods, skills, and political awareness, and (2) the CBO provides a space where values like respect and dignity are favored, and where people can socialize, leading to more engagement, diversity, and solidarity. Community is perceived and created in different ways as well, as it can embody values for some, be a tool for gathering for others, or represent a goal. The results advance that the diversity of understandings does not alter the function of CBOs and that food is a reason for creating community, equally as community is a reason to enhance food security. The study participates in the understanding of the influence different factors have on community food security, and on the connections between community and food. It brings knowledge from urban settings to the field of rural development and alternative food systems, with the state of mind that, considering the world's current food crisis, rurality must be brought within the city.

Keywords: community, community food security, community-based organization, participation.

Table of contents

List of tables

List of figures

Abbreviations

CACS	Carrefour Alimentaire Centre-Sud[1]
CARAA	Action and Reflection Committee for Food Autonomy[2]
CBO	Community-based organization
CFS	Community Food Security
CSCCA	Carrefour Solidaire Community Food Center[3]
SLU	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

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[1] CACS is the previous name of CSCCA and was abandoned in 2022 when *Carrefour* joined the Canadian network Community Food Centers.

[2] *Comité d'Action et de Réflexion pour l'Autonomie Alimentaire*

[3] *Carrefour Solidaire Centre Communautaire d'Alimentation*

1. Introduction to the research

The first chapter situates the research in the context of the current food system and its alternatives. The problem that has guided the research is explained followed by the aim and research questions. To finish, the general outline of the paper is presented.

1.1 General introduction and research problem

In the present thesis, I aim to explore community-based food organizations. I intended to extend the knowledge researchers in the field of food systems and rural development have on such organizations. I tried to highlight in which ways community-based organizations (CBOs) are contributing to food security. I also sought to understand in what ways the community is involved in creating food security at the level of a CBO. It is no coincidence that this topic is on the table nowadays. In times of a pandemic still striking, the global food system is questioned by many, and hunger and poverty have been on the forefront of international discussions (e.g., United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021). The pandemic of Covid-19 is accentuating the concerns, although they were present well before. A growing distance between foods and eaters[4], coupled with unequal distributions of resources and power are foundations of the current food system (Clapp 2020). Smallholders are constituting 70% of all the farmers, but most of the international trade is done by the 1% of biggest farms (FAO 2021a), operating mainly in large-scale monocultures participating in massive greenhouse gas emissions and exhausting the soils. The urban and the rural present a greater gap than ever, untying folks from agriculture and food in general (Clapp 2020). Hunger and malnutrition are progressing in many parts of the world, including in the North, like in Canada where the share of the population being moderately to severely food insecure went from 5% in 2014 to 5.8% in 2020; figures that are worse world-wide, going from 23 to 27.6% (FAO 2021b).

World's population is increasing, and urbanization has been, in the last decades, growing rapidly. Now, over 70% of the population is living in cities, and the total

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[4] 'Eater' is a term found for instance in Clapp (2020) and designates people who eat food, to counter the use of 'consumer' invoking the commodification of food.

number of urban dwellers will continue to grow with the years (United Nations 2018). People, wherever they are, need to eat. As rural population will, according to UN forecasts, remain the same, facing the food needs of a growing urban population will and should deserve more of our attention in the coming years. While geographical, administrative, and intellectual boundaries divide rurality and urbanity (Küle 2008), their synergy can be redefined to be able to combine urban expansion and food production (Gren & Andersson 2018). As the dichotomy needs to be less and less present, we can start thinking about rurality *inside* the city. Following this lead, I have chosen to focus on food in the context we usually oppose to rural but is in reality very connected to it: the urban.

Alternative food activism has been widely practiced in recent decades, as an answer to the neoliberal market-based economy using food as a commodity (Clapp 2020). Such alternative food systems are usually proposing local ways to source fresh and healthy foods. The organizations can broadly differ, from farmers' markets to community-supported agriculture. In general, they try to ally environmental benefits, by sourcing locally, the economic aspect by ensuring a fair price for farmers, and social initiatives like visits and helping activities at the farm. However, some have noticed that this type of practices tend to be usually attended by high socioeconomic profiles (Broad 2016; Connelly *et al.* 2011; Lutz & Schachinger 2013). . It is argued that alternative food systems can only be long-term if they fight systemic injustices instead of only focusing on the food itself (Prost 2019). Particularly, some alternative food initiatives have failed to consider the systemic economic inequalities and have thus failed to ensure justice for all (Broad 2016). To sum up, some food movements claim to provide alternatives to the global food system, but often, these alternatives do not consider social justice issues. Yet, fighting injustices such as economic, is key to establish inclusive and long-term alternatives to the global food system.

Ongoing discussions are also questioning the sustainability[5] of mechanisms to prevent food insecurity based on free distribution of donated or residual foods, such as food banks. Such operations are widely used in urban contexts worldwide, and not least in Montreal, Canada, where more than eighty food banks coexist (Dawson College, Food Justice and Sustainability Hub 2019). However, food banks can be considered as merely tackling the issue of immediate hunger, and not helping towards resolving the root causes of food insecurity (Riches 2002). Beneficiaries also stress that food banks can be embarrassing for some people (CARAA 2021). Food distribution systems proponents claim that their mission is to provide emergency relief and not to solve the problem of food injustice. While it is important to help providing crisis support for vulnerable populations, it is crucial

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[5] In this thesis, I use sustainability or sustainably to refer to a system that can be sustained or last over time taking into consideration all the aspects needed for such achievement.

to gain knowledge and experience on how people can improve their food security sustainably in the urban landscape of Montreal.

Apart from 'mainstream' alternative food movements[6], and emergency food banks, other kinds of grassroot movements exist. These grassroot movements and organizations are originally situated within political activism. For example, the movement for food sovereignty, started by La Via Campesina is one of the most famous and wide-spread peasants-driven grassroot movement in the world. La Via Campesina strives, since the 1990s, for peasants' rights and for the population's right to define their own food and agricultural system. Food justice movements represent another example since they are focusing on fighting structural inequalities like economic and social, moving towards citizen empowerment (Broad 2016, Giménez 2011). Civic food networks, striving for food democracy, represent another trend in the alternative food system world. As the name indicates, such networks count on the implication of citizens to transform the food system and democratize food (Prost 2019).

However, the different movements named above, and other grassroot movements, converge in the quest of the promotion of local production of food in underserved communities as a grassroot and gradual change (Giménez 2011). Many forms of such alternative food systems exist, with combinations of practices that are adapted to the context in which they operate. It can be difficult, and sometimes unnecessary, to try to label a particular initiative as belonging to a specific movement, as they are hardly sealed into one box. They are rather contingent and share many commonalities. For the present study, I chose to explore community-based organizations, which could be placed in different categories of alternative food movements. However, the concepts that help to situate the study in the literature, namely community food security and community, will be developed in chapter 2 and 3.

To sum up, the progressing state of food insecurity globally, including in urban areas, is not diminishing with the current dominant food system. The global food system is not providing alternatives for low-income populations. Some alternative solutions have not proved to be efficient to eradicate injustices linked to food, and emergency food operations are not viable long-term.

1.2 Aim of the thesis and research questions

The purpose of this case study is to explore in what ways the participation by people in community-based food organizations can lead communities to gain control over their food. To have control over one's food is understood as a subjective manner to

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[6] I use 'mainstream' alternative food systems to refer to the alternative food systems that do not consider inequalities such as economic, and that mainly attract high socioeconomic profiles.

refer to food security. It includes the 'sense of' food security. However, I use food security interchangeably to refer to the same idea. I aim at shedding light on the mechanisms leading to community food security in a particular context through a case study and drew from the literature to extend the reach of my findings. Placing the study in the body of literature dealing with community food security also meant an active participation in the conceptual discussion. The case study that was selected is a Community-Based Organization (CBO) named *Carrefour Solidaire Community Food Center.* The presentation of the case study can be found in chapter 5.

The following research questions have guided the present work.

1. Why do people participate in urban food-related activities in a community-based organization in a deprived neighborhood?
2. To what extent and how does participation in urban agriculture and other food-related activities allow communities to have control over their food?

The goal of this work is to extend the knowledge on what makes the participants in a CBO gain food security. The CBO counts on participation of citizens to empower the community towards food. In other words, the focus is on trying to disclose the processes that are behind the functioning of a community-based food organization, and on relating the findings with the community food security literature.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters which will hopefully guide the reader comprehensively all the way to the end. Chapter 1 has brought the reader into the general context of the study, and they will be ready for chapter 2 which goes deeper into the topic outlining the existing academic research and the function this study takes in the literature. Chapter 3 presents the choice and use of the concepts that helped the analysis and framed the discussion of the thesis. In chapter 4, the methodology section, details about the research design and the empirical evidence production are provided. The chapter explains the reasons of the choice of methods, how they were used and for which purpose. The context of the case study and its area is provided in chapter 5. Information about the case study that are useful for the understanding of the study are specified. Chapter 6 displays the summary of the empirical evidence that was produced during field work. These elements will be discussed in chapter 7, putting the empirical data in relation with the literature and

concepts. Chapter 8 is concluding by summing up the main findings and the main conclusions.

2.   Background

In this section I will elaborate on the state of the research in the field of alternative food systems and more specifically of community food security. While diverse studies and authors will be presented, I will identify the way the present study can enhance the knowledge and participate in the ongoing discussions.

2.1   The state of the research

Many scholars who are interested in community-based transformations call for attention at the community level as a scene where macro-level challenges are lived and addressed (Broad 2016). Broad (2016) cites Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Lewis Friedland who have argued that the local community can be a chosen site to understand dynamics of civic engagement. I stretch the argument by adding that we can understand engagement in general - and not only civic -, why people participate in food organizations and what it brings to the food system, by getting qualitative insights from the concerned people, i.e., participants in community activities. In line with these arguments, I have chosen to follow the lead of the community approach, focusing on local food movements as being a potential base for food security and community engagement.

> If we want to retake power over our food, we need to retake power over our collective life (Jean-Paul Faniel, Roundtable on food and social development in Montreal see Soucie 2014).

This quote captures the essence of the missions of community-based food organizations aiming to improve food security while eradicating food injustces. In this sentence also lies the red thread of the thesis: a focus on the local community engagement and interactions to be empowered through and for food.

Conducting data-driven research, McDaniel and her colleagues (2021) build on the literature that asserts that local food systems bring strengthened social ties in the global North. They demonstrate that strengthened social ties and increased social capital promote community resilience in New Mexico (McDaniel *et al.* 2021). In other areas of the food systems' literature, similar assumptions are made. Prost (2019) shows that relationship building promotes participation and engagement and leads to incremental change favoring participation by the

community and food adapted to the local taste (Prost 2019). In a similar fashion, Sumner et al. (2011) examine the role of culture in agriculture and take the example of community-supported agriculture to illustrate that participation in such systems can foster civic engagement, build community and celebrate local food.

2.2 Knowledge gap

Although I think we cannot always put alternative food systems in boxes since they have many intersecting leverage points, the present case study has several common features with the concept of community food security (CFS). This concept will be elaborated in chapter 3, but a few elements for understanding are necessary at this stage. CFS is a concept that has been elaborated as an extension of food security (Anderson & Cook 1999), adding the community component. CFS proponents consider the community as a good entry point to enhance food security (Bellows & Hamm 2002). The vision is also more long-term and reject the single use of emergency food distribution to alleviate hunger (ibid.). Anderson & Cook (1999) suggest the existence of a serious lack of theorizing on CFS. Hence, community would be vaguely defined, and it is finally unsure what the difference with 'regular' food security is.

It seems not much research has been done in this way since the paper by Anderson & Cook (1999) was released. Moreover, most research involving CFS mostly use the concept as a tool to measure food security in a certain place but rarely question the concept itself (Pothukuchi 2004; Short *et al.* 2007; Engle 2021). Nor has any research been conducted to extend understanding on the links between CBOs, CFS, and the role of the community itself. There are many research pieces proving, with different methods, the existence of a link between participation in alternative food systems and the consolidation of the community and engagement (Sumner *et al.* 2011; Prost 2019; McDaniel *et al.* 2021), sometimes stretching to civic and political engagement (Obach & Tobin 2014). However, it has not been the case in the CFS literature. This thesis intends to put in relation what we know about CFS and the underlying mechanics by which the community can gain control over their food. Also, the thesis wishes to bring the discussion of the community to the CFS literature, through a real-world case.

To summarize, a focus on the community level is interesting in the field of alternative food system to gain more understanding on dynamics related to engagement and food security. Studies have previously shown in diverse areas of the food system literature that a link exists between strengthened social ties and participation in local food systems. In turn, relationship-building can promote participation. However, in the field of community food security in which the present study is situated, the lack of theorizing upon the concept of community has led to a

knowledge gap to make associations between participation in community-based organizations, outcomes of community-food security, and the role of community.

3. Conceptual framework

In this chapter the concepts used to elaborate the framework are presented. Connections with the actual thesis are made to clarify how this framework is useful for analysis and discussion. Community food security is presented as a concept and the surrounding discussions in the body of literature as well. Then the sole but vast concept of community is presented and discussed theoretically.

3.1 The notion of community food security

Community food security (CFS) can be seen as the opposite of emergency food systems[7] since its goal is not to alleviate hunger individually but rather to implement food systems that seek to enhance self-reliance (Campbell 2004). A food system is defined as "the web of relationships that span the production, processing, trade, and marketing of the food we eat" (Clapp 2020). CFS is also distanced from the traditional view of food security, according to its advocates. Traditional food security is understood, for the purpose of the present thesis, as defined by international development practitioners. In the 1960's and 1970's the concept of food security at the international level was defined as the ability to meet aggregate food needs in a consistent way (Anderson & Cook 1999). Later, several layers of new understandings of food security have been added to the traditional one. In 1996 during the World Food Summit in Rome, NGOs had polished the concept to integrate the household component (Bellows & Hamm 2002). Household food security then designated a situation incorporating three dimensions equally important: availability, stability, and access (ibid.). This is still the definition on which most international and national practitioners base their work and assessments. It brought multidimensional aspects to the discussion on how to treat food insecurity (Anderson & Cook 1999) and its more long-term view was therefore a first step towards the elaboration of community food security (Bellows & Hamm 2002). A third paradigm emerged when food security could also be seen as subjective and rely less on objective measures (Anderson & Cook 1999).

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[7] Emergency food systems, also called emergency food relief or emergency food assistance systems, are part of an effort to mitigate hunger and food insecurity among vulnerable populations (Caruso 2019). These efforts are usually perpetrated through free food distribution supposed to be transitory and supplemental, which is not always the case (ibid.).

In the 1980's, Amartya Sen developed in parallel an assumption based on entitlements (Anderson & Cook 1999). According to him, the difficulties people face to access food are not caused by the lack of food nor lack of legal rights but by the inability to claim entitlements to those rights (Bellows & Hamm 2002). To alleviate this inability, Sen asserted the need of political capability allowing people to claim their needs in society (ibid.). Many conceptions of food security exist and remaining flexible in the definitions can leave space for diverse interpretations and in turn a more complete way to apprehend the issue.

CFS can be defined as an extension of food security: "all persons in a community having access to culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate food through local non-emergency sources at all times" (Winne *et al.* 1998 see Anderson & Cook 1999). However, with this definition the difference with the concept of food security is unclear. The extension to community does not tell us if CFS stands out in a substantial way or if it is just a more local way to perceive food security. Community can sometimes be confused with the notion of localness but having community food security might not always imply a local food system (Anderson & Cook 1999). In other words, community is meant to be a conceptual part of the CFS approach, and elements such as localness are rather part of the practical implementation in food systems (ibid.). Simultaneously, the identification of what aspects at the community-level serve to improve household-level food security may be possible with a consensus on the definition of community (ibid.). Therefore, Anderson and Cook (1999) have argued for more clarity in the theoretical discussion around CFS, especially what is meant by community.

On the other hand, Bellows and Hamm (2002) have argued that CFS are plural and are all unique and follow the political, social, economic, and environmental settings of the place. The way certain organizations work towards CFS with the community is entirely based on the local dynamics. However CFS groups across the world still embody core features and find unity through their engagement with low-income populations, their acknowledgement of the systemic basis of inequalities, and their implication in bringing inclusive, sustainable, and non-emergency solutions to improve food security locally (Bellows & Hamm 2002).

3.2 Community: which definition?

The word community has already been mentioned a few times in my text until this section and its meaning can appear evident to some. It is at least a word that is widely used in civil society, politics, in diverse academic fields, and even in daily life. Therefore, the concept of community carries different meanings depending on the field in which it is applied (Chavis *et al.* 1986; Young 1986; Anderson & Cook 1999, Lachapelle & Austin 2014). The present study focuses on community-led organizations, and on how the community can have control over their food

production through participation in the given organizations. While I seek to put forth the dynamics lying behind the outcomes of collective life of community-led organizations like enhanced food security, taking the concept of community to help the discussion seems inevitable.

Moreover, the literature in the field of CFS indicates a gap in the positionality towards the concept of community. According to Anderson & Cook (1999), CFS as a conceptual framework needs theoretical discussions, especially regarding the community. They argue the necessity of theoretical discussions for CFS to be "effective as a guide for policy and action" (Anderson & Cook 1999).

It has often been argued that 'community' can mean virtually nothing and anything at the same time and some prefer to refer to 'local social bonds' or not using this type of concept at all (Young 1986). However, as I mentioned earlier, the term is used widely, in diverse contexts, which entails a myriad of definitions. But it also implies that community means something in the eyes of many people and it is a reason enough for me to use it in a way that might help me answer my research questions. Not least, the organization I am studying relies on and targets the community to move the lines of food security and right to food[8].

As Iris Marion Young (1986) puts it in her essay, reviewing some famous thinkers having written about community, there is not a universally shared concept of community, as in all conceptual debates, but rather combinations that imbricate, supplement, or are alongside to each other (Young 1986). Most uses of the term community do not refer to an ideological or philosophical view of community, but rather to a descriptive sense. In the latter fashion, it can be conceptualized as "involving a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality (often referred to as community of place) or sharing a common heritage or set of values (often referred to as community of interest)" (Lachapelle & Austin 2014). In my understanding, this is the most practical and widespread way to refer to community. It is also probably the way in which the studied organization (*Carrefour Solidaire*) refers to the community, with a mix of community of place (the neighborhood) and community of interest (getting together through the organization). Young (1986) prefers to mention the community as a normative ideal entangled with the organization of social relations. She does not praise direct face-to-face relations as being the base of ideal communities but argues that communities (although she prefers not to use this term) are made of the differences they experience with other groups (ibid.). Hence, they are externally related rather than internally related as would the face-to-face, small group, direct relations suggest. Young (1986) uses the example of an ideal unoppressive city to imagine a space

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[8] Right to food is a rights-based approach claiming the universal right of people to feed with dignity while respecting their dietary needs (Bellows & Hamm 2002). Right to food is not used for the analysis in this paper although it is one of the goals of the studied CBO. Community food security can be a strategy to support the right to food (Anderson 2013).

where the multitude of diverse groups possibly encounter and opposes this image to the ideal face-to-face community in which there is mutual understanding, loyalty, and group identification. I propose to keep in mind this view for our case since it might help us to explore the outcomes of community organizing and the function of diversity.

Other tentative definitions have emerged, as the ones suggesting a greater purpose in using the 'sense of community' than community alone. In this view, the community is fueled by "a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met by their commitment to be together" (Chavis *et al.* 1986). The sense of community is a perspective by which the community relies on people's relationships and so, the idea of sense of community is associated with cohesiveness of the group. This contrasts with Young's view elaborated in the previous paragraph. Community can also be viewed as a space outside the state where it is possible to take action, and for example resist gentrification by establishing social support networks that help old residents to keep their housing (Delanty 2010 see Dinnie & Fischer 2020).

In the literature of community food security, however important it is to define community as mentioned previously, I think it is also important to stay open about the concept and be flexible according to the case and settings. I also argue it might be interesting to include several aspects of different viewpoints of the concept of community to explain a case. Apart from figuring out the mechanisms of the specific case, doing this can also allow for some theorizing and add to the existing theoretical discussion. Hence, I acknowledge the many possible conceptual variations of the term community, and I will rather be interested in showing the empirical evidence found in relation to this theme and how this relates to the broader framework of community food security.

In summary, community is a vague concept that has largely been debated among social scientists and used by practitioners for their work. Community food security is a relatively recent movement claiming that focusing efforts at community-level can help improving food security sustainably. I take the concepts of CFS and community to guide the analysis and investigate the connections between food and community in my case study.

4. Methodology

The following chapter presents the justification of the choice of methods. The methods that were used to perform the field work are presented. The chapter also includes elements of reflexivity, limitations of the methods used, and some ethical concerns.

4.1 Qualitative research design

For the present thesis, I aimed at exploring the place of community-based food organizations in the food system and their role in people's lives to gain control over their food. To do that, I selected one organization that would be my study case and on which I could base my work, exploring it to understand the mechanics behind their apparent work. I chose to work in the urban settings of Montreal, Canada, taking as a case the community organization *Carrefour Solidaire,* on which more details will come in chapter 5. Using a case study is helpful to explain a phenomenon in a particular context and is one of the three widely used qualitative design research strategies (Robson & McCartan 2016). To reach the set goals, the qualitative methods applied needed to be situated at the organizational and community level. The first research question refers to the motivations of participants to participate in the organization's activities, and the second poses the question of how this participation allows the community to have control over their food.

4.1.1 Qualitative data collection

To explore the research questions stated above, I needed to get the inputs of participants in the activities of the selected organization. Members and volunteers in the activity were the focus since they are the targets and motors of the community-based food organization. However, I also decided to include the voices of some organizers (employees) who would be key informants as they have an overview of the activities and how everything is organized. I could also get hints from them on how the relations seem to be within the organization, and their ideas about participants' perceptions. The selection of data collection methods was done

in the light of the needed information and included the following: individual semi-structured interviews, and direct and participant observations.

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Individual semi-structured interviews

To get the data needed in this qualitative research design, the bulk of the empirical work was done through one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The advantage of conducting such interviews is that rich and detailed information usually emerges (Kanazawa 2017). Non-verbal expressions such as the body language of the interview can also be observed and used to direct the interview. A semi-structured guide helped me to ask follow-up questions, as the answer to one question can hinge the direction of the interview. Thus, no interview had the same outcomes, but portrayed the sensitivity of the concerned interviewee. This is a way to generate views and opinions from the participants (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 different interviewees[9]. Three of them are employees working in different activities of the organization and could be contacted through open access of their contact information on the Internet. The other 5 informants represented the members and more specifically volunteers of the various activities proposed, and were contacted with the snowball effect, through the employees. To preserve the identity of the interviewees, the names used in this paper are fictional, but refer each to one individual. The one-to-one interviews lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. The informants got the chance to express their motivations to participate in food-related activities, their views on the neighborhood, their involvement, the relations within the organization, their views on the community, and more.

Table 1. Table summarizing the names, roles, and dates of interview of the informants

Name	Role	Date of the interview (dd/mm/yy)
Eliana	Employee	03/03/22
Emma	Employee	09/03/22
Gina	Employee	28/03/22
Andrea	Active member	14/03/22
Steven	Active member	03/03/22
Carol	Active member	12/03/22
Thomas	Active member	15/03/22
Peter	Active member and administrator	03/03/22

[9] See Appendix 1 for a summary table including all interviewees and their roles.

4.2.2 Observations

Apart from semi-structured interviews, direct and participant observation were conducted as part of the empirical data production process. While not representing a large part of the material produced, the observations served as a supportive method to substantiate the main findings (Robson & McCartan 2016). Observations also have a heuristic purpose (Swedberg 2014). In other words, observing social life helps the social scientist to get a hold on what the phenomenon really looks like (ibid.). Observations were either rather passive or participant. The participant observation consisted of me having an active role in the ongoing activity of the organization, hence interacting with other volunteers and employees, through volunteering work. The occasion was a community meal organized in the community center. My role was to help in the kitchen with the two chefs. I met several other employees and volunteers, some of whom I had already interviewed. Being in the middle of the action for four hours allowed to shed light on general dynamics within the organization during an event and could favor some informal discussions with members. What I call passive observations, or direct observations, held place before or after some interviews, with the concerned interviewee. These observations were occasions for the informants to show me around the neighborhood, to give explanations about the history, and to walk past the location of the urban collective garden, giving some personal insights about the place, or showing me the newly opened community center with its different features and people. In all cases, notes from the observations were used as a part of the empirical material.

4.2.3 Data analysis

First and foremost, all the material produced during the interview sessions was audio recorded. To facilitate the analysis, the recordings were fully transcribed, text being a much easier format to work with than an audio file. Transcription is also an opportunity to start making sense of the data and to add reflections and interpretations that might have occurred during the interview (Kanazawa 2017). Conversations surrounding the official interview time could also be of interest for the study and were written down in a field diary as soon as possible. Notes from the observations were also written down and used in the analysis.

I used thematic analysis as a tool to interpret my findings. The analysis of the empirical data was realized to identify thematic patterns that occurred consistently throughout the dataset. Results are based on comprehensive views of the two categories of participants I interviewed (volunteers and employees), adding the insights I got from my observations.

I used thematic coding analysis as a realist method to report on experiences, meanings, and the reality of participants (Robson & McCartan 2016). Coding was the first step in my analysis. The transcripts were reviewed, and each chunk of text

could be labelled with a code name. Once all codes had been defined and all transcripts gone through, the second step was to merge those codes into a smaller number of themes (ibid.) The themes refer to more analytical content, and, often, links between codes can be found. The emergence of codes and themes is an iterative process. Also, themes can change throughout the analysis to stay true to the data. After the elaboration of themes, it is important to make sense of them in a way that reflects the empirical material: interpretation. To do that, I identified patterns and tried to map the themes with relational causalities. I tried to see what the data was telling me (ibid.).

4.3   Ethical considerations

Each person contacted in relation to the present thesis was aware of the context and conditions of their participation, prior to their engagement. A consent form including a confidentiality clause was sent out with the contact emails. The consent form also stipulated the voluntary and informed nature of the participation in the study. Contact information to SLU representatives were included. When the meetings took place, the informants were once again fully briefed about the context of the study, their potential role in it, and the confidentiality modalities. The possibility to withdraw at any stage of the study without justification was communicated. All the audio recordings taken during the interview sessions necessitated an oral consent by participants. To preserve the identity of the interviewees, the names used in this paper are fictional, but refer each to one individual. Lastly, all respondents were treated equally, and their participation was fully appreciated.

4.4   Reflexivity and limitations

As Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000) suggests, I believe data in qualitative research is not 'collected' but rather 'produced'. Indeed, the interviewer is always involved in the process, and the relationship that emanates from the interview situation between the interviewer and the interviewee produces a certain environment that can influence what happens and is said. To try to minimize such effects, it was important to install an informal and goodwill atmosphere, where the informant could feel free to talk in a conversational way. It happened during one interview, that I realized the settings were not optimal for unguided, free speech. Indeed, the interview with a volunteer was held in the community center, where the employee responsible for the volunteers (whom I interviewed just before) was sitting, at the table next to ours. It was too late to change the settings, but I still considered the answers valuable,

since the occasions the informant seemed distracted or blocked by the presence of the employee were limited.

Moreover, it is the duty of the researcher to reduce as much as possible the altercations between one's preconceptions and positionality, and the research. My way to handle this potential problem was to be actively mindful of how I filtered the answers of the respondents, and to always be open to any finding, whether it was expected or not.

In addition, I can express limitations in the selection of the informants. The snowball effect was used, as mentioned earlier: to reach participants of the collective gardens, a standard email I had written to trigger participants to grant me an interview was forwarded to participants by the garden coordinator. In a way, this was good, to let forward the ones who really wanted to devote time. On another hand, it only accrued the possibilities of encountering the participants who have good access to their email, and who feel they have something pertinent to say. In other words, the ones we would also want to reach are sometimes the hardest to reach. Especially, the garden coordinator told me that some participants do not even have an email address. However, I could not force my path in any other direction, since the organization cannot give out names of volunteers, and no gardening activities were ongoing for me to directly meet people.

5. Context of the case study: *Carrefour Solidaire*

The following chapter introduces more detailed information about *Carrefour Solidaire*, the case study considered for the thesis. The case's most relevant components for the research are described.

5.1 Montreal and the Center-South neighborhood

The agglomeration of Montreal (Quebec, Canada) is located on an island in the Saint Laurent River of roughly 500 square kilometers and is composed of 16 municipalities (MES 2018). In 2016, 1.9 million people inhabited the highly urbanized area and were making up 24% of the total population of the province of Quebec (ibid.). It was estimated by the Regional Direction for Public Health that, in 2019 in Montreal, 234 500 people were living in a state of food insecurity, which accounts for 13.6% of the population (CSAM n.d.).

Neighborhoods characterized by different socio-economic profiles coexist in Montreal. The Center-South neighborhood of Montreal has, in the recent years, been denoted as the last popular neighborhood adjacent to the city-center. During the last century, immigrants from different waves have settled in Center-South, which has also been a historical worker area. When coming out of the metro station in the center of this neighborhood, the first thing I can see are two large buildings, called the Frontenac towers, serving as low-cost housing. As I walked in the neighborhood with one of my informants, Peter, I could also notice the traditional Montreal-style duplex houses, where usually two or three households live each on one floor. Another of my interviewees, living in such an apartment, told me that her neighbors had lived there for more than thirty or forty years. Contrasting with the duplex apartment-houses, condominium blocks suddenly appear in the landscape. These new buildings are usually made for young working couples wanting to buy an apartment, and are not accessible for the low-income population. They are the first visual sign of gentrification. When we kept strolling, Peter, one of the volunteers at the *Carrefour Solidaire,* showed me a large cigarette manufacturing factory, right next to the collective gardens of the organization. He alerted me on the imminent closure of the factory, leaving a big space for construction, in which

he would actively strive for the construction of low-income houses dedicated to immigrants. But it is known that the laws of the market might guide the owners to a more paying alternative, like condominiums.

"This is a very eclectic place" says Emma, employee at the *Carrefour* and resident of the Center-South. As the differences in the types of buildings show, differences in socio-economic backgrounds are real. Gentrification can be viewed differently by different people, but it can have some substantial effects on the low-income population, namely the rise of housing prices and the proliferation of expensive grocery stores. As one of my respondents Gina said when we talked about the evolution of the neighborhood, "now the people who are not really rich have challenges, especially in matters of food. Many of our grocery stores are now expensive, there is not really a good access to food for everyone." The supermarket offer is sleek for such a big area and one of them is now being renovated (IGA Hochelaga).

5.2 *Carrefour Solidaire:* a community-based food organization

In the context of inequalities among inhabitants of the Centre-South neighborhood and its qualification as a food desert, initiatives trying to offset those have flourished. The case study I chose to focus on for my thesis is one of them and is called the *Carrefour Solidaire Centre Communautaire d'Alimentation*[10].

5.2.1 First impression and general information

The goal of the organization is to ensure the access to healthy food for everyone, putting emphasis on marginalized and vulnerable people. Their vision englobes building a nourishing Centre-South neighborhood where all community members have access to local, ecological food in solidarity with each other.

The first day I got an interview with someone from *Carrefour Solidaire*, I was invited to their freshly opened solidarity grocery. I stopped in front and looked at the storefront. Some curtains were upholding the inside view, although some movement was visible. On those curtains were clearly showed the principles of the grocery: a system of three different prices to allow an inclusive shopping experience. I entered to meet the employee who nicely received me. They had proposed to show me the new community center before proceeding with the interview. Few people were already teeming just before the opening. I discovered a very beautiful, wooden, quite small interior with green plants hanging from the

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[10] In English: *Carrefour Solidaire Community Food Center. Carrefour Solidaire* could translate to Solidarity Crossroad. Throughout the text I will use *Carrefour Solidaire* or just *Carrefour* to refer to the organization, as they themselves refer to it this way.

ceiling. All food products were laid out in a smooth way and the three-price system was explained to me. Each person can choose, when arriving to the cashier, what price they will pay that time. Either the highest "to the next" price, the "suggested price", or the "solidarity price". As each food item can be paid in three different ways, the theory would allow for a greater social mix in the store and everyone to shop at the same place. When discussing, I understood the presence of the curtains on the storefront. The very new and trendy look they gave to the solidarity grocery would be hidden by the signposts claiming the solidarity system and they would thus try to break the image of an expensive store.

When continuing the visit, I discovered, in the other room of the center, the professional kitchen with the cook already peeling vegetables. In this kitchen, many things would happen: the collective kitchen activities, the transformation of food waste into prepared meals, the preparation of the food for the community meals. The latter take place in the grocery room, which is composed of a customized layout system that can be transformed into a dining room fitting thirty people.

In 2021, *Carrefour Solidaire* was counting 525 active members (CACS 2021). 65 persons engaged to be volunteers accounting for more than 1200 hours (ibid.) and this number is growing every year.

Figure 1. Picture of the storefront of Carrefour*'s community center, 2375 Ste Catherine Street, Montreal. (Bourque 2022)*

5.2.2 The three guiding pillars and the overarching values

Eat, learn, and engage

The core of *Carrefour Solidaire*'s work is centred around three axes: eat, learn, and engage. Through their projects, they try to improve access to fresh and local food, with for example the solidarity markets or the urban gardens (CFCC & CSCCA 2022). The activities they organize are also aimed at developing skills and autonomy (ibid.) They use the kitchen and gardens as spaces for community members to exchange and learn. The third major component of *Carrefour*'s work lies in mobilizing their community around social, environmental, and political food issues (ibid.). This can be done through diverse politically oriented activities like discussions they organize for all citizens.

Dignity, inclusion, and agency

For *Carrefour Solidaire*, food is a right. In right to food, they instil physical and economical access to food, but also the choice of food. This is in line with the commonly known definition of food security: guaranteeing the access, always and for everyone, of culturally adapted and safe food. The organization wishes to improve the agency of their community members. In other words, people should be able to choose the food they want while preserving their dignity. This means they are not forced to attend food banks if they do not want to, but all people can for example go to the same solidarity grocery store (see section 5.2.3). The organization favours a long-lasting view of community agency in the food system rather than charity – although they assert charity might be needed for emergency purposes.

5.2.3 A constant adaptation for equitable food access

Before becoming what it is today, *Carrefour* has undergone many changes and is still open to change. It started in 2013 when two projects merged – the Frontenac solidarity market and 'Kitchen Encounters'[11] – to form one organization with mutualized resources. Carrefour Solidaire Center-South, the name referring to the neighborhood, developed many projects, always evolving, to have "local responses to realities that surpass the territory" (CSCCA 2022). In 2021, the CBO became part of the Canadian network Community Food Centers[12] and hence became *Carrefour Solidaire* Community Food Center (CSCCA) to enrich their programming. In January 2022 opened their community center in which most of their core activities can happen. In this space, *Carrefour Solidaire* inaugurated a

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[11] Frontenac Solidarity Market is operating since 2007 and have conducted diverse actions for better access to healthy food. 'Kitchen Encounters' (*Rencontres-Cuisines*) has since 1983 animated collective kitchens and other activities aiming to food autonomy through learning and solidarity. (CSCCA 2022)

[12] *Centres Communautaires d'Alimentation*

solidarity grocery store in which three prices coexist and allow most people to access fresh and (sometimes) local food. In the center is also a professional kitchen in which they organize collective kitchen activities for adults, teenagers, and children, and in which they cook food for the grocery and for the community meals. The community meals happen twice a week in the same space as the grocery store thanks to a reversible chair system. CARAA meetings are also organized in the same space. The collective and educational gardens they have are located in the neighborhood. Their main garden is the only one that will be mentioned throughout the text and is the one that is detailed in the next section.

Figure 2. Picture of the main room of Carrefour*'s community center (grocery and dining room)*

Figure 3. Picture of the kitchen in Carrefour*'s community center*

5.2.4 Zooming in: collective garden and CARAA

Collective garden: a space for everyone

A portion of a hundred meters' street in the city became a 'walk of flavors' (*Promenade des saveurs*). *Carrefour Solidaire* and the city of Montreal collaborated to install a collective garden in a street initially serving as daily parking space. Since 2020 the Dufresne Street transforms every summer to welcome more than 60 species of edible plants (CACS 2021). Completely open to the public for harvests and recreation, it is taken care by different groups of volunteers four times a week and coordinated by Emma, one of the interviewees in this study. 115 smart pots (planters) containing the plants are irrigated by a drop-by-drop system (Grenier 2020). Volunteers who come to the gardening sessions are invited to take a share of the harvest. What is more, all citizens are free to pick herbs, fruits, and vegetables. It is a space dedicated to relaxation, sharing, learning.

Figure 4. Picture of the 'walk of flavors', collective garden in Dufresne Street. (Laplante 2020)

CARAA: Action and Reflection Committee for Food Autonomy

The Reflection and Action Committee for Food Autonomy is the activist branch of *Carrefour*. Always mindful about social justice, the CBO dedicates this group in priority to Peer Helpers[13] and other CARAA members. This means that most of the participants are people who have faced or still face difficulties related to food. The committee has had several actions, like meetings with politicians, or the redaction of a report linked to food waste. Twice a month since 2018, CARAA members, CARAA coordinator (interviewee Eliana) and one of the co-directors gather to discuss food- or justice-related themes, sometimes in the presence of a guest expert. CARAA is designed to be an arena for the community to debate; its fundamental principle is to give a space for people to retake their power.

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[13] A Peer Helper (*pair-aidant*) is a role invented by *Carrefour Solidaire* to be filled by people who are or have been in a situation of food insecurity. Peer helpers are employed part-time (half a day per week) and help the organization to mobilize new members through their networks. They support persons in crisis who call the organization and guide them to the right food assistance. Peer Helpers might even go with them or just spend time with the person. The three Peer Helpers of *Carrefour* are also active members of CARAA.

6. Empirical findings

This chapter presents the results of the empirical evidence that were produced during field work. As a reminder, all names are entirely fictional but refer each to one interviewee. The first sub-section gives elements of response to the first research question (i.e., why do people participate in community-based activities?). Then, the second sub-section presents the identified drivers that participate in the community to gain control over their food. The third sub-section gives the different rationales concerning community present among the interviewees.

6.1 Reasons for taking part in *Carrefour*'s activities

Asking why people participate in CBOs was the first step in understanding the underlying structures of how the community gains control over their food. As mentioned in the methodology section, the selected interviewees, either volunteers or organizers, are participating in mainly two of *Carrefour*'s activities, namely the collective gardening activities and the CARAA. However, I believe the insights can also relate to an overall partaking in the *Carrefour*.

> These are people who are motivated to build a more just food system, fair and more local. […]
> Actually it depends, sometimes people identify ideologically or politically, sometimes it's
> people who are really here for the food security, sometimes they want social bonds, to feel they
> belong to a community of people. So it varies a lot according to the person. (Eliana
> 03/03/2022)[14]

The organizers (employees) are regularly in direct contact with many of the members and volunteers of the organization and hence they have an overview of people's motivations. Eliana, employee of the *Carrefour*, suggests the motivation of each person varies alongside their lifeworld and context.

Few of the volunteers in the gardening activities have manifested that their first motive in starting to engage in the *Carrefour*'s urban gardens was to have a space to pursue gardening. In urban settings, although one might have a personal garden, it can be challenging to garden at home as Thomas, an active member, says:

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[14] The quotes that are included in this chapter are all extracted from the interview transcripts and have been translated from French to English by the author.

> I have a garden, but people urinate in it, and there are cats and squirrels, it is not very optimal, so as I cannot garden at my place, I might as well go and do it [at *Carrefour*]. […] I just like thinking about nothing, having my hands in the dirt. (Thomas 15/03/2022)

As seen in the end of the quote, relaxation is also sought after by some. Their gardening moment is for some part of an after-work routine or is beneficial to escape telework. Andrea thinks it is good that "organizers organize", so she can relax and think about something else than steering her life.

> I am taken care of, you know. […] The whole day I am at work, I need to take decisions […] I have to deal with my life in general, and then I go [to the garden] and I say, 'ok what do I do?' […] It's really fun, for me it's a relaxation to go there. (Andrea 14/03/2022)

Indeed, the garden is presented by all as an informal place where the coordinator (Emma) takes the long-run decisions and is organizing the overall scheme of the collective garden. During the collective sessions, which occur few times per week with different groups, volunteers come and follow the task list according to their preference in an informal way for a couple of hours. However, Emma seeks suggestions by the active members for example for the choice of herbs and vegetables to plant.

Some respondents also showed a great interest in the main mission of the *Carrefour*, improving good food access for all and are participating first and foremost for the sake of the idea.

> First [reason to participate] it is really to contribute to diminish food insecurity. […] It is something very important in my personal life, in my values […]. And to help solidify a neighborhood, solidarity… […] My first motivation was really to contribute to something beautiful. (Carol 12/03/2022)

Equally, Peter, active member in the garden and administrator of the *Carrefour*, sees "food not necessarily as gastronomic, but political, institutional, environmental, social":

> I really want us to keep our emphasis on the community. To me, […] food is just a reason. As Michael Pollan said, it is not what is on the table that matters, but who is around it. And for me this is one of our great, great priorities. (Peter 03/03/2022)

In this quote, Peter was speaking also from his point of view as administrator in the board of directors and was referring to the importance of keeping the focus on the low-income community in a context of gentrification. His conceptualization of food tells that he aims at building a more just food system. By combatting social disparities, he hopes food security will follow.

Emma's comment (garden coordinator) coincides with Eliana's (employee) on the variety of people's reasons to engage. While I have not been able to talk to all

participants of the collective garden, I believe the employees have gained good insights:

> People who come to the collective garden come for many different reasons. Often, they want to be involved in the neighborhood, and they find it beautiful. For some it's just to break isolation, people who live alone, who don't often see other people, and who want to meet people, to do an activity. For some it's really for the harvests, to have access to fresh vegetables and because the workshops are free. And for some it's to learn how to garden. (Emma 09/03/2022)

Steven, CARAA member, is considered to be or to have been living in a situation of food insecurity which has granted him the role of Peer Helper in the organization. For him, escape solitude is one of the major reasons for his engagement. He considers that *Carrefour* saved him in a difficult phase of his life. Now, he is very involved in the operation of the organization, partly because he feels indebted for life, but also because he can socialize:

> For me, [*Carrefour*] is like a family, it's like… when I see [Eliana], I am happy to see her, I say hi, how are you. You know, it gives me someone greet, I am not alone. I come to get a lot of self-esteem allowing me to occupy my head instead of being in my neurosis, in my head. That's what I come to get. And food too! (Steven 03/03/2022)

Food does not seem to be the first reason for Steven to come to the organization. He treats his roles as a Peer Helper and CARAA member as a job which helps him to get over with some issues in his life. He praises the importance of meeting people and getting out of his comfort zone to have more self-esteem.

Figure 5. Summary diagram of interviewees' reasons to participate in Carrefour*'s activities. Answer to research question 1.*

The diagram above summarizes the main reasons of the participants to join the different activities proposed by *Carrefour*. The empirical material clearly indicated

that among all interviewees, diverse reasons came up and were sometimes multiple. Ranging from ideological mindsets to contribute to the greater good, learning how to plant vegetables, relaxing, or meeting people, all incentives lead people (mainly) from the Centre-South neighborhood to be together and sometimes discover other purposes for their involvement.

6.2 Drivers for the community to gain control over their food

6.2.1 Access to fresh food and learning

The activities of the *Carrefour* are as diverse as the reasons for which people participate. Collective kitchens, collective gardens, reflection roundtables, community meals, etc., coexist. Through them, the organization wants to provide equitable access to fresh food. During the community meal that constituted my participant observation I witnessed the very good quality of food that is freshly prepared and distributed for free. The collective garden is also a place where all volunteers go home with a share of the daily harvest.

> [My participation in the collective garden] has not changed my way to eat completely. It's not like I was eating junk food and am now vegan. […] The greens I harvest in the garden take up a lot of space [in my diet]. (Carol 12/03/2022)

Although the garden itself is not sufficient to provide all the neighborhood with fresh food, it can be a terrain for learning about diverse herbs and vegetables and developing skills in gardening. The same can be said about the collective kitchen activities.

> It was fun, doing the treatments against insects and all. Finally, it's also that they teach you to recognize insects, diseases, and all that, and we learn about biological treatments… it was nice, I learned a lot of things. (Thomas 15/03/2022)

> I really learned things about gardening. […] Plant names, how to prepare fresh herbs, how to transplant… (Andrea 14/03/2022)

The learning can also reach beyond the technical aspect. Some participants become more mindful about the social scope of food and food production while others might have even small changes in their relationship with the food system.

> [participating in the garden] maybe brought me more to think about the social aspect of agriculture rather than the health aspect. (Thomas 15/03/2022)

> [coming to the garden] brought me closer to the importance of earth, the beauty, and it became inseparable. I almost never go to the supermarket anymore. (Carol 12/03/2022)

The collective and open access street garden is also highly frequented by passing-by and notably children. The possibility of reaching the garden freely extends the learning opportunities to families and all people passing and stopping. It might also inject the thought to the population that this kind of models are possible, exist, and can present an alternative to the dominant food system.

6.2.2 Political activities

I use the term political to refer to activities or actions that intend to transform the community or society. In other words, the person or group carrying out such activities hold a discourse of change. In *Carrefour Solidaire*, political actions are mainly and manifestly present in the CARAA group (Action and Reflection Committee for Food Autonomy). CARAA holds twice a month a discussion among members and sometimes with a guest expert. However, the aim of this group is to truly give a space for the members to retake power over topics related to food challenges. The group is not aimed only to discussion. They also act and write to elected officials or write a participatory report (see footnote 16 p.38). The topics for the committees are highly inspired by the interests of the CARAA members.

Eliana, the coordinator of CARAA, organized a few sessions called *I eat, so I vote*. For the occasion of an important election, some politicians were invited to answer questions from the *Carrefour* participants. The meetings were appreciated by the members, notably by Steven:

> We did *I eat so I vote* and we invited politicians, [and we asked questions] and they answered you know […]. It was interesting to be there… I participated in two of those meetings. I found it interesting. (Steven 03/03/2022)

CARAA gives occasions for members and particularly low-income members to exert their political voice and will. In that way, *Carrefour* provides the necessary space and coordination. The empirical data shows that members get hold of subjects that they would not treat if they did not have the occasion to. In addition, participating in such activist and political meetings and actions are contributing to the members feeling they are listened to. They sense they are part of the discussion and that their voice can make a difference. This joins Sen's assumption that people need political capability in order to be able to claim their rights, as inequalities are not caused by the lack of food or lack of rights according to him (Bellows & Hamm 2002).

6.2.3 Underlying values

Solidarity

The organization *Carrefour Solidaire* is putting a lot of emphasis on solidarity, as the name also indicates[15]. Through all their projects, solidarity is the prime value that is practiced and promoted. Although the value of solidarity is displayed in the overall activities, its most visible manifestation occurs in their newly opened solidarity grocery store, where fresh, mostly local produces are sold for three prices. The ones who pay the highest price will allow others to pay the lowest price. The choice is free and at the discretion of all users. Solidarity in this form permits everyone to be in the same store, able to buy the same products.

> The grocery is splendid. What a simple yet powerful idea to have three prices in one grocery. There is no discrimination in the sense that you don't have one store for the poor and one store for the privileged. One grocery for everybody, with the same products, and with a social diversity because everyone comes to the same place […]. (Andrea 14/03/2022)

Andrea suggests social diversity is brought onto the plate with such a system. Indeed, all kinds of people can come. However, until this store is widely known in the neighborhood, the "beauty" of the place can be refraining for some, especially the low-income populations, as the interior looks fancy, like other new-wave niche grocery stores that they usually cannot access. *Carrefour* is aware of that and tries to counter this effect by putting curtains on the windows with visible explanations of the price system.

Dignity

In the aforementioned quote, Andrea also indirectly points out the importance of dignity for all. Dignity is one of the main values underlying the organization's work. It is also described by informants as enabling participants to have equal access to resources like food. Dignity was most described as being connected to the possibility of all participants to the organization to eat fresh and healthy food, without them needing to attend food banks or feed on food waste. Steven, with his knowledge on food distribution organizations, testifies that he knows many people who would prefer not to go to a community dinner or free food distribution not to be forced to endure being there, in a place "for the poor", surrounded by strangers. Those people would be happy to be able to pay their groceries with dignity like in the *Carrefour*. Although he says, "prices could always be even lower!" (Steven 03/03/2022). One informant also considers the organization to treat participants with dignity because volunteers are not there for cheap labor but are respected for their valued work. In that sense, participants feel they act with dignity.

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[15] *Solidaire* in French means solidary or solidarity.

Respect and trust

Respect is the base of all relations and can almost be seen as the ultimate underlying value, from which all other derive. The empirics showed that respect leads to feeling of equality, it leads to putting value into people and hence favoring dignity, it leads to trustful relations, and many other. The informants did not explicitly define respect, but their narratives highlighted that respect is shown for example when they are accepted as they are and when their opinions are considered.

> [The structure is] participatory, and I imply respect, dignity, goodness… so, these are the things that make it work here, we are respected, there is harmony […]. Everyone is equal. We are equal. In brackets of course, because I don't have the same responsibility as the co-directors of course, but it's as if everybody is equal. It's what they make us feel. (Carol 12/03/2022)

The respect the organizers show to the members displays through the consideration members' opinions receive. Several examples show that *Carrefour* cares about what participants think.

> CARAA is a concertation group we have here, linked with food and [other related subjects]. We are here to debate, so we debate. And then [the organizers] put it down on paper and take it into consideration. When they develop their projects, their things… it's important, our opinion is important. […] I have a great interest for CARAA, and the people are interesting. We always have good topics, good debates. (Steven 03/03/2022)

> We wrote a dissertation, you know? "If eating was a right"[16]. It's the work of the whole group through two years […]. It was not like, we meet once or twice. […] no! All along, we were considered, […] in the planification, the ideas of importance for us, our quotes […]. We had access to everything, […] it's really democratic participatory, transparent. (Carol 12/03/2022)

From respect stems also trust for some. This trust is an important factor for people to engage through time, year after year. Developing face-to-face, respectful relations during activities grants the development of trustful feelings and a will to engage more.

> Slowly, I got used [to be involved in the *Carrefour*]. I had developed trust towards the people who work with me. (Steven 03/03/2022)

Steven's relational trust development towards the people he works with was possible due to prolonged relationships with the organization's employees and other volunteers. It had a positive impact on his engagement. The second time he got asked to be a Peer Helper and CARAA member, he accepted because felt he was in a good position to do so, although he had refused the previous year because of his anxiety.

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[16] *If eating was a right*, (in French: *Si se nourrir était un droit*) is a report published by *Carrefour Solidaire* and written by CARAA members and organizers. It touches upon the importance of long-term visions in food rights and was written with the participation of members. The reference of the report can be found in the bibliography.

Indeed, feeling trust can be even more important for anxious participants and for whom participating in the activities is breaking their isolation. This was expressed by an employee who had witnessed the opposite: people not coming because the organizers were changing.

> People develop attachment and feel at ease. Many people who come to the garden are anxious, who are struggling to get out of their bubble, to communicate with people […], they trust someone, and if that someone leaves, they tend to less come back. (Emma 09/03/2022)

Trust is also felt by the employees from the organization, i.e., from the co-directors. They feel they are trusted in their work; they have freedom to do their responsibilities, and still get support when they need to. Trust proves to be a decisional factor in encouraging more implication from the employees and enhancing productivity. As both Emma and Eliana mention:

> I have a lot of autonomy; they trust me to do decisions for my program. (Eliana 03/03/2022)

> As an employee, what I find incredible with *Carrefour*, is the extent to which they trust me. […] it makes a huge difference in our work. When you feel you are appreciated and trusted, I apply myself much more in my work than in places where I was super controlled. (Emma 09/03/2022)

In this case, trust is present between the co-directors and the employees I talked to. It was developed because the directors trusted the employees in their work. It entails those employees feel they are not controlled in their work but rather encouraged. The effects are that the workers are more willing to work and feel good about the relations between them and the direction.

Achievement

The continuous achievement of planned projects is contributing to the generally shared feeling of respect towards the organization. The internal organization with four co-directors seems to be highly satisfactory among the interviewees. The hard-working staff, combined with their leadership, and their value of engagement, lead to the successful implementation of projects which in turn motivates participants to continue to engage.

> What makes it all work, is that [*Carrefour*] conclude their projects. What is planned, it works. […] maybe, if nothing was working, we would be bored, we wouldn't come […]. (Steven 03/03/2022)

The empirical evidence explicitly showed that the above-mentioned values perpetrated by the organization and appreciated by members are crucial for the functioning of *Carrefour.* With respect towards their members, the organization gains the trust of the informants. Solidarity contributes to participants feeling they

can act and eat with dignity, which is important for everybody and further for people suffering from food insecurity. All these elements contribute to people engaging continuously. Steady involvement in the organization's activities in turn contributes to people gaining more skills, having access to more food, and that they develop their critical mindset towards the food system, gaining political capability. It also means that people spend more time together and develop bonds which makes them want to stay engaged in the activities, which we will see in more details in section 6.2.4.

6.2.4 The importance of social relations

The above-mentioned values are also articulated through a general goodness and friendliness across the organization which I could witness during my participant observation. The organizers actively seek to develop socialization by organizing potlucks to gather all volunteers in the end of the gardening season or doing small socializing breaks during the activities like sharing a tea with herbs from the garden.

> The team is really fun, you must have met Emma, she's a really dynamic person, and all the others are really interesting people… you know, it was fun to go [to the collective garden]. […] It's very pleasant. We, the volunteers, are treated really well, with lots of attention, even with love. (Andrea 14/03/2022)

When participating in a community-based organization like the *Carrefour Solidaire*, social relations can be a goal or a consequence. In any case, social interactions hold a central place in the functioning of the CBO. Although in different ways, all interviewees mention the crucial drive of relations. In most cases, fun and good relations were the number one factor for the interviewees to continue engaging.

> What I liked the most [when participating in the collective gardening is] to chat with [one of the horticulturalists]! (Andrea 14/03/2022)

> You know, sharing with people every week [during the gardening sessions] is super fun, I can't wait to see them every week. (Carol 12/03/2022)

> It's fun! At least in interpersonal relations, it was really fun. […] in the end of gardening season, Emma had organized a potluck […], it was an occasion for all volunteers [from different participation days] to meet. […] It was fun, it made me discuss with people with different life paths, it was fun. We all have a common starting point you know, so it makes good exchanges. (Thomas 15/03/2022)

The organizers openly display the wish of the organization to enhance social relations. According to them, "isolation and food insecurity are closely related" (Eliana 03/03/2022) and food has an immense social drive.

> Eating is typically a moment when you come together. We talk, we share, around food, so this is what we want to do as well [at the *Carrefour*]. (Eliana 03/03/2022)

Hence, food becomes a reason for other purposes although physical access to fresh food remains a clear goal of the organization. Food is a reason to gather and spend time together. Sharing time around food encourages discussions and encounter that would perhaps not happen somewhere else. Moreover, having something in common – liking gardening or just liking food – is a trigger for people to talk to each other. Having the reason of food is also helping isolated persons to break their bubble and to create bonds.

While bonds are created in face-to-face interactions during diverse activities, *Carrefour* also encourages social diversity in their programs. The organization practices equity by openly and actively targeting, mobilizing, and including low-income populations. However, all people are welcome. The gentrification in the neighborhood reflects in the organization as Eliana (employee) says that new volunteers tend to be rather from privileged socio-economic backgrounds. *Carrefour* becomes a place where different kinds of people can get together but still have something in common. The prevailing character of social bonding in the organization further promotes unity in diversity.

Furthermore, the aspect of solidarity contained in projects like the solidarity grocery (discussed in section 6.2.3) depends on social diversity to work (some people need to pay more for others to pay less). But solidarity coupled with social diversity can also foster new horizons for acceptance of the other. My empirical data has shown that some participants have changed their ideas about people from other socio-economic backgrounds, like Steven who did not think the grocery based on solidarity would work:

> When I sit [in the grocery] and I see four people passing paying the highest price, it's nice. In the beginning, I had doubts. Will it work? Will it not? Will rich people take advantage of the system and pay the lowest price? You know, I have a vision of rich people as dishonest people. But not all of them. I am impressed, that some pay more and that it actually works. (Steven 03/03/2022)

In other words, *Carrefour* organize its activities in a way to allow all people to access fresh food in good conditions and do so by promoting social relations, diversity, and solidarity. But by doing that, they also give space for people to change their mind about things and break down prejudice.

6.3 Visions of community

Community is a central part of the identity of the studied CBO. Interviewers were asked to tell what community means to them, in the context of the *Carrefour*.

Employees tended to employ community to describe the people who attend their activities, people within a certain geographical boundary, or who have the common interest of gardening. Such an idea of the community is probably bound to the CBO's understanding of it. It is a very practical way to refer to the community.

> I guess [each neighborhood represents] different communities. I would involve [in the community] all the ones who live in these areas and maybe who identify? Well, then when I talk about the garden community, I rather mean those who are interested in it. […] It doesn't involve only the people living nearby the garden. (Emma 09/03/2022)

This evidence suggests Emma considers community to be bound to the neighborhood which can be called community of place. By adding the aspect of interest, she indirectly refers to the community of interest. Emma also brings the personal perception facet into her definition of community which suggests the sense of community is more important than where you live or what you are interested in. Only with this statement we can perceive the complexity of finding a universal definition of community. At least, the statement shows that a single position like community of place or community of interest does not seem possible in our case.

> [The community] is each person who lives in the neighboorhood, really each person, no exclusion. (Gina 28/03/2022)

Although grounded in the geographical boundaries, Gina brings inclusion to the discussion which is approved by most other informants.

> When we say everybody from the community has access [to the garden], we mean that all the people who pass by are the community. […] The community, it's everybody! You don't choose. (Carol 12/03/2022)

> [The community is] everybody who eats food. That's it, to me food is like water or air […]. I really want to stop there. Everything that eats. (Peter 03/03/2022)

> The community, it's without exclusion. We don't exclude. We must not exclude what is bad. […] It's everybody. (Steven 03/03/2022)

Carol develops a lot on what the community means to her and brings to the table many more aspects of what a community can look like or feel like. She begins with grounding the community in the neighborhood and goes on with the crucial importance of sharing and feelings of belonging and security to finish with the inclusive side of community.

> It can be in the neighborhood, and we create bonds, we share, we share ideas, sometimes goods, we share. There is solidarity, we create things. To me, community is the bonds you create with all the people around you […] and you know, you are happy. It is linked with a feeling of belonging. You feel safe. […] We watch over each other, but also on the people we don't know. It involves everybody in the neighborhood or passing by. (Carol 12/03/2022)

Andrea also shares ideas about ideals communicated through and shaping the community:

> I would say [community] is people who share… who share ideals at least. A vision of what a neighborhood can be, a vision of what a group of people living in proximity can be. And this ideal is an ideal of sharing, of collaboration, of environmental values. […] In the end, also aiming at improving the living environment. (Andrea 14/03/2022)

The community as it is seen by the organizers – of place or of interest – is rather viewed as an inclusive place by the other members: they reckon the community is everybody passing by, no exclusion possible. Community values are also expressed as being motors for getting together and goals themselves, like sharing, collaboration, or improved living conditions.

To summarize, in this empirical work I have found that the reasons for participants to show up in the activities proposed by *Carrefour* are diverse and are not necessarily linked to their wish to continue engaging, as they develop new purposes and views during their involvement. This empirical also suggests that access to fresh food and learning is facilitated through the activities. Participants can get food to eat, whether it be during community meals or after a gardening session. They can also develop skills like cooking or gardening. Political activities are occasions for members to cultivate their critical thinking as well as have a feeling of being heard and displaying agency. It is also clearly indicated that different values are holding the organization and the members together: without solidarity, trust, respect, dignity, and achievement, people would not continue to engage, and the organization would not have any purpose. In that sense, these values are equally important as any other feature of *Carrefour*, since they are the drivers of the good functioning of the organization. They are also foundational for some rationales of community. In most cases, community is equal to inclusion. The empirical material also proves that social relations are on the forefront of *Carrefour*'s work. They are simultaneously a reason for people to continue to participate, and a goal of the organization to break isolation and to create community. At the same time, relations and social diversity can bring new prospects for some participants as they break down prejudice they might have on people from other socio-economic backgrounds. To finish, the empirical work showed that community can have different meaning depending on the person, ranging from an idea bound to a common place or interest, or to common values, or total inclusion.

7.   Analysis and discussion

Analysis and discussion chapter tries to make sense of all the empirical evidence to make it resonate with existing literature outlined in chapter 2 and 3. The findings are discussed in a way that the research questions are answered.

7.1   Answers to the research questions

As a reminder, the research questions that were posed to guide this work were: (1) Why do people participate in urban food-related activities in a community-based organization in a deprived neighborhood? And (2) How does this participation in urban agriculture and other food-related activities allow communities to have control over their food?

To the first question, the section 6.1 provides answers through the outline of empirical data. All kinds of reasons are at the base of people's engagement, although these can evolve according to the person I did not find that any specific reason for participation is prevailing. They can be as diverse as a wish to socialize, to garden, to learn how to garden or cook, to have access to fresh food, to participate in a 'beautiful' project, or to be part of the community. Probably other reasons are present among members. Exploring this question constituted an important step to understand the mindset of people and of the organization, to continue investigating possible answers for the second research question.

The answers I have identified to the second research question are mainly linked to sections 6.2 (Drivers for the community to gain control over their food) and 6.3 (Visions of community). The question was focusing on two aspects: the community and in what ways it can gain control over food through a community-based organization. Through the empirics, I have identified several factors contributing to people gaining more control over their food.

First, without doubt, participants gain access to fresh food whether it be in the collective garden, in the grocery, or in the community meals. Moreover, skills are developed which encourage members to continue their efforts at home, for example cooking or gardening, and in that way, we can say that people have more control over their food than they had before participating to the named activities. Participation in the collective garden even proved that some changed their mind

about urban agriculture and have a closer relationship with homegrown vegetables since then.

Second, the political activities of *Carrefour*, namely CARAA (Action and reflection Committee for Food Autonomy) undoubtedly brings to the table certain subjects and empowers low-income participants to engage in debates and actions around food autonomy. Supporting Sen's argument that food insecurity can be eradicated if people have political capabilities helping them to claim their entitlements, I argue that CARAA is like the earth making the tree grow. *Carrefour*, with CARAA, provides a space and coordination for CARAA-members to grow a political conscience related to food topics and social justice in general. But more than this, the empirics showed that CARAA-members truly feel listened to, and it makes them more confident so that they can both mobilize and openly express their opinions, which I think is equally important as the physical access to fresh food.

Following the outline of the empirical material, different values were identified to be central to people's engagement. The respect with which activities and relations are conducted is a clear driver for participants to continue engaging. It also gives people power to achieve what they want which connects to CARAA discussed above. Indeed, this stems from a feeling of equality and participatory processes which all arise from a mutual respect between organizers and members – respect of opinions, respect of choice, of people's health. Dignity also arises from respect of people and their choices towards food. Dignity is one important facet of CFS, since the community should rely on non-emergency food sources, which is provided by the solidarity grocery or the collective urban garden. Other values, such as trust between people within *Carrefour*, at all levels, encourage more participation as people feel they are trustworthy and valued. What was called achievement – the success of all projects due to a hardworking team – is also determining for people to engage. When one believes in something, they are much more prone to invest their energy in it.

Similarly, social relations are part of the biggest drivers for people to continue engaging in the CBO's activities. This aligns with Prost (2019) claiming that social relations fostered through a CBO leads to more engagement. To stretch this argument, I would add that more engagement leads to more control over food as people continue to gain access to fresh food, to learning, to political awareness, etc. While social relations are a goal for the organization or an outcome for participants, it is equally important in shaping the community and building trust. Once again, the value of respect is at the center of socializing. Furthermore, the facilitation of social interactions around food helps vulnerable populations to break isolation. In the space of the CBO, characterized by trustworthy and nice people, the ones who might be uncomfortable in the beginning, flourish and engage in different activities. It follows the principle of CFS putting vulnerable populations at the forefront, and

this study proves it is mainly possible thanks to the promotion of social relations and of certain values such as respect, dignity, and solidarity.

This thesis has sought to understand the links between community and food security. In the past analysis and discussion section, we have outlined some elements of how people, by participating in *Carrefour*, can gain control over their food. We have seen that by coming together in the different activities proposed by the CBO, they can develop skills, awareness, relations, etc. In the next section we will look at the different perceptions and aspects of community that are displayed in the case study. We will identify what it means for the discussion in the field of CFS.

7.2 The community in all this?

Interpretations of the concept of community differs from person to person. Organizers view it rather like a geographical boundary, but I identified a transition from the descriptive use to a value-based meaning. For some, community equals inclusion and having something in common. When food is the common factor, everybody can be considered as part of the community since everybody consumes food.

Charity is not a solution – it is known within the *Carrefour*. But, at the same time, they use the community meals – free distribution of food – which represent a large part of the program since they are organized twice a week. As Peter says: "it's a balance. It is very useful to create community.". Hence food is a reason to make people mingle, and the social bonds coming out of this are linked to the building of community. In other words, the meaning of building community is related to building social relationships and a 'safety net'. So, *Carrefour* sees the meals as opportunities to make people develop networks and social bonds. Doing that also brings a sense of belonging to people which links to what some scholars call the sense of community, putting forward the belonging as a deciding factor to define community (McMillan & Chavis 1986).

The activities organized by *Carrefour* encourage social diversity. People with different backgrounds and lifeworlds come together. Food is a reason for them to come together. When spending time together or seeing the others paying the highest price in the grocery to be solidary, people might break down certain prejudice they had on "poor" or "rich" people. By changing their minds on one person, they might change their minds on the whole socioeconomic group the initial person is part of. In other words, challenging discrimination against a certain person or group has consequences beyond the place where it happened. It all starts in a physical place, for example a collective garden or a solidarity grocery, where people interact regardless socioeconomic backgrounds. The effects of these social encounters have

an effect in a much longer term and scope. As food justice advocates argue, the elimination of systemic discrimination based on economic disparities, race, ethnicity, and other sorts of intolerance is the very first step towards the construction of a more just and inclusive food system (Broad 2016). But it also proves the community can be understood as more than in a descriptive sense. It can be a tool, wanted or not, for other phenomena to happen, like the acceptance of 'others' as in being more tolerant to other people. Breaking prejudice through social diversity can constitute a virtuous circle: it leads to more social diversity because the walls of the silos in which we are compartmented in society get thinner, and we can hence combat systemic inequalities.

People enacting solidarity and diversity are also prone to redefine what community means. Aligning with Young's (1986) assumption that communities are made of the differences they experience with other groups, the present work has shown that difference can be brought within communities and can even redefine their border (if such thing as border exists in communities). In a way, relating to Young's ideal unoppressive city, a physical place such as *Carrefour*'s grocery is a space where numerous diverse groups meet and interact. When they encounter, they can see how the others act. In our case, instead of these encounters being a way for the groups to externally identify through the differences, solidarity plays a crucial role in changing perceptions of some people towards other groups. In that moment, the other people, initially belonging to other groups, become part of the solidarity group. All this is facilitated because *Carrefour* includes a vision of social diversity and provides places like the grocery for everybody to join in the same area. Under the label of community, the organization gives space for people to challenge their views. Meanings of community can evolve for the participants.

In a similar fashion that community can be represented beyond the descriptive sense, lies the idea of community being extended by the reach of the garden. The collective garden that has been mentioned since the beginning of the paper is also completely free to access for anyone. This was made possible by an active wish of the organization to install it in a street with open access harvests. Passer-byes often stop because of the attractivity of the green luxuriant street provided with picknick tables. Everyone is allowed to pick vegetables and herbs. Passing-by children and adults also have the opportunity to learn, and to enjoy fresh food. When passing by, people can get interested in the project and ask to become volunteers, as it happened with the interviewee Andrea. They might then become part of the community of gardeners, or the community of the *Carrefour* at large. In this sense, community is used in a descriptive way, like a community of interest or a community of place, as some community-scholars suggest it is used (Lachapelle & Austin 2014). However, by opening up the garden to strangers, *Carrefour* displays inclusion in their way to view the community. Therefore, I also identify community as a value, for example the value of inclusivity. Like the informant Peter says, if one eats, one is part of the

community. So – is that not what the organization tries to do through the garden? No exclusion is possible when the garden is free to access. The very limitations of the community, which some scholars try to get a hold on (Anderson & Cook 1999) are infinite.

If building community is seen as a goal, like some would argue in the CFS literature (Levkoe 2006), I believe it is always done with a purpose. In our case and in the community food security paradigm, the purpose is to enhance access to good food for all. Other intentions, even if they are unconscious, underpin community building. Informants Peter and Gina stated that "we all need to belong to and engage in the community". Does the need refer to an individualistic penchant or is it manifested to satisfy an altruistic nature? Maybe part of the answer lies in the group behavior of humans. Belonging to a group might contribute to individual feeling of safety. We can rely on others, and we create a safety net. This safety net is made of relational networks which are probably more comforting than relying solely on the government's social services. Safety net refers here to the community. However, conscious purpose or not, community has been argued to be a starting point for combatting social injustice (Broad 2016). Moreover, grounding the food system in the community can help adjusting the problem-solving actions to the realities of the place.

In the context of the organization, all participants and employees do not have a common understanding of what the community is. In contrast to Anderson & Cook (1999) claiming the crucial need to define community for CFS theory, I found that the operation of *Carrefour* is not altered by the plurality of visions of community. In the end, the important thing is that people do come together, sometimes with community-building stimulus, sometimes not.

With their different rationales of community, people find space in the organization to fulfil their desires (gardening, socializing, etc.). Participants stay engaged because they feel empowered through the activities. It can be by developing cooking and gardening skills, knowledge about plants, knowledge about other cultures. But it can also be about feeling one has a space to express oneself and be listened to. It can be through social relations, feeling less lonely. And it can be about gaining awareness about the political and social scope of food.

Finally, all possible scenarios outlined above are possible if the organization provides a playground and deliver their activities with respect, solidarity, and inclusiveness. I think about these as the "glue" of the system, or as a sun, radiating on everything without exception and making the ecosystem grow. Along the way, or along the growth, some people might even change perspectives on what they thought was the 'other': breaks down prejudice and enlarge the meaning of community.

Independently of the different meanings of community, the concept at ideological level serves to make sense of the findings and of what happens in CBOs

in general. The empirical material clearly indicates that different people carry different meanings of community, but all are participating in the same organization. A common meaning of community is not what will enhance community food security. According to my findings, it is rather the values embraced by all participants and the CBO that are contributing to encourage more engagement and in turn improving people's control over their food. Anderson & Cook (1999) argue for more clarity with the concept of community, but I argue that a plurality of visions by the participants does not hinder community food security.

Community is without a doubt a central element in community food security and among practitioners like community-based organizations. Community is used as a term to describe the work and the actions of the organization. However, this thesis shows that community is organically present among all the mechanisms leading people to engage and to gain control over their food. These mechanisms are the access to fresh foods, to learning, to political awareness or capability, sense of agency, and are all facilitated by social interactions, trust, respect, solidarity, and diversity. Community, I argue, is more than a concept but is deeply found in each interaction, feeling, or action. In other words, community is part of the identity of *Carrefour* and at the same time, community constitutes all the mechanisms that lead people to have control over their food through their participation in the activities. Taking the concept of community to justify their work, *Carrefour* facilitates relationships, values, activism, fresh food, etc. On the other hand, the study shows that participants have their own definitions of community. However, these definitions which often include the notion of inclusion, respect, and sharing, can be found in the activities of *Carrefour* (shared harvests in the garden, inclusion of everyone in one solidarity grocery, respect of members' opinions…).

In that sense, I argue that no matter the meaning of community for some, its use at the practical level in the organization leads to more food security. However, this work also shows that the real, underlying drivers for community food security are the social interactions described by the informants, which are supported by values they name, such as trust, respect, solidarity, dignity, which bolster continued engagement of the members. Those underlying drivers are easily blended with the meaning of community. This study proves once again that food is a reason for building community, but I also suggest that community is a reason for strengthening food security.

7.3 Implications for knowledge

This study suggests other leads for the understanding of the role of community for community food security. On the ground of empirical evidence, the study argues that community is used at the practical level by CBOs to bolster engagement and

this engagement leads to more food security. Community is also shown to be embodied in all aspects which are leading to enhanced food security, namely values, social relations, sharing of space and knowledge, etc. This study adds understanding to the mechanisms leading to community food security, and the role of community itself in CFS.

Further, gaining insights on community food security in urban settings can have implications for rural development. It is in my opinion necessary to consider both urban and rural areas as places to act and reflect on how to achieve more just food systems. Aligning with this argument, this thesis sought to bring rurality inside the city to achieve more fluidity in the food systems.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Key findings

Participants participating in *Carrefour Solidaire*'s activities engage for diverse reasons. None of the reasons were found to prevail on others. They include: the wish to be part of a community, the wish to act for a dear cause (activism/ideology), the wish to learn more about gardening or cooking, the wish to socialize, or the wish to just relax in a nice place.

By participating in the diverse activities proposed by *Carrefour*, people get access to learning, to political skills, to fresh food. The main drivers leading to sustained engagement by the members are the respectful environment established by the CBO, social interactions, the sense of agency, as well as other values such as trust, achievement, and dignity. Community has different meanings for different people.

8.2 Main conclusions

(1) Although participants in the CBO have different understandings of what 'community' represents,, those differences do not prevent the organization from functioning and people to engage. This study found that the use of community at the practical level in the organization provides space for people to gain control over their food. By getting together in different settings, participants get access to fresh foods, to skills, to political capability.

(2) The community is also involved in all aspects of the mechanisms contributing to food security: inclusion, respect, sharing, social relations. These aspects are the real underlying drivers which ensure continued engagement of the members.

(3) This study suggests that food is a reason for building community, but community is a reason for enhancing food security.

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Popular science summary

The global food system is constituted by all production, processing, and distribution of food across the world. Food is treated like a commodity and its trade results in injustices within the food system, not to mention the ecological disasters. Alternative food systems have emerged in rural and urban settings to try to counter the harmful effects of the dominant food system. However, some of these alternatives have also been subject to critiques as they do not systematically take into consideration social equity. Community food security movements, alternatives to the alternatives, seek to focus on the community and more specifically on low-income populations to develop grassroot and long-term solutions so that everybody can have access to fresh and healthy foods. This thesis poses the questions of why people participate in community-based organizations (CBO) and how this participation allows the community to gain control over their food. The study wants to elucidate the role of the community in community food security and the ways in which CBOs can help resolving growing food insecurity. The qualitative methods focused on a case study and produced empirical material with semi-structured interviews (8) with active members and employees of a CBO in Montreal, Canada, and observations in the CBO.

This study finds that participation in the CBO is fostered by different reasons encompassing the wish to socialize, to garden or to cook, to gain skills, to be part of a community, and to act for ideological and political purposes. By participating in the CBO's activities, the community gains more control over their food because (1) people get access to fresh foods, skills, and political awareness, and (2) the CBO provides a space where values like respect and dignity are favored, and where people can socialize, leading to more engagement, diversity, and solidarity. By discussing the meaning of community with different interviewees, the study revealed many ways to perceive this concept. The study suggests that even with the different definitions of community, the organization and the participants are acting in the same way, towards more food security. It is suggested that food is an occasion for people to come together and build community. The study also suggests that, under the label of community, the organization favors food security.

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Appendix 1

Interviewees listed by fictional name, and their role within the *Carrefour*.

Name	Role	Specifics
Eliana	Employee	Coordinator for engagement and mobilization, and for CARAA meetings and members
Emma	Employee	Coordinator of the urban collective gardens
Gina	Employee	Community chef: prepares community meals and is kitchen chef
Andrea	Active member	Volunteer in the urban collective gardens
Steven	Active member	CARAA member and Peer Helper: participates in CARAA meetings and overall activities involving Peer Helpers. Sometimes volunteers in the urban collective gardens
Carol	Active member	Volunteer in urban collective garden and CARAA member
Thomas	Active member	Volunteer in urban collective garden
Peter	Active member and administrator	Volunteer in urban collective garden and administrator in the board of directors

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