Territorializing local public policy: Building social muscle, sustaining participation in food system transformation

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Abstract
This article focuses on experiences of engagement with public institutions to explore the nature of local level state-society relations that might enable the construction of food sovereignty. It illustrates how peasants and activists struggling for food sovereignty can benefit from and shape the impact of a variety of institutional supports to enable food system transformation. It draws on the concept of territorialized food systems, to illustrate the importance of considering the what and the how of policy and on feminist social reproduction theory to add nuance and depth to how we think about the process of leveraging public policy to enable food sovereignty. I develop the concept of social muscle to describe some of the ways that social movements try to build strength and resilience in order to navigate contradictions as they arise in this process. I argue that territorializing food systems can help reclaim control over food policy at the local level, but it also requires coordination among a range of diverse actors. A feminist analytical lens helps to visibilize this diversity of actors, understand and overcome some of the barriers to participation in policy processes that they may face. Finally, I suggest that no political opportunity can be seized upon or sustained without social muscle, which is required to guide policy making towards the construction of food sovereignty and which needs to be constantly strengthened.

Keywords
Food sovereignty, municipalism, social reproduction, territorialization, social muscle

Introduction
In the face of growing inequality and climate crisis, the global peasant movement, La Vía Campesina, has put forward the idea of food sovereignty as a way to transform the corporate controlled food system (Borras, 2010; Desmarais, 2007; Paget-Clarke, 2009). This proposal
advocates for putting control over the decisions about how food is produced, processed, distributed and consumed back into the hands of small-scale food producers and local communities. It is an urgent plea to transform food systems into ways of supporting regenerative ecological relations between humans and nature. Though commonly associated with peasant movements in the Global South, diverse examples of initiatives pushing for change within their towns and neighborhoods, from small-scale agroecological farms, to local food networks, to neighborhood pantries, have popped up throughout Europe as well. There, peasant organizations and allies have increasingly directed energy towards influencing public policies as a way of linking together and scaling up potential for social transformation.\(^2\) Given the emphasis on local control over food systems, an important portion of such efforts have focused on shaping politics in local spaces by influencing municipal policies (Bizilur and Etxalde, 2015; EMAUS Fundación Social et al., 2011; Kay, 2016).

Food sovereignty represents a broad political agenda for system change that requires the involvement of many sectors and institutions. It is an agenda in constant evolution, through social movement organizing and alliance building, policy making and scholarly debate. Though not without contradictions and unresolved questions, the six pillars of food sovereignty as outlined at the Nyéléni global gathering in 2007 remain an essential starting point for understanding to the scope and overview of what the concept means (Nyéléni, 2007: 39). Still, it remains open ended and under construction. In the case of the Basque Country, after decades of struggle by small-scale farmers, the idea of food sovereignty is now receiving attention from some policymakers interested in applying the concept to guide efforts to revitalize rural areas, thus giving it a contextually specific meaning and practice. As the number of interested public sector actors increases, what to prioritize, how participation in policy making is structured and how long efforts can be sustained to ensure changes all emerge as central issues to be confronted. Before tackling these questions, this article offers some context by way of historical examples of social movements channeling their energy for change towards public policy in Europe and a framing of public policy as a tool for building food sovereignty. Then, I offer a brief theoretical framework based on three components. I explore on the concept of territorialized food systems, to illustrate the importance of considering the what and the how of policy in order to enable the construction of food sovereignty. I draw on feminist social reproduction theory to add nuance and depth to how we think about the process of leveraging public policy to enable food sovereignty. Finally, multiple contradictions permeate the concept of food sovereignty itself as well as the realities of using institutional channels to bolster it. I develop the concept of social muscle to describe some of the ways that social movements try to build strength and resilience in order to navigate contradictions as they arise.

To illustrate how these concepts help interpret ongoing policy initiatives on the ground, I provide examples from the Spanish Basque Country\(^3\) which illustrate some of the opportunities and challenges such an approach brings up. The Basque case is especially illustrative here for two main reasons. First, the Basque farmers union, EHNE Bizkaia was a founding member of La Vía Campesina and has played an important role locally and internationally in the movement for food sovereignty, making the landscape of engagement in public policy for food sovereignty especially vibrant. Second, the historic struggle of the Basque people for their right to self-determination and autonomy has contributed to a deep-rooted culture of political engagement at the local level in defense of Basque sovereignty, into which the idea of food sovereignty blends well. The notable initiatives in food system transformations in this region have already been the subject of scholarly attention (Bizilur and Etxalde, 2015; Calvário, 2017; Calvário et al., 2020), however the political landscape is dynamic and rich with lessons learned which are relevant beyond the Basque territory. Thus, this article aims to deepen our understanding and glean further insights into the process of bolstering food sovereignty via municipal institutions. (Figure 1)

In sum, this article focuses on experiences of engagement with public institutions to explore the nature of local level state-society relations that might enable the construction of food sovereignty. It
illustrates how peasants and activists struggling for food sovereignty can benefit from and shape the impact of a variety of institutional supports to enable food system transformation. I argue that territorializing food systems can help reclaim control over food policy at the local level, but it also requires coordination among a range of diverse actors. A feminist analytical lens helps to visibilize this diversity of actors, understand and overcome some of the barriers to participation in policy processes that they may face. Finally, I suggest that no political opportunity can be seized upon or sustained without social muscle, which is required to guide policy making towards the construction of food sovereignty and which needs to be constantly strengthened.

**Context**

**Politicking municipal policy spaces historically**

Approaching municipal governance and local public policy as a site of social transformation is not new in Europe. Pushing for change at the level of city government was common, for example, among socialist activists at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. They demanded new policy to address the consequences of massive rural to urban migration and a growing class of precarious urban workers. This went hand in hand with a strategy of networking. They set up national and regional federations of town and provincial authorities anywhere socialists were vying for public office (including e.g. the International Union of Local Authorities, IULA, formed in 1913). Some key ingredients in this networking were publications for information sharing, and events, which brought key actors together (Dogliani, 2002: 573). They organized regular conferences that brought together delegates representing hundreds of municipalities from all over
Europe in the period between the two world wars. Alliances were made with trade unions, cooperatives and consumer and tenants’ associations. These kinds of channels of written and in-person exchange were essential then - as they are now - to providing new leaders with knowledge and strengthening alliances. This burst of what Ewen and Hebbert refer to as municipal internationalism, “laid the basis for networks that still exist and flourish today, networks that antedated the first permanently organised cooperative action between modern nation-states. [...Later,] the explosion in town twinnings since the late 1940s, was a practical manifestation of the embryonic movement for supranational unification within postwar Europe” (2007: 327).

These large networks brought opportunities, but also challenges. The expansion of the network brought increased internal diversity and tensions between members and organizations. This came in the form of differences between socialists who saw organizing at the municipal level as a step towards revolution, and bourgeois reformists who sought to respond to the negative social and environmental impacts of industrialization and urbanization (Dogliani, 2002: 573). As these networks matured, the dependence that they had developed on key individuals became apparent when older leaders died or retired (Dogliani, 2002: 573). This shows the importance of mechanisms that build strength and cohesion within networks to ensure generational turnover in order to sustain political processes.

It is clear that today’s context is different. Efforts for social change via public policy in the early 1900s primarily dealt with emerging urban issues. Food sovereignty movements show growing attention from rural movements and spaces towards municipalities and cities. Growing income inequality has emerged as a pressing political and societal concern: since the crisis in 2007, income inequality and distribution of wealth remain at all time highs. According to the OECD, “10% of wealthiest households hold 50% of total wealth; the 40% least wealthy own little over 3%” (Fürster et al., 2017: 6). Meanwhile mainstream policy solutions are not providing satisfactory answers, especially in rural areas. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was established in 1962 as a way of increasing productivity to guarantee food security across Europe. However, after years of reforms and a changing political landscape, the CAP has increasingly shifted its focus towards subsidizing export-oriented production, giving the majority of aid to large-scale industrial agriculture. Accounting for some 37.6% of the EU budget in 2018 (58.1 billion euros) (European Parliament, 2020), the CAP is fomenting inequality in the countryside. The smallest 71.37% of beneficiaries share 14.94% of the total funds in amounts of less than €5000/year. In contrast, the largest 1.88% of beneficiaries share 26.18% of the total subsidies in amounts of more than €50,000/year (European Agricultural Guarantee Fund, 2017). Consequently, rural issues are increasingly being incorporated into more holistic or territorial perspectives about what municipal policy must address.

**Public policy as a tool for building food sovereignty**

After a period of focus on national level political parties, we are seeing a surge in attention by social movements refocusing on local level public policy. As Borras points out, the period from the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to the 1980 peace settlement in Zimbabwe saw many experiments and peasant efforts to gain state power through national institutions and political parties. Since then, as many of those revolutions and parties have been weakened and/or violently undermined, what have emerged in their place are different kinds of movements. “Most are non-party social movements and are zealously protective of their autonomy from political parties” (2016: 3). While it is not new to see municipal and state institutions as especially relevant spaces of potential social change in Europe, this history of peasant movements brings up challenges and dilemmas about the institutionalization of food sovereignty.

The role of the state (and therefore public policy) in the construction of food sovereignty is a hotly debated issue (Desmarais et al., 2017; López García et al., 2017). At the core of food
sovereignty is a demand for peoples, communities and territories to have the right to define and control their own food systems. This means that the authority (sovereignty) of the nation state is constantly being challenged (Trauger et al., 2017). Bach and McClintock warn against the dangers of such collaborations in the context of guerrilla gardens in Montreal. “Such institutionalization also standardizes and incorporates them into the abstract space of planners, policymakers, and markets; erstwhile guerrilla gardens become symbols of livability and sustainability that are marshalled to attract investment, attracting gentrifiers and real estate capital to these inner core neighborhoods” (Bach and McClintock, 2020: 15).

When food sovereignty movements engage in policy making spaces, they navigate this tension between the need to collaborate with public institutions, and the risk of losing touch with their mission and the contentious politics of challenging state authority which is part of their DNA. Indeed, the self-governed, autonomous initiatives that pave their own way without public support or even in direct conflict with the state are also important. These types of projects light a path for an emergent ‘partner state’ to follow (Restakis, 2017: 10–11).

Meanwhile, the state is not monolithic or static. A decade of austerity policies has decreased social safety nets and weakened the public sphere. This means that local authorities may be looking for new solutions in the wake of failed neoliberal policy that has left them with shrinking budgets and massively privatized services and assets. The municipal level is also important because experimenting with local and tangible solutions can be seen as a laboratory for bigger changes, both structural and in terms of social consciousness (Calle, 2015: 17). Community gardens may not directly challenge industrial agriculture, but by participating is such activities, “individuals’ political awakening contributes to the ongoing development and mobilization of a collective vision” (Bach and McClintock, 2020: 15), and local level organizing can be a more accessible way to engage in politics than what is feasible at the national level. Municipal level engagement also helps build political power at the local, territorial level, thus contributing to more tailor-made and contextually specific policy initiatives.

**Theoretical framework**

**Territorializing food systems**

In an effort to provide a framework which is broad enough to capture and foster cross pollination among the many different sectors involved in the food system, yet also specific enough to guide a particular direction of change tailor-made to fit specific geographies, I draw on the idea of territorialized food systems. This framing describes a re-scaling of political control and a broad and inclusive view of the actors relevant to this process. Indeed, “territorialization is a process of embedding the social relations of social space within a physical space” (Floyd Henson, 2015: 3). In its narrow conceptualization it refers to, “the territorial organization (territorialization) of political power that appears to give a common form to all states within the inter-state system in the modern period. This territorialization process involves the systematic parceling of a potentially global political system into a series of mutually exclusive spaces controlled by separate and formally sovereign states” (Brenner et al., 2003: 8). However taking a broader, historical perspective reveals that “the scalar organization of political-economic life under capitalism is socially produced and periodically transformed” (Brenner et al., 2003: 5). Territoriality is thus a historically specific and socially constructed notion, “forged through interaction and struggle, and thoroughly permeated with social relations” (Elden, 2013: 4). And, “the primacy of nationally scaled forms of state regulation is being destabilized” (Brenner et al., 2003: 11).

The idea behind territorialized food systems, “not only involves the emphasis on specific local, urban, and regional problems that require specially tailored solutions rather than a one-size-fits-all
national strategy, but has also opened a space for the resurgence of the urban and regional scales in their own right.” (Brenner et al., 2003: 4). The implication of this shift for the governance of food systems, then is a greater reliance on community engagement to tailor policies to the territorial context and networks that are geographically rooted and coordinated. In short, territorialization is a process that is socially constructed, and in the context of food systems suggests a process of “re-localization”, or a “place-based” approach to how the food system is structured (Moragues-Faus et al., 2020: 11).

This perspective has influenced many food systems scholars and can be understood as related to a number of overlapping concepts like, the “foodshed” (Kloppenburg et al., 1996) or “regional food systems” (Clancy and Ruhf, 2010), or alternative food systems (including Community Supported Agriculture and local markets). “These locally embedded, alternative food systems are set in opposition to the distantiated, socially disembedded food relations associated with global industrial agriculture” (Bowen, 2011: 326). Greater trust and transparency is gained by structuring food systems at the territorial scale, while a globalized system, “works to conceal production practices and environmental degradation from distant consumers” (Goodman, 2004: 5).

Territorial markets shorten supply chains, and focus on adding value to place-based food production (Kay, 2016: 12). “They are thus more distributed in that they share value between places and different actors in the supply chain” (Moragues-Faus et al., 2020: 11). This redistribution of value hints at the socio-political implications of territorialized food systems, which encourage a decentralization of political power and a rebalancing of power in social relations. As Landy puts it, “The scale of management is decentred in favour of the more local scale, at the risk of threatening the higher scale which is losing power, if not legitimacy.” (Landy, 2017: 114).

Such decentralizing and rebalancing requires, “organization and coordination between diverse actors (public, private, associations, citizens) with asymmetrical resources and powers around territorialized issues” (Fèche et al., 2021: 2). For Lamine, the “territorial agrifood systems” approach, “has the potential to create collective responsibility through the inclusion of scientists, citizens/consumers, farmers, business people, educators and politicians alike, all of whom represent the different components in a given territorial agrifood system” (Lamine et al., 2019: 168). In other words, what makes up food sovereignty implicates many different public agencies. The intention of specializing has led many governments to divide into distinct departments, which in practice can create silos of thinking and doing. “This reductionist thinking combined with the lack of coordination has led to separated sectoral developments that discount complexity, conflicts, and synergies—all key features of sustainability” (Smith and Wiek, 2012: 429). Indeed, the policy areas that are relevant to food sovereignty naturally center around agrarian policy but also range from public infrastructure to child care to education. As Marsden and Smith suggest, “re-localisation can contingently create spaces which bring together new assemblages of local and external knowledges and practices” (2005: 448). Thus, shifting the scale of policy intervention and collective action can help enable networks capable of driving change.

**Feminist policy making**

In addition to rethinking the what of public policies for food sovereignty, inspired by a territorial approach, feminist policy vision also helps reframe how policies might be developed in order to better support food sovereignty. In Europe there are a number of initiatives that focus on gender and public policy. Many of these emphasize the need for more women to be represented in public office. While important, if the structural barriers to participation in politics are not resolved, these efforts will have limited impact. This requires much more than policy efforts that simply focus on women as the targets of development, and see them as key recipients of aid and protection.
Smith and Wiek argue that the complexity of sustainability can be better tackled by, “integrating knowledge and resources from various stakeholders and decision makers,” via “inclusive, collaborative, and participatory approaches” (Smith and Wiek, 2012: 430). However, such collaboration sheds light on the centrality of the politics of participation. If the goal is to create public policies for food sovereignty that are truly transformative, an appreciation of the diversity and inequality that shape the ability of people in a given territory to participate must be built into the way these initiatives are developed and implemented.

Social reproduction scholars have illustrated how the division of labor within the current capitalist system has invisibilized care and reproductive work, like child raising, food provision and housekeeping, mostly carried out by women for centuries (Federici, 2019; Ferguson, 2017; Fraser, 2014). Authors like Deere (1995), O’Laughlin (2007) and Agarwal (2014) have pointed out how many classic studies of agrarian political economy have portrayed the peasantry and the family farm as one homogeneous unit. This hides the fact that within farming households there are complex sets of class, gender and power relations. Not all resources are necessarily pooled nor is all labor shared nor recognized. And not all families conform to hetero-normative stereotypes. The reproductive and care work done predominantly by women within the food system is on the one hand invisibilized and undervalued by capitalist ideas of what farm and food work looks like, while on the other hand capitalism would not function without it. In other words, capitalism needs patriarchy to survive. The work of ecofeminist scholars like Mies and Thomsen (1999) and Herrero (2011) has also deeply influenced food sovereignty movements today. Building on these ideas, proposals coming from Basque women’s collective for food sovereignty, Etxaldeko Emakumeak, are calling for ‘agro-ecofeminism’ as a key part of their struggle (Emakumeak, 2018; Laslao and Emakumeak, 2019). For them transforming gender relations is an important component of food system transformation and ultimately a key pillar of food sovereignty. In terms of public policy, this means thinking about policies through a feminist lens in a way that corrects historic exploitation of social reproductive labor, while also establishing new ways of policy making that create space for different, more just gender relations.

**Social muscle**

Taken together these perspectives on the *what* and the *how* of policy making provide insights into the ways that local public institutions can enable food sovereignty. Policy must be territorialized, reflecting specific needs and realities of a diverse set of actors in a given territory, and inclusive in its objectives and process. Just as food sovereignty movements benefit from institutional supports like this, to achieve and sustain this type of policy landscape, public institutions need to be influenced and guided by collective social pressure to stay relevant to efforts to build food sovereignty. To explain this dynamic I develop the idea of social muscle.

I borrow the phrase from Basque activist, Ana Gonzalez who uses it casually in her descriptive way of speaking about collective efforts to influence local public policy. The term resonates here because: a.) the function of a muscle is to provide force and/or motion. Seen in political spaces, social muscle can apply pressure and move processes forward; b.) muscle is made up of a bundle of muscle tissues, themselves made up of a diversity of different proteins. Strength is developed by increasing the number and diversity of those proteins. This highlights the importance of collective organizing among diverse actors as the basis for strength and endurance of social muscle; and c.) muscles transform energy from the nervous system into mechanical force. This point evokes the idea that information and education are key inputs that trigger and drive social muscle.

Like other biological metaphors transposed onto social relations (for example, social metabolism (Molina and Toledo, 2014) or social resilience (Cote and Nightingale, 2012), the idea of social muscle must be taken as an analytical device, not a manner of equating social and biophysical
processes. That said, the concept of social muscle is used here to refer to the force generated by collective processes which can influence the process and outcomes of policymaking, and help to sustain institutional dynamics which support food system transformation. As I will unpack in the following sections, social muscle is important because the process of territorializing food systems is not automatic. As Sack argues, “territories require constant effort to establish and maintain” (cited in Elden, 2013: 4). And feminist policy making requires inclusive collective process, which social muscle strengthens and is strengthened by.

**Policy initiatives for food systems change in the Basque Country**

**Access to land and territory**

Central to food sovereignty is the issue of access to and control over the natural resource base needed for food production, like seeds, forests, land and water. Land concentration is increasing across the European region, putting many small farms out of business. Between 2003 and 2013 the EU lost 33% of farms under 10 ha (Feodoroff and Kay, 2016). And of those smallholders that survive, as of 2009, only 28% of the land was held in a woman’s name, even though women make up 41% of the family labor force (Shortall, 2010: 16). Only 31% of cash transfers from the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU go to women, who typically receive less due to the fact that they tend to own smaller parcels of land (de Gonzalo Aranoa and Urretabizkaia, 2012: 35).

To address the issue of land access for small-scale farmers, some local public policies are focusing on facilitating lease and rental agreements. Many of these efforts are being called ‘land banks’. These land banks often involve the municipal government serving as an intermediary that helps identify potentially farmable land, and facilitates access at favorable terms for farmers to both privately and publicly held property.

In Zeberio in the Basque Country for example, as part of the integrated rural development plan, “Nekazalgune”, the local government opened a call for proposals in 2014 for projects that would revive the primary sector, providing job opportunities, entry points into agriculture for young people, and care for the environment. After consulting with EHNE Bizkaia, local authorities sought to provide alternatives for a town with an aging rural population and outmigration of youth. Proposals were evaluated based on the following criteria: viability, sustainability, agroecology, inclusion of gender perspectives, job creation, and community vision. In 2 years, a total of four projects were granted land with leases for 10 years (one recipient opted not to take the land). However, what was initially conceived of as an annual call for proposals was suspended after local elections brought a new political party to power. This example highlights the challenge of sustaining projects like land banks when they depend entirely on the will of the party in power.

While no one size fits all model exists, the size of the municipality, state of the budget, amount of land in public hands, demographic changes and local economy are all factors likely to shape the way local governments see the most pressing problems. Leveraging the expertise, knowledge and problem-solving capacity of social movements and small-scale food producers, EHNE Bizkaia was able to give input and influence the municipal government of Zeberio. What these land banks and lease arrangements appear to lack however, are institutional changes to secure spaces for ongoing democratic participation in how these programs are developed and managed. In cases like Zeberio we see how this makes such initiatives weak once the governing party changes and becomes less supportive of the food sovereignty agenda, especially if the capacity to influence local authority was dependent upon particular public representatives rather than the pressure of social muscle external to party politics.
**Territorialized food economies**

Perhaps the most commonly cited mechanism for redistributing power in place-based food systems, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes and related models, serve to bring producers and consumers closer together. However, one especially dynamic arena of local government involvement in territorializing food systems is via public procurement in a range of public institutions. Rather than community supported agriculture, such programs can be seen as publicly supported agriculture, providing secure markets for local producers. On the producer side, women tend to work at points of sale in farmers markets and managing of multiple CSA accounts, thus providing demand by larger public institutions can relieve the pressure on this position. On the side of those receiving locally grown food, the quality of food at public institutions like school cafeterias, hospitals and elderly care facilities has health and gendered implications. The care and education sectors tend to employ more women than men, and if children and elderly people are sick or unhappy because of food quality, the burden of dealing with and finding solutions falls disproportionately on women in the household. Conversely, if kid’s and grandparents’ food is local, free from agro-chemicals and nutritious, the benefits to the rest of the family will likely be felt most by the women in the house.

Public procurement is a strategic place where local authorities are expressing their support for particular models of food production. In smaller towns, filling demand may be less of a problem, but in larger cities, public procurement policies can require coordination and pooling of production among small-scale producers in order to fill orders, adding additional administrative and organizational challenges for farmers, a key aspect of the social muscle required to take advantage of public procurement opportunities.

**Participation in policy-making**

A feminist and territorial perspective of local food economies emphasizes the importance of increased opportunities for new types of governance, and increased citizen participation in deciding how the food system works. According to Renting et al., new relationships to food that things like CSAs generate, “form the basis for (re-)creating linkages with state and market parties, and thus lay the basis for new configurations of agri-food governance mechanisms” (Renting et al., 2012: 290).

Some forms of participation remain informal, via personal and activist networks linking local authorities, farmers, consumers and/or food sovereignty activists. While this can be effective, it privileges the voices of those who are already connected and risks further excluding already marginalized groups. In an effort to organize and institutionalize participation in food system transformation, the concept of a food policy council has been gaining traction in recent years, especially in the UK and North America. These councils vary in structure, but in general they attempt to provide an institutional architecture for people’s engagement in policy spaces dedicated to food issues. Some sit squarely within government institutions, with funding and participation by elected officials. Others are volunteer-based, groupings of civil society representatives, which are separate from, but engage with governments. A key debate has emerged in the context of these types of initiatives in the Basque Country: opt for broad coalitions, which include competing political parties and risk very slow action, or engage only with the party in power and risk losing the council space when power shifts hands? (Urkijo personal communication, 2016). While broad coalitions can ensure more stability for initiatives over time, they require sustained engagement and social muscle.
Rethinking care work and the politics of participation

Besides who is selected for leadership positions or invited to meetings, there are structural factors that perpetuate gender inequalities and the ability for women and LGBTQ people to effectively participate. Politics is dominated by masculine logic: competition, hierarchy, public debate, imposition, etc. A feminization of policy spaces introduces other priorities like: care, work in networks, valuing everyday activities, negotiation and agreement (Ubasart González, 2017: 1–2). Plus, without a transformation of the way care work has been historically divided among men and women, participation in political spaces becomes an additional burden on women’s already limited free time. On the one hand this can be addressed by developing public policies that reach these, often invisibilized, areas of society. This means providing things like public child care or free education to defray some of this burden.

On the other hand, there is also a need to bring care work into politics, “put life at the center,” (Serrano, 2017) or “feminize” politics (Zechner, 2016). This means finding new and more effective ways of making space for the emotional labor that is also part of policymaking. Putting life at the center of politics also means reassessing the priorities embedded in policymaking spaces. In other words, feminist policymaking is about making policy that recognizes and supports care work in society, while also finding ways of prioritizing care work in the process of making policy itself. None of these strategies would be complete without rethinking the role of men and new masculinities, which also reinforces the importance of men’s contribution to care work and transforming gender relations (Pinilla Muñoz et al., 2014).

Saxonberg calls for degenderizing policy as opposed to genderizing policy. In the area of family and social policies, Saxonberg argues that the key question is the degree to which policies “give women incentives to work or to stay at home, and whether they give fathers incentives to share in child-raising tasks, because these policies have the greatest impact in terms of promoting or discouraging gender equality” (Saxonberg, 2014: 2). Public maternity leave but no paternity leave and/or not having high quality public childcare services can become incentives for women to stay out of the labor market and reify patriarchal gender roles. In contrast, combined maternity and paternity leave with incentives for fathers to assume childcare and/or high-quality public care options can help diminish existing gender roles and expand labor and care options for families.

Such policy questions may seem far removed from a food sovereignty agenda, but taking the gender dimension of food system change seriously forces us to broaden our thinking about what territorial and feminist policy making for food sovereignty might look like. In the Basque context, efforts to explore the intersections between feminism and food sovereignty have highlighted the importance of alliances between feminist and farmers movements. This has also meant that much greater collaboration among public institutions in rural and urban areas is needed to bring historically separate policymaking spaces into a collective conversation. Etxaldeko Emakumeak has sought to address this issue by hosting a series of workshops with public officials working on gender equality in rural municipalities to explain the realities faced by women in the farm sector. Another example of how such integration is being promoted is through the production of educational materials. The training manual developed by the Basque government Institute for Women, EMAKUNDE, seeks to support the incorporation of a gender perspective into local and regional development (De la Cruz, 1998). Documents like this and many of the policies for food sovereignty discussed throughout this article are likely to have some very important impacts on gender relations. However, to better sustain this work, the frame of policy proposals for food sovereignty must explicitly make gender justice a more consistent component of policy language, process and outcomes.
Building social muscle to sustain transformative public policy making

Regardless of how perfect public policy is on paper, the realities of the political landscape in which it is developed and implemented will ultimately shape its impact. No policy is self-interpreting nor self-implementing (Franco and Monsalve Suárez, 2017). The successes and failures described in the policy initiatives above reveal some contradictions and shortcomings. Seemingly transformative policies like the land bank in Zeberio can be reversed despite being developed through a participatory process. The opportunities provided by public procurement to support food system change may be missed if farmers and food producers are not well coordinated. I suggest that strengthening social muscle can soften some of these contradictions and help ensure that local public policy making supports and sustains food sovereignty. Taking an active role in generating knowledge to inform and monitor policy efforts as well as training and political education are two key strategies found among Basque food sovereignty activists to strengthen social muscle.

Informing and monitoring policy: Don’t wait for the state

Whether it is an incomplete land registry, (Kenny and Coin, 2016), lack of understanding about how territorial markets work, (Kay, 2016: 15), or the real contribution of women’s labor to the food system – who controls the collection of data and the production of knowledge deeply shapes the policymaking process. Research and educational processes are never neutral. Preliminary studies to inform policy makers are crucial, and below I highlight some tools, which have been developed to ensure that control over these processes is held locally. Additionally, the assessment of policy impact and popular monitoring efforts can be seen as opportunities to strengthen social muscle. In practice, the assessment of impacts and preliminary studies for future policies are not separate activities. Ideally tools for analysis of the challenges and opportunities for local public policies provide an accountability mechanism for ongoing feedback, evaluation and adaptation so that policies can be responsive to people’s needs and evolving contexts.

The Basque socio-economic observatory, Gaindegia, has partnered with Basque farmers’ union, EHNE Bizkaia to develop an opensource mapping software to serve as a vehicle for articulating participatory land policies. This tool collects and organizes cadastral data that is currently dispersed among different local and regional authorities, as well as geographic features, like sun exposure and soil quality plus tenure information. The idea is to provide mapping tools that the farmer’s union can use to articulate clearly its alternative vision of territorial planning that would contribute to food sovereignty. This initiative is inspired by the idea that social movements do not need to rely only on government data to develop their policy proposals. In a sense this can be seen as an attempt to assert people’s sovereignty over the data that informs policy making. However, this also brings up important debates about how to maintain control over data. If made opensource, what kinds of protections exist to prevent investors with different economic interests from using these detailed maps to develop a different plan for capital expansion into new areas?

There are a number of international tools that can help to add extra impact to this cycle of informing and monitoring policy. Using human rights language can also change how demands are perceived or provide guidance to local authorities about policy implementation. Instruments like the Tenure Guidelines, the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines, CEDAW, and Right to Food all provide normative backing to many of the local level policy initiatives outlined in this article. However, these human rights frameworks to which nearly all states are signatories often go ignored. Nonetheless not waiting for the state to uphold human rights (Franco and Monsalve Suárez, 2017), appropriating such frameworks, adapting them to local contexts and giving meaning to human rights on the ground can help people take control over the production of knowledge about policy impacts and needs. In the Basque Country for example the Charter on Social Rights represents a process
bringing together six unions and six social movement organizations that decided not to wait for the state. “For this reason, we assume the responsibility to put forward a Charter of Social Rights, the objective of which is to guarantee basic social and economic rights in order to ensure that all people who make up Basque society have the ability to make their own decisions about and access to the conditions necessary for dignified lives” (Asamblea nacional de la Carta de Derechos Sociales de Euskal Herria, 2014).

Incorporating these frameworks at the local level strengthens advocacy work with the use of arguments grounded in human rights. At the same time, people’s monitoring efforts can put more transformative interpretations of human rights declarations and local policy into public debate. The process brings together different groups and lays the groundwork for developing strategies for future action.

**Education and political formation for generational turnover**

Strong leaders are certainly important, but a dependence on a few individuals to keep networks functioning can be a major weakness in the long term as seen in the historical case of the IULA. To address the challenge of generational turnover in food sovereignty movements a number of notable educational initiatives have emerged. Some like postgraduate, MA and PhD programs at European universities including the University of Coventry, the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Universidad de Cordoba, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Universidad del País Vasco (UPV), among others, have created research communities which cultivate scholar-activism especially focused on agrarian political economy, political ecology, social movements and agroecology (Borras, 2016). Other programs like the collaboration between EHNE Bizkaia and UPV, Baserritik Mundura, have translated the Brazilian landless people’s movement (MST) model of political training (developed at the Escuela Nacional Florestan Fernandes, ENFF) to the Basque context in a post graduate program on food sovereignty. One of the class modules in the launch of the program in 2016 was specifically dedicated to local public policies for food sovereignty. Another module in the 2017 edition focuses on feminism and food sovereignty, and care work is built into the student’s responsibilities throughout the year. Other platforms like the Nyéléní pan-European Movement for Food Sovereignty have since 2011 been working to consolidate the European network of organizations working towards food sovereignty. At the second pan-European forum in Romania in 2016, specific workshops were organized to discuss public policies for food sovereignty. Importantly, many efforts are ongoing that focus on training new farmers and food producers and providing education about issues ranging from agroecology as a movement, a practice and a science to mechanisms for land access and health and safety regulations. With less than 5% of the population employed in agriculture in most European countries, a key part of strengthening the social muscle behind food sovereignty depends on expanding and providing training for the next generation of food producers, as well as linking up with other allies and leaders for food system change.

**Conclusions**

This article brings together a small portion of the many examples of innovative policy making at the local level happening throughout the Basque Country today. Food sovereignty is a lens for understanding how these diverse initiatives can work towards broad based system change. What becomes clear, however, is that a shift towards a more feminist and territorial approach to both the content of public policy as well as the political process is needed in order to build food sovereignty. The examples looked at here suggest that peoples’ participation and feminizing politics are both important in the way policy gets created. But using public policy to scale up the construction of food
sovereignty must be a thoughtful and intentional process, bolstered by strong social muscle. There is no one size fits all model, however some general insights can be drawn. 

Who is involved matters. Local authorities play a key role, but diverse coalitions spanning multiple sectors throughout a given territory and which visibilize the role of social reproductive labor in the food system, are also essential. The way information is used to shape these processes matters. The way knowledge is generated and controlled has political consequences. Information and knowledge building strategies that empower local communities can be seen as the engine for sustaining peoples’ participation. How participation is structured matters. Participation is not just a matter of holding an open meeting. Here I have focused especially on highlighting how obstacles to participation are disproportionately felt by women. But many kinds of exclusion exist, based for example on race, class, age and ability. Participatory policy making for territorializing food systems therefore means dismantling these structural barriers to participation for all marginalized groups and building new institutional arrangements that enable effective participation by the people who are most negatively impacted by the corporate controlled food system.

Participation that rebalances power enables policy to be more than a bureaucratic exercise and provide real strategies for confronting political problems. At the same time, as the many challenges noted throughout the text suggest, policy alone will not suffice. Initiatives to build food sovereignty on the ground, must seek ways to build social muscle and become more than a collection of isolated projects. Rather than thinking of farmers and food sovereignty activists as participants in policy making, perhaps it is more fruitful to think about feminist and territorial approaches to local public policy as one form of participating in a broader project of building food sovereignty.

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**Notes**
1. “Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal - fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations.” – Nyéléni Declaration (2007)
2. For example: the public policy discussions held in the context of the Ny éléni Europe process; The participatory process led by Land Workers Alliance in England to develop policy proposals; or the seminar organized by EHNE Bizkaia on the same topic in Nov. 2016.

3. This research draws on 5 years of participant observation and engagement with Basque farmers and activists working to build food sovereignty. 40 interviews were conducted during 2018 with farmers, local authorities and activists in the Basque Country and other regions of the Spanish State and Europe.


7. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living including adequate food, as well as the fundamental right to be free from hunger.

References


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