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Inviting Everyone to the Table: Strategies for More Effective and Legitimate Food Policy via Deliberative Approaches

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Abstract

It is well-recognized that the general public is not typically involved in food policy debates, with participation often limited to elite participants with special interests. This paper investigates potential strategies for more effective and legitimate food policy utilizing systemic approaches to deliberative democracy. Two main strands are explored: first, it is argued that food is a key domain that could benefit from the move to systematic approaches to deliberative democracy. Examination of various types of public engagement about food, including consultation by submission, consensus and citizen conferences, citizens’ juries, and local food planning, reveals a dominance of micro-public perspectives that warrant greater integration and analysis at a systemic, macro level. Second, the paper contributes to the dialogue on systemic deliberative processes by analyzing tensions that are endemic in the domain of food policy, illustrating some of the points of weakness (and potential strengths) for effective deliberation in similar complex systems as well as presenting suggestions of directions for future research to contribute to the development of a more robust analytic framework for systematic approaches to deliberative democracy.

Introduction

Food is a highly contested domain in contemporary democratic societies, in no small part because everyone eats. Food *is* special: we require it for survival, it is a basic human right that is deeply entwined with our personal and cultural identities. What we ingest literally becomes part of us, making it distinct from most other things about which we make decisions, and making it rich with symbolism as well as presenting a multitude of choices and associated risks. Food-related issues have resonance for many people in ways that other issues do not, as Gwendolyn Blue (2010) notes, because they involve the well-being of ourselves and those close to us.

Many have noted that there is a need to maintain—or in some cases restore—public trust in the food system. Levels of trust in food systems are correlated with diverse social and relational factors, and have been documented as relatively high in countries that have experienced high-profile food crises (such as the United Kingdom despite the BSE scare) and quite low in locales with reputations for high-quality and nutritious food such as Italy (Kjaernes, Harvey, & Warde 2007). Food is an important domain in which to promote restoration of public trust which is critically related to the legitimacy of policy and the effectiveness of these policies.

Although the need for public participation in food policy is clearly recognized, there is limited consensus on the appropriate mechanisms for promoting it (Shepherd 2008). Some scholars and regulators have advocated the need to develop novel spaces for public involvement in food policymaking (Hansen 2010; GOS 2011; UNGC 2012) to foster trust and engage the public in critical decisions which affect their everyday practices. Engagement in food policy is particularly

important because the general public considers and evaluates risks differently than technical experts and regulators, and hence their involvement is critical for effective policymaking (Slovic 1987; Putnam, Pharr, & Dalton 2000; Houghton et al. 2008). The general growth of awareness and fear of 'risks' in contemporary society (Beck 1992) also makes food a critical target for public engagement in deliberative policymaking.

This paper investigates potential strategies for more effective and legitimate food policy by taking a systemic approach to deliberative democracy. Following a brief introduction to deliberative democratic theory with focus on systematic approaches, two main points are made: first, it is argued that food is a key domain that could benefit from systematic, integrated approaches to deliberative democracy. Examination of recent attempts at public engagement on food-related issues, including consultation by submission, consensus and citizen conferences, citizens' juries, and local food planning, reveals a dominance of micro-public perspectives that warrant greater integration and analysis at a systemic, macro level. Second, the paper contributes to the dialogue on systemic deliberative processes by analyzing conflicts that are endemic in the domain of food policy, illustrating some of the points of weakness which need to be mitigated in order for effective deliberation to occur within similar complex systems, and highlighting specific issues raised by food policy that warrant future research to build a more robust framework for systematic deliberative democracy approaches.

What are deliberative democratic approaches?

The 'deliberative turn' (Dryzek 2000) has been a major focus in democratic theory over the past 25 years (Elster 1998; for surveys see Bohman 1998; Gastil &

Levine eds. 2005; Chappell 2012). Deliberative democratic theory is normative: it claims that for decisions made in democracies to be legitimate, they must be preceded by genuine deliberation. Justification of political decisions should be founded in the “procedures and communicative presuppositions of democratic opinion- and will-formation” (Habermas 1996, 30). Many mechanisms for democratic decisionmaking do not support this type of legitimacy; voting may reflect an oversimplified aggregation of very general and typically fixed preferences; lobbying tends to represent narrow interests of those who have the capacity to pay for representation and accentuates strategic gaming of decisions; and so on. Hence supporters of deliberative democracy argue that we should both make certain that legislative bodies behave in a deliberative manner and promote deliberation and engagement among citizens. Thus in deliberative democracy, “[t]alk-centric democratic theory replaces voting-centric democratic theory” (Chambers 2003, 308). In truly deliberative processes, people must rely on reasoning that engages with the needs of everyone likely to be affected, hence utilizing a collective sense of the good (Gutmann & Thompson 1996; Rawls 1996).

Advocates of deliberative democratic approaches use various rationales to defend them (Cooke 2000). First, deliberative approaches are argued to be procedurally fair and hence they improve the outcomes of decisionmaking (Benhabib 1996; Cohen 1996). Deliberative approaches create epistemically-robust democratic outcomes as they are concerned with producing the best possible policies (Habermas 1996). Others believe that they are educative and promote widespread participation in policymaking and civil affairs (Barber 1984), allowing the development of neglected skills relating to deliberation and respect for the views of others (Gutmann & Thompson 1996), especially where they are in conflict, and

improvement of participants' understandings of their own values and preferences and abilities to develop well-grounded arguments to explain them (Chambers 1996; Niemeyer 2011). Deliberative democratic approaches also have the potential to promote more transparency and trust in public institutions, and hence result in more legitimate and effective policy. Most importantly, advocates of a deliberative model argue that it makes the best sense (compared to competing models) of our key normative assumptions relating the good life which are central to Western democracies (Rawls 1993; Habermas 1996; Benhabib 1996). The key idea is that everyone is capable (in principle) of making informed judgments on moral and policy questions, and no one's opinions can be discounted on irrelevant grounds as they are autonomous moral agents due equal respect. Hence, engagement must not only inform, consult, and involve the public, but promote higher-level processes (Head 2007). Some efforts have been made to develop metrics for levels of deliberation based on empirical case studies (e.g., Steiner 2012), although details of such schemes have been critiqued in various ways.

A recent and more nuanced approach to deliberative democratic theory focuses on the complex and larger-level systems within which legitimation of decisions and policies typically occurs (for a review of this literature and a critique, see Owen & Smith 2015). These scholars (see particularly Mansbridge et al. 2012; but also Mansbridge 1999; Goodin & Dryzek 2006; Dryzek 2010; Parkinson & Mansbridge ed. 2012; cf. Goodin 2008) stress that the empirical turn in deliberative democracy scholarship has gone too 'micro,' prioritizing "discrete instances of deliberation, investigated with little if any attention to their relationship to the system as a whole" (Mansbridge et al. 2012, 25; see also Parkinson 2006; Thompson 2008; Stevenson and Dryzek 2014). They advocate a turn upward to focus on the system

taken as a whole in terms of its deliberative characteristics, including widening the definition of what counts as 'deliberation' to include more informal practices such as 'everyday talk' and media coverage/debate. In one dominant view (Mansbridge et al. 2012), processes that are non-deliberative can nevertheless be viewed as part of a larger system in which they contribute to a deliberative process. Critics have stressed that this account runs the risk of judging a system to be deliberative where there is little (or no) deliberation actually taking place among citizens, which runs contrary to the basic tenets of deliberative democracy, and advocate developing a 'deliberative minimum' as well as a more robust conceptual and normative framework for making judgments about deliberative systems (Owen & Smith 2015). We will return to this issue in more detail later in the paper in relation to deliberation about food policy in particular.

Engaging the public in food policy deliberation

In this section, I explore formal food policy engagement activities conducted in recent years with particular attention to their deliberative contributions. These activities are grouped under general categories, but undoubtedly overlap in some of their key characteristics (for a more formal typology, see Rowe & Frewer 2005). The topics on which the events focused ranged greatly from narrower debates over food risk (Barker et al. 2010), biotechnologies in food, and labelling, to broader issues such as food security and agricultural policies. Many were not explicitly envisioned as deliberative democratic activities but they often share theoretical and practical aims with those methods, hence making them appropriate targets for an analysis of this type. A detailed evaluation of the actual outcomes of any one of these engagement processes is well beyond the scope of this paper, as my main focus is on the processes themselves and prospects for future deployment within more

systematic approaches to deliberative democratic theory. By taking both micro and macro perspectives on these activities, I show how more integration is required in food policy initiatives along with more attention to the broader food system.

Consultation by submission: Various governmental bodies use online mechanisms for soliciting stakeholder views on food policy. These platforms clearly are efficient in terms of broad accessibility and require much lower levels of funding and ongoing maintenance, hence permitting low-cost engagement. Examples include the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the Australian Commonwealth Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR), and Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). Similar to many scientifically-based regulatory organizations, all of these bodies have statutory obligations to consult with stakeholders. Who counts as a ‘stakeholder’ may well be a complex matter (Glicken 2000), but for instance EFSA defines a ‘stakeholder’ broadly as “an individual or group that is concerned or stands to be affected—directly or indirectly—by EFSA’s work in scientific risk assessment.”

The usual format for public consultations is electronic submission with a limited time period, specific points on which feedback is requested in response to a regulatory proposal, and details about the type of comments that will be considered admissible in terms of the organization’s mandate. Typical topics for consultation include labelling requirements, food packaging, permissible additives, food fortification, and food safety issues. The public is notified of a consultation through media outlets along with direct invitations issued to a standing list of stakeholders including industry and consumer advocacy groups.

These types of consultation mechanisms typically do not support principles of deliberative democracy as traditionally understood: for instance, although they are in principle 'open to all,' there are clear barriers to widespread participation including awareness of the consultation, language (Finardi et al. 2012), and requirements of technological proficiency associated with internet use (mitigated if there is an option for receiving non-electronic submissions). However, if certain features are in place as part of a broader deliberative system, they may make a positive contribution. So although this type of consultation often does not result in transparent deliberative dialogue, as public comments go directly to the regulatory agencies for consideration without interaction fostered either amongst members of the public, or between them and regulators or experts, public comments in some cases are collated and made public. For example, in 2008 EFSA began publicizing comments received, along with making a commitment to considering them and giving motivations for including (or excluding) these considerations in their final opinions on the policy under discussion (Finardi et al. 2012). In the instance, the process also allows considerably more integration between the deliberative contributions (however stilted and asynchronic it might be) and the actual policy outcomes.

Some commentators argue that deliberation can occur when individuals consider evidence and arguments representing various points of view (Lindeman 2002) or when a citizen justifies her views or defends them against challenges even if only in her own mind (Gunderson 1995). Thus online forms of deliberation can produce greater awareness of the reasons underlying opposing views (but also can result in polarization, see e.g. Price, Nir, & Capella 2002) as well as fostering a generally more deliberative culture, when viewed from a systemic level.

Another concern is that the rules of engagement are highly structured in ways that many potential participants find overly limiting; consultation only occurs with regard to specific issues and against the backdrop of the regulatory authority's mandate. For example in the Australian OGTR, certain types of considerations are not open for debate, namely those relating to potential social and economic effects of GMOs which by legal, parliamentary definition lie outside of the regulator's mandate. Citizens' concerns about GMOs often are a hybrid of worries about tampering with nature together with patent rights, benefits for investors, and risks for consumers or those in developing countries, but Australian regulatory structures do not allow these types of considerations to be simultaneously considered, making some citizens feel their concerns cannot be heard (Robins 2006). This example underscores that consultation alone cannot be assessed outside of the broader system within which policy is constructed, which in this case is viewed by many as not open to public input, deliberative or otherwise.

Consensus and citizen conferences: This type of public engagement on food policy has occurred frequently, with consensus conferences conducted in Europe including the United Kingdom and Denmark, Canada, the United States, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Australia (Joss & Durant 1995; Einsiedel, Jelsøe, & Breck 2001; Mayer & Geurts 2008), among other locales. The typical format for such events is that a small group of lay persons (12–15) are recruited to examine some controversial issue or more infrequently a policy proposal. Participants are asked to identify key concerns and engage in discussion and questioning of experts, and then generate a consensus position that is made available to policymakers and the general public. Consensus conferences about food often have focused on

biotechnologies (especially GMOs), likely because of the original association of this type of public engagement with technology assessment.

The recognized advantage of this form of engagement is that it involves participation of non-experts and agenda setting by them. In principle, participants may be randomly selected to achieve various representational goals, but more often volunteers are sought, hence increasing the likelihood of persons with pre-existing interests or biases participating, which also creates potential for class bias; however there are mechanisms for correcting for these difficulties. Among the clearest disadvantages particularly from a systemic point of view that these types of events often have not been tied directly to specific policy initiatives, and hence have not resulted in documentable direct political influence (Einsiedel, Jelsøe, & Breck 2001). Many of these types of engagement events undoubtedly have been useful in terms of deepening knowledge of issues and awareness of debates among the broader public, particularly due to media coverage that often accompanies them.

Citizens' juries: Citizens' juries have increasingly been used, particularly within research settings, to adjudicate policy matters with reference to food. Citizens' juries draw on some of the practices associated with legal jury trials, including selection of participants at random (or to represent the general population); the opportunity to cross-examine expert witnesses representing different points of view; and the necessity to render a verdict on a concrete proposal. The jury is typically composed of 10–25 people who meet over a series of days to receive evidence and deliberate (Coote & Lenaghan 1997; Smith & Wales 1999).

Citizens' juries grew in popularity in the 1990s particularly in Western democracies, but also have been used in a variety of developing countries with

regard to agricultural research and governance. The topics explored using citizens' juries include GM foods in the United Kingdom, France, and South Korea, among other locations (Marchant & Askland 2003–4; Rowe et al. 2005); policy strategies to reduce childhood obesity in Australia (Comans et al. 2013; Henderson et al. 2013; Moretto et al. 2014); and assessing consumers' understandings of the term 'organic' (Barnes, Vergusnt, & Topp 2009) and older persons' views on food retailing (Timotijevic & Raats 2007) in the United Kingdom.

This mechanism clearly fulfills several key deliberative principles at a micro-level: it aims not to engage with those with pre-existing interests in an issue but to allow 'average' members of the public to become informed; debate, discuss, and deliberate; and come to a decision through reasoned exchange. Another potential advantage is that citizens' juries require unanimity or at least clear consensus even if a minority opinion is present. As John Dryzek (1990) argues, requiring unanimity increases the likelihood that participants will develop shared understandings of others' perspectives. However, Jane Mansbridge (1983) has noted that requiring unanimity can be problematic where groups lack in pre-existing relationships or personal ties; generating unanimity is especially difficult when there are significant inequalities between the participants.

Recognized limitations of citizens' juries is that they are extremely time- and resource-intensive, and ultimately only allow a very small group of individuals to engage with an issue. As with consensus conferences (of which some would argue citizens' juries are a variation), effectiveness is likely to be limited without methods for direct input into policy. Hence those events convened by governmental organizations and which are integrated into a broader system which allows for incorporation of data from citizen juries are much more likely to result in

recommendations that affect policy as compared to those convened for research purposes or by non-governmental organizations.

Local food planning: Public engagement methodologies are increasingly used by grassroots organizations to produce local food plans that they claim are more reflective of public values. Examples include local food policy councils in the United States (Blackmar 2014), the People's Food Policy Project in Canada which focused on food sovereignty (2011), and the People's Food Plan in Australia (AFSA 2013). Methods for engagement differ but typical formats include facilitators or 'animators' who provide background information on key policy issues, gathering people in informal groups and settings within their own communities, and the generation of a series of concerns as well as concrete policy proposals, sometimes utilizing 'dotmocracy' techniques (the placing of dot-shaped stickers by each person against those issues rated to be of most importance). These types of engagement activities are lauded as particularly useful because of their relative informality, for instance the Canadian project literally gathered locals 'around the kitchen table,' and hence in some senses allows capturing of 'everyday talk' of the sort favored in systematic approaches to deliberative democracy.

Such events are clearly useful because they have greater potential for engaging those who might otherwise be excluded from more formal activities, including those with lower literacy skills, from groups traditionally underrepresented in political activities, and/or those who live in more remote communities (such as indigenous, Aboriginal, or First Nation communities who often are specifically targeted to participate). This 'local' type of approach—where those who are affected join in debate, deliberation, and decisionmaking at the community level—also fulfills one of Iris Marion Young's (2000) five key elements which contribute to what she

terms a 'deep' democracy—one that is inclusive and allows diverse voices to be heard. Although traditionally thought of as limited in their abilities to engage because of the small numbers of people involved (Weeks 2000), Jeannette Blackmar (2014) argues that such activities have the potential to serve as deliberative fora if staged correctly to permit the fostering of truly deliberative exchanges and decisions. Local food planning can permit inclusion not only of 'consumers,' but also food producers and others involved in the food system, hence promoting future networking within communities. As with many other types of public events, local food planning often involves facilitation by those who are knowledgeable (about food policy, security, and sovereignty, for instance) but does not privilege them as experts, allowing a levelling effect that can have a positive impact on subsequent exchanges and participation, which in turn could make positive contributions at the macro level.

Limitations that often arise from these sorts of events quickly become apparent when we look at them from a more systemic level: many of the sponsoring organizations appear to have pre-determined agendas. For instance they often are opposed to industrialized food in any form; are aligned with organics, anti-GM, and/or local food movements; advocate veganism, vegetarianism, or at least reduction of meat consumption; and hold other values that may be in conflict with one another (and with some participants' cultural, social, or other values), and thus unsurprisingly, discussion facilitators typically are interested parties with strongly held views. Most importantly, because these plans usually aim to make major changes to the entire food system in a holistic manner, they are highly unlikely to result in short-term policy changes given they are not integrated with concrete policy proposals. Nevertheless, articulation of the common good is a clear focus in these types of events and hence they have considerable potential for enhancing the

democratic legitimacy of particular policy initiatives, again particularly where they result in broader media coverage, promulgation of outcomes via social media, and so on.

Lessons for systematic deliberation on food policy

As can be seen from the analysis above, many of the mechanisms utilized to explore food-related policy issues at a micro level have considerable prospects for fostering more public involvement in food policy. However as also illustrated, there are a series of concerns that arise when these approaches are analyzed in their broader, systemic contexts and weighed against the ideals of deliberative democratic theory, many of which are shared across several examples of mechanisms for public engagement. In this section, I focus on key tensions arising in the domain of food policy which flow from the examples above as well as broader considerations about food policy.

First, food is a domain which is dominated by marketing, and hence much of what becomes public about people's views about food and food policy derives from surveys or polls which typically do not involve deliberative processes. As Simone Chambers (2012) argues, 'raw' opinion may in fact be useful for certain purposes in a mass democracy, as it is "reflective of what citizens actually think, believe, and care about" (71). However we clearly must protect against public participation being completely passive rather than active and thus more highly deliberative (see Parkinson 2012, 151). But food raises an additional issue: as has been noted with regard to surveys of views on biotechnology, including food technologies (Davison, Barns, & Scibeci 1997), as particular types of biotechnology (products) move toward market, key issues are viewed as more closely related to individual consumer

preferences than to debates among citizens over the common good. If people will buy something, it must be acceptable (or even good) at least to them, which is what primarily matters in capitalist societies. Consumer and citizen discourses often are incommensurable (Sagoff 1988), as a consumerist discourse typically narrows the conversation to those matters which directly affect individuals' health and welfare through purchasing decisions, whereas a discourse rooted in concepts of democracy and citizenship views the public as entitled (and perhaps obligated) to participate in discussions about common purposes and the greater good (Davison, Barns, & Scibeci 1997 after Winner 1991). Given that members of the public are simultaneously consumers, citizens, and perhaps producers (or other stakeholders in the food chain, such as retailers, processors, and so on), food clearly provides a policy domain in which certain aspects of systematic approaches to deliberative democracy warrant further investigation, notably what issues should be the foci of deliberative discussion but are likely to be obscured because of consumerist discourses or the presence of conflicting roles which may interfere with people's participation in policy in their capacities as citizens.

A second key point is that many food-related issues are viewed by policymakers and others as technical and scientific (e.g., in relation to food safety and hygiene), and hence policy discussions tend to be expert driven even when attempts are made to engage the public (Wynne 1998). From the point of view of some advocates of systematic deliberative democracy (e.g. Mansbridge et al. 2012), such non-deliberative processes may still be acceptable (say in the case of highly 'technical' issues) so long as they are complemented in the broader system by deliberative processes. However, our accounts currently lack any robust measure of what would count as a 'deliberative minimum' (Owen & Smith 2015), which is a

particularly important point in the case of food policy not only because of the tendency to rely on experts but also because of the complexity of the interrelated levels involved in the food system and policies associated with it. Further, food provides us with evidence of ways in which what typically are seen as highly complex and technical policy issues can benefit from more public involvement, for instance in debates over scientific issues relating to food risk assessment (Barker et al. 2010). Thus examples from food policy experiences may help us to determine when and how we are meeting such minimal standards as well as how to formulate the conditions under which the connections of experts with non-expert citizens are likely to improve deliberative systems (see the discussion of expert/citizen relations in Mansbridge et al. 2012, 13–17, and Christiano 2012).

Dialogues and awareness about food policy among politicians and members of the general public often arise in times of crisis, such as the ‘mad cow’ disease and horsemeat scandals in the United Kingdom; melamine taint in Chinese-made infant formula; *E. coli* contamination of packaged greens and meat in the United States; and Hepatitis A contamination of frozen berries in Australia. All of these controversies arguably involves some basic agreement about the underlying science, but are marked by conflicts regarding best practices; appropriate policies for food screening; effective mechanisms for standards enforcement; concerns about transparency regarding policies and standards; conflicts between public, industrial, and governmental interests; and even debates over import regulation and free trade. However times of crisis are not ideal for the promotion of deliberative engagement, as it can be undermined by being reactive rather than proactive. A key issue that warrants more explicit attention in the literature on systematic deliberative democracy is how a systematic perspective can be used to anticipate issues that are

likely to arise, even if framed in a generic way, and stimulate public deliberation even when we are not in times of crisis. This concern goes beyond the need to foster a culture of deliberation to the necessity to attempt to buffer the system against quick and expedient resolutions often driven by media coverage, as typically has occurred in the food domain. It also points us to the necessity of a more robust approach to 'integrating' various levels or 'discursive spheres' (Hendriks 2006) within the system with regard to their deliberative capacities and potential.

It has been frequently noted that democratic engagement is often limited by socioeconomic status and education level (Bennett et al. 1995; Fung 2001). This type of bias is especially likely to occur with food where there are a large number of 'foodies' (Johnston & Baumann 2010) who take avid interests in anything related to food, but who do not represent the general public. They may view themselves as more knowledgeable than the general public and hence morally and otherwise superior (for a related argument, see Guthman 2007) which can undermine attempts to foster deliberation due to the implicit undermining of authority and epistemic legitimacy. Hence the issue of social domination which has been noted as a particular pathology of deliberative systems (Mansbridge et al. 2012, 24) is particularly trenchant in the case of food policy, especially because of the coincidence of social and economic power among the actors who take an interest in food policy, despite the hypothetical importance of food policy to all (citizens and otherwise). Food policy thus provides a critical case study for exploration of methods for counteracting these somewhat more subtle forms of social domination and their effects on deliberative processes.

Finally, food provides us with a range of apparently more individualistic political actions such as boycotts and preferential consumerism (Stolle, Hooghe, & Micheletti

2005; Blue 2010) which nevertheless are key examples of potentially non-deliberative contributions to policymaking. Undoubtedly such activities are important expressions of public opinion that can contribute to food policy, and perhaps even to broader deliberative systems, but because of food's deep connection to a range of values, they also can provide a nexus for exposure of deeper systemic issues. A key example can be found in recent boycott efforts in Australia and elsewhere of halal-certified products due to their purported association with funding terrorism, or perhaps more insidiously the increase in concern over halal slaughter practices in the name of animal welfare but often in conjunction with anti-Islamic sentiments (reference blinded) as part of a more general societal trend toward culinary xenophobia (Anderson & Benbow 2015). Although some have argued that micro-level deliberative approaches can promote a deeper sense of 'critical multiculturalism' (Awad 2011) as they require participants to question pre-existing norms and values and engage respectfully with others about their views, deep systematic, structured inequalities and entrenched power relations (Sanders 1997; Young 2000, 2003) are extremely difficult to counteract within a broader system. Hence the complex domain within which everyday talk surrounds food policy provides an excellent case study for exploration of the required 'deliberative minimum,' and how and whether non-deliberative acts can contribute to systematic deliberation beyond their symptomatic or inadvertent effects (cf. Dryzek 2010, 82 on Australian politician Pauline Hanson's racist speech).

Ways forward and future prospects

What are the key factors to which we must attend if we wish to make food policy more deliberative and hence more effective and legitimate? In summary as seen in the review of typical forms of micro-level engagement activities, there must

be more explicit integration of the principles of deliberative processes in concert with reflection on the broader system within which these processes occur, particularly those that seek to directly inform policy. Perhaps most importantly, we should be cautious not to make assumptions about who should count as a ‘stakeholder.’ Everyone of course is a food consumer, but more importantly they are ‘food citizens’: everyone has (or should have) an interest in creating conditions which permit the development and maintenance of democratic and socially and economically just food systems (see Wilkins 2005 for a related discussion). Of course, the difficulties associated with acting as a responsible food citizen lie in the details about what counts as just, what other factors should be included in our ideal system (such as environmental or economic sustainability), and how we measure such outcomes. Because these uncertainties require exploration and debate, the key aim of those who wish to foster more public involvement in food policy should be to encourage the exchange of not just of opinions or the gathering of purchasing preferences, but to prioritize discuss about arguments and reasons associated with the values that people hold. At the macro level, considerable research is required into what contributes to a deliberative system for food policy, given the various tensions explored above which are likely to result in weaknesses or even failures in any deliberative system. Accordingly, we require a more robust analytic framework for systematic approaches to deliberative democracy that attends to real-life policymaking in extremely complex domains: food is ripe for the picking.

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