

ACCOUNTING FOR COMMUNITY IMPACT

Thinking Across the Spaces and Times of a Seven-year Pan-Canadian Community-based Research Project

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Abstract

Governments and private funders are placing increasing demands on postsecondary institutions and community-based organizations to account for the impacts from their collaborative research and learning efforts. In this article, we explore how best to account for impacts arising from the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement project (CFICE; 2012–2019), a collaboration of over 30 postsecondary institutions and 60 community partners from across Canada. In doing so, we note the strengths and, in particular, the weaknesses of the theory of change rationalist approach to evaluation in tracking impacts favored by funders. Seeking a more thorough understanding of how community-campus engagement activities impact collaborators, we turn to the theories of David Harvey, Basil Bernstein, and Norman Fairclough for a deeper account of the space-times of social practices and of how social change actually occurred in three examples of CFICE activity. We argue that rationalist program planning and evaluation models with currency in community-campus engagement activities need supplementing with more nuanced and theoretical accounts of how community impacts and social change actually happen over time within complex and multi-scalar contexts. Such scholarship can better inform funding agendas that do not always seek to place communities first.

Introduction

Conceptualizing and evaluating community impacts from community-campus engagement initiatives is a complex task. We understand community-campus engagement as encompassing community-based research, community service-learning, and the many ways postsecondary institutions act as anchor institutions in their communities. Disentangling precise effects of interventions from wider social and cultural developments renders simple cause-effect relationships highly problematic. Yet the imperative for academic and community partners to account for the impacts of their collaborative research and learning efforts to governments, foundations, and

increasingly the postsecondary institutions involved in such terms is a reality of contemporary community-campus engagement work.

Governments throughout the world are increasingly concerned to performance manage the postsecondary sector. The measuring of economic, social, and cultural outcomes from postsecondary institution initiatives is intrinsic to this governance (Jongbloed & Benneworth, 2013). Philanthropic foundations supporting both postsecondary institutions and community-based organizations are likewise concerned to demonstrate clear return on investment in scaling up their interventions to achieve as large an impact as possible. These funding pressures have influenced research design, in which intended impacts are often articulated to funders in terms of “outputs” and “outcomes” rather than research findings. Funding applications require applicants to frame their project proposals using theoretical approaches to evaluation (theory of change and results-based management) in order to hypothesize and predict expected outcomes from the outset of the project. This funder-driven approach reflects the “new public management” ethos (Benneworth & Charles, 2013) that has permeated much of higher education policy and governance in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada in recent years. Community-campus engagement activities and actors, working across these fields of practice, are expected to demonstrate both benefits for the community and for the postsecondary institution (e.g., enhancements to institutional reputation, student learning outcomes, research outputs/funding/rankings).

What these evaluation regimes often share in common is the tendency to privilege certain scales of community impact and types of impact metrics and stories (i.e., those that are easily measurable). It is common for governments, private funders, and the academy to favor “scaled up” solutions across national and international jurisdictions over more localized and contextually specific impacts (Pain, Kesby, & Askins, 2011). Related to this is the conceptualization of impact itself, operating here more like a tangible return on investment than a co-produced and mutually beneficial process (Banks, Herrington, & Carter, 2017). Moreover, impact measures for community-campus engagement activities often get articulated to knowledge exchange frameworks designed primarily for industry engagement, commercialization, and technology transfer and the privileging of financial value for the campus, industry, or local municipality (Benneworth & Charles, 2013; NCCPE, 2019). Co-produced knowledge exchange frameworks suitable for community-campus engagement contexts require different conceptions and measures.

Notwithstanding these pressures and critiques, policies that commodify community-campus engagement activities and impacts could also present opportunities to further the goals of co-designed research and learning to contribute to community impacts across local, national, and international fields of social practice. Clearly, the metrification of higher education and community engagement can be seen as another mechanism for the neoliberalization and marketization of both the postsecondary and social purpose sectors (Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014). At the same time, the call to account publicly for how opportunities for research and education are accessible for the communities that host postsecondary institutions align with the legitimate claims of communities to share in the benefits of postsecondary education, though only if community perspectives on what “impact” means are included in defining these measures. The task, as we see it in response to these wider trends, is to co-produce with communities approaches to impact assessment that have value to them. This would include



Figure 1. Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement partner distribution.

paying attention to the negative impacts of ill-conceived and under-resourced community-campus engagement projects. Such an agenda is concerned with how community-campus engagement activities can be conceived and evaluated in ways that privilege “community first” perspectives.

In an effort to address this objective, the immediate purpose of this article is to explore ways of accounting adequately for complex community impacts. We draw from our experience with the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE) project (2012–2019), a collaboration of over 30 postsecondary institutions and 60 community partners from across Canada (see Figure 1). CFICE activities were aligned with its main research question: “How can community campus partnerships be designed and implemented to maximize the value created for non-profit, community-based organizations?” (CFICE, n.d.). Being community first means engaging in “equitable partnerships to co-create knowledge and action plans for addressing pressing community issues” (Higginson, 2018). The CFICE project aimed to strengthen public policies and programs in specific sectors, enhance the capabilities of nonprofit community-based organizations to form effective partnerships with

postsecondary institutions, and extend pan-Canadian community-campus engagement networks. Our research involved supporting over 50 demonstration projects across four sector-specific hubs that addressed poverty reduction, violence against women, food security/sovereignty, and environmental sustainability. CFICE also had a separate knowledge mobilization hub. Most hubs involved, at their core, a collaboration between academic partners and a “backbone” community-based organization or network that acted as a node connected to other community partners.

To account for CFICE’s community impacts, we focus on three projects from two hubs of CFICE activity: community food security/sovereignty and community environmental sustainability. These examples effectively illustrate the complexity, across time and space, of a large partnership. In exploring the notion of community impact through these three case studies, we aim to illustrate the challenges, limitations, and possibilities of assessing and reporting the community impacts of large, multi-scalar, and multi-partner community-based research projects, whether to communities, funders, institutions, or governments. To do so, we move beyond the theory of change evaluation schemas (Taplin & Clark, 2012) we began with in CFICE to an engagement of Harvey’s (1996) insights on the spatio-temporalities of social change. Drawing on Fairclough’s (2003) conception of social practice and Bernstein’s (1990) theory of recontextualization, we also examine our three cases to illuminate how community activists and engaged scholars worked together in novel ways to collectively achieve social change and impact across local, regional, national, and even international practices.

Co-authors of this article have also contributed insights from their own social locations and roles within CFICE. Peter Andrée, the CFICE Principal Investigator, was responsible for monitoring project evaluations and impacts in addition to being a community-engaged scholar within the Community Food Security/Sovereignty hub. Charles Levkoe was the academic co-lead of the same hub. Nadine Changfoot was an academic co-lead of the Community Environmental Sustainability hub, while Magdalene Goemans was a graduate student from Carleton University working on a local demonstration project within this hub and later coordinating broader mid-term evaluation reporting across CFICE. David Peacock, Director of the Community Service-Learning Programme at the University of Alberta, participated in CFICE over the last two and a half years of the project, examining funding and institutional policies for community-campus engagement. Isabelle Kim was the Director of the University of Toronto Centre of Community Partnerships at the time of the research, coordinating roundtables that brought together CFICE partners and others for community-campus engagement movement building.

Our core argument is that simplistic, reductive measures of impact within multi-scalar and multi-partner projects are likely to distort the way change actually unfolds and how impacts are conceptualized and experienced within community-campus partnerships. We assert that donor-driven impact evaluation frameworks privilege certain kinds of scaled up social change imaginaries that contrast with contextually relevant community-driven approaches that are often more challenging to reproduce and demonstrate economies of scale. We conclude with a call for a greater diversity of theoretically informed research on the impacts of community-campus engagement to challenge the direction this conversation has taken under the influence of performance and results-based management approaches.

CFICE Goals and Theory of Change

As earlier stated, the CFICE project understood community-campus engagement to encompass community-based research, community service-learning, and other ways that postsecondary institutions act as anchor institutions in their communities. Most hubs involved, at their core, a collaboration between academic partners and a backbone community organization or network that acted as a node connected to other local-scale community partners.

The initial goal of CFICE was to “contribute to more successful, innovative, prosperous and resilient communities across Canada” (Jackson, 2013, p. 3). This goal was revised in 2015 to the more manageable goal (as understood in terms of money, time, and partners involved to date) of communities and campuses working effectively for “a more healthy, sustainable and just society” (Johnston, 2019, p. 3).

From the outset, CFICE used a theory of change (Taplin & Clark, 2012) approach to graphically map out a series of intended project inputs and activities that were causally linked to achieving incremental impacts as well as broader project goals. This theory of change methodology was utilized for pragmatic reasons; many community partners were already familiar with it given that they often engaged with the method in relation to government and privately funded initiatives. This approach also assisted the steering committee in managing multiple activities across a disparate group of CCE actors and in promoting a sense of cohesion across demonstration projects. The theory of change approach operated as a results-based management tool (Spreckley, 2009). The original theory of change proposed by CFICE outlined the accomplishment of its overarching goals over two phases, with local demonstration projects taking place within thematic hubs over four years in Phase I (2012–2015), then mobilizing key learnings through community and academic co-led working groups in Phase II (2016–2019). That is, more localized community impacts would manifest within demonstration projects in Phase I, and the learnings from these activities would inspire scaled up and replicated capacity building policy changes across community organizations, postsecondary campuses, and governments and private funders of the work in Phase II. From a broader perspective, these changes, in turn, were understood to contribute to a healthier, more sustainable and just society.

Tensions appeared on occasion during the research activities, however, between a concern for impacts at the local level of demonstration projects and concern with how these impacts related to strengthening community-campus engagement processes in general. From the outset, the research sought specific impacts within particular locales *and* enhanced processes of community-campus engagement, though periodic evaluation exercises encompassing the entire project tended to focus on process over local impacts. In addition, our theories of change clearly suggested linear pathways to impacts, progressing logically through discernible steps from local to national/international, or from the level of micro-interaction to the level of systems; in practice, however, we discovered that community impacts did not follow these neat schemas. Janzen, Ochocka, and Stobbe (2016) also argue that theories of change are concerned with particular social settings and not with generalizability and replicability to other sites of practice. Nonetheless, their graphic representation can function to impose precisely this power of explanation and causality across spaces and times of community-campus engagement.

Impact Evaluation

Due to its decentralized structure and beyond the overall theory of change, CFICE employed a wide range of evaluation approaches across its hubs and projects. No fewer than 10 different evaluation frameworks—including participatory evaluation (Whitmore, 1998), developmental evaluation (Gamble, 2010; Patton, 2011), and appreciate inquiry (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003)—were listed in the original application (CFICE, 2011). All were employed at some point, as hub and project leads gravitated to the approaches with which they were most comfortable.

Impact evaluation models have primarily emerged from the social innovation, community development, and philanthropic sectors, with an emphasis on intentionally coordinated efforts to achieve deeper impact and drive meaningful systems change (e.g., Tamarack Institute, 2019). The poverty reduction hub in CFICE partially adopted the collective impact model, succinctly described as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 36). Tamarack Institute (later Vibrant Communities Canada) served as community backbone within this hub, and community and academic partners within the hub across Canada developed a common agenda around poverty reduction with community-campus engagement functioning as a means to that larger end. However, internal discussions across CFICE partners revealed that the broader project could not easily fit the collective impact model. CFICE developed out of diverse, existing partnerships in each of its sectors. These core partners were not prepared to foreground a common denominator for CFICE over individual sectoral priorities (both in terms of goals and measurable indicators of progress). It became apparent that the community first ethos of CFICE also meant respecting the autonomy of each of the hubs.

The complexity and scales of the research projects resisted simple statements of impact. CFICE sought to co-produce knowledge with partners about what a community first model of community-campus engagement could be; it sought to achieve local and regional community impacts across very different hubs and sectors; and it undertook all of these things to shift broader sector-level policies and produce capacity for community-campus engagement ultimately toward a healthier, more just and sustainable society. In addition, the project tried to accomplish these impacts across vast expanses of Canadian geography and time zones. Perhaps not surprisingly, CFICE evaluative frameworks—centered around a shifting theory of change approach but also taking insights from a multitude of other evaluative frameworks employed at hub and project levels—did not provide us with adequate tools to account for the range and complexity of impacts from our partnered research and activism. Ironically, we needed more theoretical accounts than a “theories of change” offer. This led some of the academics in our midst to revisit their own theoretical tools in order to bring social theory into the conversation of community impact. In this article, we draw on the social theories of David Harvey, Basil Bernstein, and Norman Fairclough to gain deeper insight into CFICE experiences of impact, though this exercise has led us to realize that there are other theorizations of social change that may be equally valuable to explore, as we discuss in our conclusions. This turn to social theory is not an end in itself; the point is to think beyond popular understandings of

impact and then, ultimately, return to the joint task of constructing with community partners more meaningful and compelling explanations of impact.

Social Theories of Space-times and Social Practices

In his influential work *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996), Harvey provides a more complicated but productive reading of the nature of space and time and their relations than the linear theories of change and other prominent evaluation techniques commonly assumed within community-campus engagement activities. For Harvey, space and time are not independent realities; rather, they are better conceived as unfolding together within social and ecological processes, as co-constitutive realities, and as socially constructed by people and communities (Harvey, 1996; Peacock, Lingard, & Sellar, 2015). For example, social practices such as large academic conferencing often envelop participants in their own space-times; spanning over the course of close to a week, participants engage in routinized 20-minute presentations in a variety of rooms across a campus or hotel, hear keynote speeches, eat (too much) in buffets, drink a wine (or two) before attending a banquet, pass through the poster room with graduate students, and so on. This is how university partners may experience academic conferences; this is how they are done. In contrast, these events can be mystifying to community partners. These social practices with their own spatio-temporalities are not absolute, however, and the conference exists within other space-times such as the campus-based academic term or our domestic lives and so forth. Social change occurs when there are changes in how these space-times are related to one another, as for instance, in how local/regional and national scales and times have been reworked in contemporary global capitalism, with a time-space compression (Harvey, 1990) enabled by modern technologies and shifting individual experiences of community, identity, and sense of place. Social practices like community-campus engagement tend to construct (and be constructed by) their own space-times. When we try to understand how community impacts occur within research and learning projects, we need to pay attention to how these social practices, and networks of practices, relate to one another in complementary or conflicting ways.

Within sociology, Bernstein (1990) has theorized how social practices (and their networks) relate to one another. Social change describes the process of how social practices and their elements become *recontextualized*—appropriated by or relocated within other social practices (see also Fairclough, 2003). Community-campus engagement represents a kind of hybridized social practice, or recontextualizing of social practices, generated between the fields of academic research and teaching and community development. For Harvey (1996), elements of each practice become internalized within the other in a new social practice. These concepts can be deployed to understand how community impact manifests within community-campus engagement by accounting for how particular partnerships, unfolding within specific space-times, are linked to other social practices or different partnerships and by considering if these interactions produce new, recontextualized forms of social practice. Considering how community impact occurred within CFICE will necessarily involve paying attention to how these space-times are related, changed, or assembled (Peacock et al., 2015).

The themes of space and time and community engagement have surfaced within the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* previously, albeit independently from one another. Bailey (2017), also citing Harvey, has interpreted detected enhanced impacts on her students' learning in a service-learning course by paying close attention to the way that inequalities are spatialized and to how students re-think their social location through traversing the spaces/places of this inequality throughout the length of their placements. From another perspective, Tryon et al. (2008) consider the difficulties in short-term service-learning efforts based on the academic term and how they contrast with longer time frames of community work and effects in their exploration of the negotiation of time as a key constituent of service-learning partnerships between communities and post-secondary institutions. Yet in neither case has these elements been brought together in a relational understanding of space-time. Such an approach promises new analytical traction in understanding the community impacts of community-engaged research and learning.

Methods

To illuminate how impacts occurred within CFICE, we focus on three examples from two CFICE hubs (Community Food Security/Sovereignty and Community Environmental Sustainability) that span differing geographies, scales of action, and time frames. This examination of multiple examples follows Stake (2006) in attending to the common elements among the cases but also the unique contexts for each. Our method is simultaneously an instrumental approach to case studies (Stake, 1995) and theory driven in drawing out these cases as examples of how the space-times of community-campus engagement practices, and their intersections, become loci for the impacts themselves. Utilizing the concepts of space-times (Harvey, 1996), social practices (Fairclough, 2003), and their recontextualization within new networks of practice (Bernstein, 1990; Fairclough, 2003), we examine how community-campus engagement actors have convened in new spaces and times of action and dialogue to pursue their aims and produce community impact. Data were selected from a variety of sources including CFICE-related journal articles, tool kits, and internal evaluation documents (themselves based on surveys, focus groups, and interviews with participants) as well as reflexive accounts from academic partners regarding how they witnessed or questioned impacts unfolding.

By accounting for impact, we aim to develop a more theoretically informed account of how community impacts actually occurred through CFICE, in distinction to the theory of change models that anticipated their occurrence and articulated their accomplishments for funders. We also searched the data for tensions or differences in how multiply situated actors interpreted the purposes of their work and its impacts. Accounting for community impacts to multiple constituencies was an ongoing challenge throughout the project, in part because our theory of change and evaluation frameworks were not shared universally or valued in similar ways across our multiple partners. We begin with an examination of experiences and impacts within the Community Food Security/Sovereignty hub of CFICE.

Three CFICE Impact Case Studies

Community Food Security/Sovereignty hub

Between 2012 and 2016, the Community Food Security/Sovereignty hub of CFICE (hereafter the food hub) supported 12 demonstration projects, all involving community and academic partnerships (Kepkiewicz, Levkoe, & Brynne, 2018) with the aim of advancing more healthy, equitable, and sustainable food systems where the people that produce and harvest food have more decision-making power (Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2011). The hub was established in partnership with Food Secure Canada, a pan-Canadian social movement organization “to provide core support for a new network . . . in the area of community-campus partnerships” (P. Andrée & C. Kneen, letter to prospective food hub partners, September 9, 2011). Engagement within CFICE brought capacity and sustained funding for community partners, and CFICE leadership served as critical connective tissue between Food Secure Canada and another hub partner, the Canadian Association for Food Studies. Impact within the hub was understood both in terms of establishing “best practices” for community-campus engagement and “improving programs, services, policies and procedures” for community-based hub partners and their networks (P. Andrée & C. Kneen, letter to prospective food hub partners, September 9, 2011).

Each demonstration project received a small amount of funding to support their work and evaluate the impact of their engagements. Project participants also attended and presented their experiences at national conferences hosted by Food Secure Canada and the Canadian Association for Food Studies. Many presenters came, first and foremost, to share local project stories and successes (and challenges; see Andrée, Chapman, et al., 2014), but by co-presenting workshops and jointly working on articles (e.g., Andrée, Bhatt, et al., 2014; Levkoe et al., 2016), they also became part of a broader network at the intersection of community action and academic research that was enabled by CFICE. For example, during a bi-annual Food Security Canada conference in 2012, the food hub led a session targeting community organizations called “How to get academic researchers to help you get things done” in addition to a roundtable entitled “Campus-community partnerships in the Canadian food movement.” Notes from the roundtable reveal that participants saw CFICE as a means to an end that involved: (a) identifying and disseminating best practices around community-campus partnerships (e.g., sharing power and resources, working across timelines, etc.); (b) bringing together unique positionalities, knowledges, and roles; and (c) strengthening the academic-activist nexus in Canada’s food movement.

Alongside synergies, there also existed tensions between demonstration projects and wider hub priorities. For example, collaborative evaluation of these projects revealed that some partners were more interested in understanding local project successes in terms of immediate social and environmental impacts, while others were more focused on larger issues of process including trust building and transparency among researchers. Still others spoke to a combination of the two (Andrée, Bhatt, et al., 2014; Kepkiewicz et al., 2018). Another tension that emerged was between a focus on local partnerships and those at the regional and national levels through and with Food Secure Canada. The food hub initially worked to support and connect local partnership work (i.e., demonstration projects) across the country. However, as CFICE developed, the hub’s focus became more about

regional- and national-level food partnerships. This shift became especially evident during Phase II of CFICE, when a food sovereignty brokering working group that had been established focused almost exclusively on issues related to development of a Food Policy for Canada. This shift resulted both from changes to the external environment (e.g., the new federal Liberal government's commitment to develop a food policy [Trudeau, 2015]), and shifting interests among CFICE community partners (in particular, Food Secure Canada indicating a preference for CFICE to support a national policy agenda over local projects).

To support this national food policy work, CFICE, the Canadian Association for Food Studies, and Food Secure Canada co-funded a postdoctoral fellow position to mobilize academic and community partnerships, conduct research, and draft reports, all with the aim of influencing a more sustained impact on the food policy conversation in Canada. During this period, the postdoctoral fellow *was* CFICE for partners, continuing to provide critical connective tissue between Food Secure Canada, the Canadian Association for Food Studies, and the national food policy advocacy effort. In June 2017, over 50 academics and community practitioners met to discuss strategies for how to impact the national-level food policy discussion. Most academics that participated were deeply involved in the Canadian Association for Food Studies, and many had been involved in CFICE-sponsored events. The community practitioners were part of the Food Secure Canada community (with a number identifying as both academics and community practitioners). This combined group played an active role in the only federally sponsored national food policy consultation because of their previous efforts to meet and form this epistemic community (Levkoe & Wilson, 2019).

Outputs and effects of the food sovereignty brokering working group of CFICE are myriad. They include a variety of academic publications (e.g., Levkoe, Brem-Wilson, & Anderson, 2018; Levkoe, Erlich, & Archibald, 2019; Levkoe, Schembri, & Wilson, 2018), including a special issue on the National Food Policy in *Canadian Food Studies* (Andrée, Levkoe, & Wilson, 2018). Of the articles in this issue, about a third were authored by individuals directly involved in CFICE projects, and all were written by individuals engaged in the broader Food Secure Canada and Canadian Association for Food Studies networks. Overall, mobilization through CFICE enabled some of its participants to engage in high-level food policy discussions. We saw the effects of these efforts within the 2019 federal budget, in which a national food policy was first announced as a federal funding priority (Government of Canada, 2019).

In sum, through Phase I food hub initiatives and associated Phase II working group efforts, project-level community and academic partners were able to engage with broader academic and social movement networks, thereby scaling their impact in various ways. Their participation played a valuable role in expanding national networks, building a pan-Canadian food movement informed by both community and academic voices and contributing to national food policy-making.

In the case of the food hub and subsequent working group, Harvey's (1996) space-time conceptions and Bernstein's (1990) notion of recontextualization assist in understanding how significant impacts from CFICE supported activity unfolded across the multiple sites and times of food sovereignty activism in Canada. The scales of these impacts—from local student-supported actions for food sovereignty in Toronto, Ontario, or Mission, British Columbia, to effective connections forged across the country—were in large part produced by the anchor

partnership between CFICE (a national research project) and Food Secure Canada (a national nongovernmental organization). More precisely, multiple food sovereignty projects unfolding within differing space-times were “sutured together” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 6) through the key partnership between Food Secure Canada and CFICE. Their partnership involved a linking together of their social practices and discourses—particularly in influencing the development of a national food policy—through the support and development of existing networks (e.g., Canadian Association for Food Studies) and the development of new networks (e.g., the food hub). As a community-campus engagement project, CFICE and its academic partners were greatly assisted by Food Secure Canada’s reach across Canada, and CFICE in turn expanded Food Secure Canada’s network by funding local food security/sovereignty projects and connecting them with that network to enlarge spaces for activism.

Both Food Secure Canada and CFICE were united in their interest in stitching together very localized, place-based alternative food work in Canada to limited-time national networks and policy initiatives. As a national umbrella and networking organization built on the pillars of provincial networks and member organizations, Food Secure Canada was supported by CFICE through its funding of local food projects across Canada. This work was not without tension, as both the location of impacts and the timing of interventions to achieve them were necessarily negotiated and renegotiated within CFICE–Food Secure Canada partnerships.

We also see a crucial recontextualization (Bernstein, 1990) of academic and activist practices occurring within an opportunity that arose when the Canadian government shaped a new national food policy. CFICE and Food Secure Canada actively built the capacity of their networks to influence the food discussion, with CFICE contributing to engagement capacity by funding a postdoctoral researcher to produce dissemination materials to drive the national food policy agenda. Academic research practices were recontextualized within an activist space-time, encompassing the timing of government consultations. As community activists and scholars convened in the emerging space-time of a government policy consultation, Food Secure Canada was able to mobilize its distributed members into coordinated action while CFICE supported the production of actionable knowledge aimed at government policy actors. By creating new networks across the academic and activist space-times and social practices, CFICE and Food Secure Canada were pre-positioned to exploit a policy shift that was unanticipated when the CFICE project began. Although CFICE hoped for such influence through its theory of change, how it came about was beyond the scope of the impact model from which CFICE worked. Additional ways in which CFICE came to have impact in its collaborative work across the space-times of community and academic practices is evident within efforts with a neighborhood group known as Sustainable Living Ottawa East.

Sustainable Living Ottawa East

Sustainable Living Ottawa East (hereafter SLOE) is one of three community partners that participated in Phase I demonstration projects within the Community Environmental Sustainability-Ottawa hub of CFICE. SLOE is a volunteer citizen organization that aims to further sustainability efforts within their neighborhood of Old Ottawa East. During Phase I of CFICE, the sustainability hub’s academic partners, most substantially through multi-year graduate student research assistance, supported SLOE’s efforts to influence environmental and social

sustainability measures within a local, large-scale residential infill development project. SLOE drew on the CFICE partnership to produce several tangible research outputs, including a multi-themed report on sustainability options for the site; an experts forum directed at the developer, municipal representatives, and neighborhood residents to discuss suggested approaches; and more specific documents outlining site planning and energy alternatives for the development.

While other sustainability hub community partners contributed to wider CFICE initiatives beyond Phase I of the project—including a CFICE-wide community impact symposium and Phase II working groups—SLOE members directed their involvement primarily toward their own demonstration project. SLOE’s involvement in CFICE offers an example of how impact for community was conceptualized around specific, comparatively micro-scale efforts, with only modest regard for broader CFICE goals. SLOE’s volunteer efforts within a neighborhood-scale organization to influence local development were still taking shape during the first years of CFICE, and as such the group had limited capacity to connect to larger CFICE objectives. In evaluating their involvement in CFICE, SLOE members linked community-campus engagement to enhanced project visibility, greater confidence in engaging with the developer (as association with a postsecondary institution lent “gravitas” to the project), and better access to funding and organizational support. These impacts, along with the development of the research outputs earlier mentioned, aligned with CFICE objectives to foster tangible results within demonstration projects and strengthen capacity for community-based organizations. CFICE may have also aimed to advance understandings of larger community-campus engagement processes and relationships within partnerships, but this was not a primary objective for SLOE. Engagement between academic and SLOE partners was respectful, quite amiable, and in retrospect often transactional (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010). SLOE’s involvement with academics from CFICE enhanced an already extensive regional network of municipal representatives and urban/building sustainability professionals that the group had assembled on its own.

As is usually the case within community-campus engagement contexts, particular projects and partnerships do not constitute the entirety of a community partner’s work. The time line for the CFICE partnership sat within other more elongated times and spaces of action for SLOE; thus, concrete measures from the developer to enhance sustainability within the infill property comprised one potential result of the project but did not exhaust the aims of the organization.¹ From the outset, SLOE members understood project “success” in terms of steps on a path toward greater awareness by the developer of potential sustainability actions for the site, as well as toward broader neighborhood resident engagement in this initiative. Both of these outcomes were advanced over Phase I of CFICE. One example of productive steps forward regarding the latter goal took shape beyond Phase I, with a group of older adult residents formed out of the original SLOE initiative working to establish a seniors co-housing community in the area.

Efforts for social change in this partnership demonstrate how meaningful movements toward CFICE’s

1. A discussion by one SLOE member of the influence of the group’s efforts on the emerging form of the built development, with construction still underway, may be found at <http://www.mainstreeter.ca/index.php/2019/04/05/the-development-of-the-oblates-lands-an-in-depth-report/>.

broader vision of a healthy, sustainable and just society were accomplished in part through micro-scale activities, participatory engagement processes, and sometimes small and iterative steps toward environmentally and socially sustainable communities. These activities saw a volunteer neighborhood organization, graduate students, and faculty—reinforced by city councillors and planning/building professionals—work together in a new, reconfigured local space of action. The SLOE partnership within CFICE suggests that impacts are not linear and do not necessarily work from smaller to larger scales and regions of influence. Fostering local-to-local connections among distinct social practices (the academy, neighborhood activism, professional work) effectively produced new and relevant community impacts.

Stewart Street Active Neighbourhoods Canada

Stewart Street Active Neighbourhoods Canada (Stewart Street) was one project that took place within the Community Environmental Sustainability-Peterborough-Haliburton hub of CFICE. Stewart Street was a neighborhood-based participatory planning project and part of a Canada-wide network of projects under the Active Neighbourhoods Canada umbrella. This is a national partnership of organizations piloting participatory planning projects with a goal of elevating voices that are traditionally marginalized within planning (Active Neighbourhoods Canada, 2015, p. 3). Stewart Street was divided into three parts: (a) the creation of a tabletop, three-dimensional neighborhood portrait to understand the context of the neighborhood and identify potential improvements and constraints related to mobility; (b) establishing a common neighborhood vision for public space in the neighborhood, defining priorities for action and creating design solutions that respect the local identity and practices; and (c) a neighborhood plan that included the city planning context to inform strategy for the incremental implementation of the goals identified in the vision (Active Neighbourhoods Canada, 2015, p. 3).

Overall, the goals of this project were in alignment with general CFICE goals. CFICE brought funding to this project for an embedded graduate research assistant from Trent University to support all three parts of the project as well as capacity through the participation of two Trent University faculty as both members of the project's steering committee and the student's thesis supervisors. A key goal of the project was to build capacity among Stewart Street neighborhood residents in planning processes, which eventually led to both neighborhood residents and planning outputs becoming part of planning information centers that were part of a city-led citizen engagement process for street re-design that would impact the neighborhood. This was the first instance in which a community-led planning project was given space within a citizen engagement process in Peterborough (Nasca, Changfoot, & Hill, 2018, p. 12). GreenUP, a local environmental charitable organization, led Stewart Street and was the public face of the project.

Outputs from this coalition were multiple. Letters to the city were drafted with clear Stewart Street input into the proposed street design. Other forms of dissemination included workshops, reports, conference papers, publications (with local, regional, national, and international reach), and a graduate thesis related to the project. The Stewart Street project became the model for a successful three-year Ontario Trillium funded project, NeighbourPLAN, which currently replicates capacity building for neighborhood planning across downtown Peterborough.

The process of community-campus engagement during the project also produced knowledge gains regarding when and how power relations were reproduced, unintentionally or systemically. The steering committee reflected upon instances when power relations were disrupted (e.g., when residents were positioned as leaders and experts to guest planners in the neighborhood) and reproduced (e.g., through overwriting of resident voices by technical, professional, or academic language sometimes used in steering committee meetings and in a design charette led by planners). These recognitions became opportunities to strategize the centering of resident voices in future similar circumstances. For example, project members committed to plain language in meetings for future practice, and within NeighbourPLAN, residents lead their respective neighborhood projects with GreenUP acting as the broker with, and asking for input from, the now arms-length steering committee.

Understanding of CFICE itself among community partners varied throughout the project. For GreenUP, CFICE was understood as a funder (one among many) and provider of added capacity through two faculty. CFICE was an enabler that supported the student and faculty presence to the project and, for some community partners, vaguely connected their work with wider scholarly and activist networks. During the Phase I CFICE-wide evaluation, CFICE became more visible to Stewart Street members. A focus group that was part of the evaluation became a welcome opportunity for the steering committee to reflect upon the project and air tensions over power relations on the committee that had been accumulating during the project. A focus group recorded the following key impacts from the partnership: (a) capacity building that allowed for prioritizing the needs of the community; (b) the sustained and embedded support of a graduate student researcher for two years that brought the project to completion; (c) support from faculty for supervising the student; (d) trust building and sustained partnerships across sectors; (e) support for responding to partnership complexity and tensions; (f) the leveraging of the success of the Stewart Street project toward Ontario Trillium Funding for three more downtown neighborhoods; and (g) the provision of space for group reflection and evaluation.

Discussion

These three examples (from two hubs) of community-campus engagement are useful for understanding the loci and mechanisms of impact in a large, complex project like CFICE. Our understanding of impact itself, following Banks et al. (2017), is a mutual exchange of knowledge producing positive changes for both community (geographical and associational) and postsecondary actors.

Within the food hub, the recontextualization of academic knowledge and community activism/knowledge occurred through engagement processes among CFICE actors, Food Secure Canada members, and other activists and scholars. The strength of the policy impacts produced depended upon a mode of engagement where distinctions were blurred and some actors assumed identities as scholar-activists or activist-scholars (Andrée, Kepkiewicz, Levkoe, Brynne, & Kneen, 2017). The impactfulness of these collaborations between community-located and campus-based knowledge holders was directly related to a recontextualizing of academic and activist practices within a particular time. That is, the spatio-temporalities (Harvey, 1996) of academia and community activism were reassembled within a specific period of policy action and activism. This required a reassembling

and hybridizing of actor identities (Fairclough, 2003) undertaken by individuals with a foot in both academia and community activism, employed on campuses, and within new activities by nongovernmental organizations (e.g., Food Secure Canada staff contributing to academic journals). These varied activities demonstrate how impacts from community-campus engagement are not simply unidirectional (i.e., from campus to community) and when sustained may be witnessed in mutually affected identities, practices, and organizational structures.

CFICE involvement with SLOE, involving a partnership between academic partners and a volunteer citizen organization, sought to achieve locally specific impacts and alter typical responses to development. In this instance, and unlike the food movement sponsored work, the spatio-temporal dimensions of the project were quite contained and did not connect into other movements and networks beyond that which was useful for achieving local results within the immediate neighborhood. This community-campus engagement project did not comprise the same degree of hybridizing of identities and practices or recontextualizing of discourses; embedded graduate students and their supervisors added useful legitimacy to project knowledge, without producing the same degree of synthesis of knowledges (within a transactional relationship). Yet these local-local partnerships and connections, enabled through CFICE, nonetheless built capacity within a citizen-led organization for future efforts and connections with postsecondary institutions as allies in the struggle for sustainable local development.

The spatio-temporal dimensions of impact within the Stewart Street project sit between these previous two cases. CFICE academic actors worked in concert with a local chapter of a Canada-wide network and movement for participatory planning to build the capacity to contribute to a municipal-led citizen engagement process for neighborhood street re-design. CFICE also assisted local actors in leveraging funds from other foundations to continue their work beyond the time frame of this project. Situated within a dense web of partners, the visibility and influence of CFICE in this network may have been somewhat muted but was manifest in the work of specific graduate students and faculty members. Yet this humble positioning of academic support was crucial in constructing a different kind of community-campus partnership in which local knowledge was meaningfully recognized, not simply articulated into outputs amenable to the careers of academics. Community first intentions are never sufficient, and adequate recognition of community perspectives requires an ongoing critical reflection among engaged academics about their own knowledge generating practices (Goemans, Levkoe, Andrée, Chang-foot, & Christopherson-Cote, 2018). This approach, coupled with the public-facing leadership from GreenUP, effectively mitigated power relations between the academics, planners, and local activists involved in the project. Such strategic positioning of CFICE identities and practices within this local-local environmental network was itself an important impact of community-campus engagement and contributed significantly to project success. Although the recontextualization and hybridizing of identities across academics and environmental activists was not as pronounced as within the food hub case, there still existed sufficient immersion within activist action for CFICE to contribute meaningfully to these local objectives. In all of their actions, CFICE academic partners privileged community first articulations of the meaning of actions for social change, even if these did not rise to the top level of a CFICE theory of change model.

As we have discovered within CFICE, the impacts of community-campus engagement, both discursive (our

changed ways of talking and writing about things) and material (e.g., resource flows), are distributed unevenly across space and time. Although experiences within CFICE reveal that differently positioned community-campus engagement actors naturally privilege their own conceptions of impact, these impacts can be read cumulatively across the project as unfolding across multiple spaces—including geographically situated events and projects, social practices, and policy domains—and their particular time frames. Each partnered activity unfolds across its own space-time. Local project impacts unfold according to their own internal rhythms, as do partnered engagement processes among community-campus engagement actors and as do nationwide policy impact initiatives. We should not necessarily expect linear, causal relationships among these social relations mapped over space and time. Neither should we always, for instance, expect local projects to achieve (only) local impacts in the short-term or broader policy and structural changes in the long-term. Nor will local change and impact necessarily lead to structural changes and impacts at a systems level. Precisely how local community-campus engagement impacts occur and cause further impacts across space-times and social practices—or even the social structures of national policies—remains an empirical matter to be investigated in each instance.

Conclusions

Accounting for the impacts of the CFICE project is a complex and challenging task. The theories of change that guided our work, and to which we were held accountable by government funders, were more meaningful as aspirational than measurable. More precisely, the societal health, justice, and sustainability goals sitting at the top of these evolving models provided us little understanding of how local community-campus engagement projects, and networks of community-campus engagement efforts, would actually progress these goals forward. Phase II of the CFICE project shifted more explicitly to focus on the engagement process and relationality of community-campus engagement itself—both as the best path to desired end states as the spaces and times for local CFICE-funded activities were coming to an end but also in light of a recognition that these ultimate goals were being realized, to greater or lesser extents, within specific space-times of varied community-campus engagement projects and relationships. Linear and one-directional accounts of campus-based intervention causing community-based impacts became insufficient to account for both our and community partners' experience of the project; as a result, we began to understand impacts differently.

We have suggested that community-campus engagement impacts are best understood as co-constructions across the spaces and times of collaborative work for social change and involve recontextualized knowledge generation and recognition processes. Commitments to epistemological equity (Dei, 2008) within CFICE projects were coupled with support for existing, and generation of new, networks of collaboration (in our examples, around community food security and community environmental sustainability). Sometimes these arrangements contributed directly to larger scale policy change; sometimes they did not. Yet even when the locus for community impact was more circumscribed, these cases offered new modes of collaboration forged in the construction of community-campus engagement that generated new knowledge and mutually impacted the participants and their agendas for social change.

Attempts to construct simple metrics to account for community impact are problematic unless, as is postulated in the case of collective impact, there is multi-stakeholder consensus in which partners agree to be accountable to a limited number of simple measurables (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Principles, process, and outcomes of community-campus engagement activities are all important to track, and indeed are co-constitutive, but questions of principle and process can often get lost in outcome measures, with impact reduced to unidirectional effects upon community. The spatio-temporalities of projects matter and are complex and unpredictable, yet it is in the blending together of distinct discourses and social practices over time (e.g., between the academy and the community) that we can identify social change taking place. Univocal calls to scale up social innovations and impact, across multiple spaces and times, are naive in understanding how social change actually occurs.

Accounting for the community impacts of community-campus engagement means being accountable, first, to the relational demands of this collaborative work and to our partners themselves. For CFICE, that meant being faithful to the community first animating principle for all of our work. For campus-located actors, it involved relinquishing power, real or assumed, to define and control the work and its progress, and being flexible enough to respond to emerging opportunities for productive influence. In general, our ambitions for systems change through community-campus engagement must be accountable to the particular aspirations of the people and communities in specific locales with whom we labor. To be community first means being susceptible to being changed as well, as the impacts that we are seeking for others are unlikely to occur without a shift in our own practices.

To funders of community-campus engagement work, we as participants need to better explain the limitations of rationalist program planning theories such as theories of change and trace how community impact actually happens in the entangled social relations of multiply scaled and themed projects. For instance, we need to attune funders to how social impacts are more likely to occur when practitioners from across fields learn to internalize some of their collaborators' modes of action and discourse. Our experience has shown that support for those scholars and activists and their networks is more likely to foster individuals and collaborations prepared to act in an effective manner when the space-times of policy change unfold favorably. This was most clearly evidenced in the interactions within CFICE with Food Security Canada.

Nonetheless, more scholarly work needs to be done, drawing on diverse theoretical understandings of how social change and community impacts occur within a complex set of social and environmental conditions. We cannot rely on standard evaluation models alone to investigate the unfolding of complex social phenomena and events. In this article, we turned to the social theory of Harvey (1996), Bernstein (1990), and Fairclough (2003) to assist in illuminating how change really happens. In doing so we have suggested that our capacity building in community-campus engagement for strengthened networks, linking together many local contexts and social practices (and space-times), can position community-campus engagement projects for larger scaled social impacts. Additional scholarly work should draw on social movement theory as one example (e.g., McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996) to further understand the role of community-campus engagement within these practices; this would offer deeper and more critical analysis than is often the case in the pragmatic and managerially inspired evaluation frameworks dominant within this "impact moment" in higher education.

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