Food Policy Councils:
An Examination of Organisational Structure, Process, and Contribution to Alternative Food Movements

Rebecca Schiff, B.Mus., Dip. Env.

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Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy
Murdoch University, Western Australia

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Rebecca Schiff
Abstract

The contemporary global food system is plagued by a myriad of problems. In recognition of the problematic nature of the conventional food system, practitioners and researchers have sought, throughout the past century, alternative, sustainable food production, consumption, and exchange systems. Some of the solutions proposed for these problems suggest the establishment of new institutional forms such as that of the food policy council, an organisation which, through the embodiment of a food systems perspective, proposes innovative local and regional level solutions to food systems problems.

Over the past two decades numerous food policy councils (FPCs) have been created in North America and Australia. Research on FPCs still remains minimal, leaving many gaps in knowledge as to the role of these organisations concerning the ways that they can and do contribute to the sustainable development of food systems and ‘alternative food movements’. Research to date on the organisational structure of FPCs lacks consideration of organisation theory and the relatively substantial body of literature dealing with evaluation of collaborative, interagency organisations, an organisational type closely related to FPCs. There is a lack of consideration as to definition of the role of FPCs within the broader context of sustainable food systems movements and the procedures and protocol for effectiveness in achieving outcomes and fulfilling these roles.
Considering the significant gaps in knowledge, this research focuses on identifying a clear definition of the mission or roles of FPCs and investigates some of the previously unexplored organisational characteristics of FPCs as a foundation for identifying what may lead to ‘best-practice’ organisational structure and process in fulfilling these roles. Since there is limited information and research to date specifically on FPCs, a qualitative and more specifically grounded theory approach was taken to provide an exploratory and reflexive research design framework. This design incorporated a continuous, interactive layering of data collection, classification, and analysis. Following a preliminary literature review, the inquiry focused primarily on the gathering of information directly from FPCs involving several different types and sources of data.

Research findings revealed several aspects of food policy council objectives that can be considered together as defining the organisational role of FPCs. This provides a basis for determining the most effective administrative structure and operations management for fulfilling this role. Findings and analysis also indicated certain components of structure and process that can lead to effectiveness in terms of capacity building and fulfilling organisational roles. A model of FPC structure is developed and presented to summarise these findings, considering those components revealed through the research as contributing most to effective FPC operation. The development of this model from a broad and diverse representative sample, indicates that such modelling of structure and
process may be applicable in transferring the concept of and creating FPCs in new locations.
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In all the directions
All my relations
Megwich