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Template 3 case study

Food policy councils

& bibliography

‘Food citizens? Collective food procurement in European cities: solidarity and diversity, skills and scale.’

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About this document

This is a template case study on food policy councils, covering of some of the relevant literature pertaining to the *Food Citizens?* project, made available as a resource for those interested in the subject areas of our project. This is not an exhaustive list of literature, but rather an overview of key publications useful to consider, most of which have extensive bibliographies of their own worth reviewing.

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Although care has been taken in preparing it, page numbers and quotations may be inaccurate on occasion. Thus, if one is interested in quoting specific authors listed here, one should consult the original publication.

There is an accompanying power point presentation that was used in a seminar in 2017 that corresponds to the sections of this template case study.

Happy researching.

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Food councils are a form of local governance regimes established usually in collaboration between local government, NGOs, and other civil society organizations. Toronto was the first city to establish one, and its success has led many cities across the world to emulate it in locally specific ways. However, although they are often cast as institutions that address food access inequities and other social and urban structural problems, they are also ideologically motivated. Additionally, they bring together disparate groups, each with their own agendas, priorities, expertise, expectations, and set of resources. Thus, we could say that they are ultimately inherently political institutions, or at least politicized ones. They require access to public money for their projects, and require the cooperation of local governments, which means that they may be classified themselves as lobbying organizations, or at least NGOs with political ambitions. Ideologically, their promoters take as a base assumption/belief that the current food system is inequitable and must be democratized. Insofar as they are successful in creating projects, they are also advancing their own worldview through them and the food council institutions.

Thus, this literature review first goes through some of the key literature written on Toronto's Food Policy Council (TFPC), explaining also the background of the academics publishing on this institution who were involved in its formation and programming. Then, I bring together a disparate set of anthropological themes in an attempt to highlight how one may approach such institutions in an anthropological way. This exercise is mostly speculative, as we cannot foresee what analogous institutions our researchers will find in their own field sites. My goal here is to pick out a few strands of literature for orientation towards potential themes.

After setting out what the TFPC does and how its proponents conceptualize its practices, I review anthropological literature on governance efforts by NGOs and economies of care, as how civil society negotiates with the state is central to the functioning of such institutions. How individuals negotiate with local institutions directly to implement change, or engage with the state more broadly, are ways to understand one's position in relation to the state, and one's values or expectations of the state in general.

Toronto Food Policy Council

This section summarizes some of the activities of academics in developing the Toronto Food Policy Council, before going into the institution's historical development and purview. I cite core literature analyzing the work and position of the TFPC, highlighting both criticisms and accolades of its work. The literature describes the TFPC's role in society, its mission statement, its relationships to other institutions, its way of going about community food projects, and the thinking behind its projects. There are some criticisms of its projects, asking whether or not it is truly ethical or easy to engage in if one is in a marginal socioeconomic group. The literature also describes the food landscape of Toronto in efforts to explain why a council grew here first.

It should be highlighted at the outset that some academics publishing on food councils, particularly the development of Toronto's Food Council, were also active in their establishment and advocacy. This is not highlighted to diminish their authority, credibility, or objectivity, but simply meant to clarify the position of researchers in relation to their object of study. The participation of social scientists in social movements they study is increasingly the topic of academic debate (see Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003; Hale 2006; Speed 2008; Lamphere 2003). Scholars have a particular

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analytical lens and an outsider position that are useful for institutional development because we can see the power systems and dependencies at play. In my brief investigation into the Toronto Food Policy Council, I learned that there were many academics instrumental in various aspects of its development who have gone on to publish about the institution in various ways. In fact, the myriad ways these academics have pursued engagement in food system change while drawing on their scholarly capacities provide insight into how to be critically engaged social scientists. They are examples of how social scientists can have real-world impact, using their knowledge and perspective to positively influence the world around them.

For example, in the 1990s, Rod MacRae was the director of the Toronto Food Policy Council. He was also a consultant tasked with writing standards for the Local Flavour Plus (LFP) NGO while at the University of Toronto, where he additionally ‘worked with sympathetic administrators in the University for a year to alter the institution’s purchasing strategy towards social and ecological responsibility’ (Friedmann 2007: 390). Ultimately he has published on the Toronto Food Policy Council in his capacity as an academic. Cited below, Chiara Certoma, a professor of political science at the University of Gent, looks at citizen-driven governance and making urban design participatory, and has YouTube videos on critical urban gardening. Chiara Tornaghi, a critical human geographer, self-identifies as a ‘scholar-activist with a background in politics, sociology, and planning’, where she has ‘been involved in and/or has helped establishing a number of food sovereignty/food policy initiatives, such as the Leeds based Edible Public Space, Tinwolf-LandShare, Leeds Urban Harvest and Public Healing Garden among others, and she is a member of the Reclaim the Fields pan-European constellation’ (departmental website). Gerda Wekerle, is an academic who began her activism in a women’s organization. This led to her involvement in lobbying various Toronto governmental offices, which over her career has taken her in the direction of conservation in the city and food system planning; she has described Toronto as ‘one of the most advanced cities in North America with respect to food security’ (Wekerle 2016: 378). Jennifer Welsh, a professor of nutrition, served as the Toronto Food Policy Councils’ first Community Co-Chair (1990-1992), and created an interdisciplinary center with another academic, Mustafa Koc, called the Centre for Studies in Food Security, which ultimately ‘was instrumental in developing both Food Secure Canada and The Canadian Association for Food Studies’ (Welsh’s departmental website). Kameshwari Pothukuchi is an urban planner researching community food systems and civic participation in planning, with a particular interest in race, gender, and ethnicity issues in urban planning. In her TEDx Detroit talk, ‘Feeding the mind’, Pothukuchi talked about her activism in farmers’ markets that she helps to organizing as part of an organization SEED Wayne, part of Wayne State University where she is a professor, and where she encourages healthy food options in universities, advocating for budgets of universities to allocate more to local food procurement (10% of Wayne State’s food budget goes to local sources, she says, and it could be much higher). Joe Fridman is the project manager for Fresh City Farms, and devotes his energy to ‘building a more sustainable and resilient society and economy’ as relate to sustainable food systems (according to this LinkedIn profile). Rebecca Schiff, who has a PhD in sustainability and technology policy, focuses on research on the ‘distribution of social goods such as housing, food, and healthcare’ to marginal community members, is concerned with social justice, and was a coordinator for Homeless Individuals and Families Information System in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. Alison Blay-Palmer is the founding Director for the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems and an assistant professor in geography and environmental studies. She engages in projects with the UN’s FAO, as well as other organizations focused on urban agriculture and food security.

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The Toronto City Council established the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) in 1990 as a roundtable consisting of people with diverse political views from different food sectors, in coalition with community groups and public servants who recognized that the ‘organization of the food and agriculture system was associated with health risks for Toronto residents’, where hunger and poverty were linked to the centralized nature of the food economy and environmental damage (Welsh and MacRae 1998: 251). The literature on urban gardening has been cast as either sharing ‘a tendency towards either an advocacy view or a rather dismissive approach on the grounds of the co-optation of food growing, self-help and voluntarism to the neoliberal agenda’ (Certoma and Tornaghi 2015: 1124). One reason for this, Pothukuchi (1999: 216) has posited, is that urban policy officials and planners tend to associate food issues as ‘within the purview of rural policy, applying mainly to farmers’. However, governmental and quasi-governmental institutions have arisen in communities to encourage such programs for a variety of reasons that do ultimately help marginal communities access high-quality foods.

Welsh and MacRae (1998: 253) explain that it is the characteristic that the TFPC is made up of representatives from food sectors that has allowed for meaningful connections with community groups, as it ‘acts as a bridge between community agencies and the political and bureaucratic machinery of the City’ in ways that facilitate cooperation with municipal government. After advising community agencies as to how to gain support of governance institutions, and facilitating stable coalitions between grassroots organizations and government, the TFPC disengages to focus on other projects and allows these new networks to flourish on their own rather than further integrating itself into the maintenance of such projects and networks (MacRae 2004: 16). However, the organization does not write policy itself, but only advise on policies, limiting its ultimate scope (Blay-Palmer 2010: 407).

The TFPC’s mission statement states its first operational goal as ending hunger and creating a system of food distribution that does not rely on charity to feed the hungry (MacRae 2004: 16). This is part of a larger Toronto mission to actualize a ‘just city’, where food planning in an urban environment is central (Blay-Palmer 2010: 403). It is a sub-committee of the Board of Health, but unlike other sub-committees enjoys a degree of independence from government (Pothukuchi 1999: 219). Toronto has many ‘food deserts’, where access to healthy food is restricted due to poor transport links and food affordability, which results in poor diets and increasing prevalence of diabetes in such communities (Fridman and Lenters 2013: 546). As a result, the TFPC has promoted the establishment of community kitchens and ‘food hubs’ (Fridman and Lenters 2013: 544). These are usually part of community or government programs (Fridman and Lenters 2013: 548), but at the same time are criticized as projects that depoliticize food insecurity by placing it in the realm of community rather than governmental responsibility (Fridman and Lenters 2013: 551).

Fridman and Lenters (2013: 547) explain that an important role of the TFPC is to embed ‘food systems thinking’ into local government. This despite other researchers’ claims, e.g., Wekerle (2016: 379), that Toronto City planners tend to be only interested in the physical locations of community gardens, farmers’ markets, and other food-related systems, rather than perceiving ‘food security as a social movement’, despite the fact that Toronto’s Food Policy Council supports the efforts of civil society actors in the food justice movement there. Indeed, it was consciously

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‘structured to be cochaired by both a community representative and a city councillor as a means of solidifying the link between the community and the political process’ in order to address not only the food system, but hunger in Toronto (Welsh and MacRae 1998: 240).

The question for our project is how to approach such institutions in an anthropological way. Dylan Gordon (2011: 26), an anthropologist looking at local food systems, shows how imaginaries of the good life are associated with consuming local food in downtown Toronto’s marginalized, ethnic minority communities, arguing that debates around local food should be reframed around ethics. Citing Guthman (2003), Gordon (2011: 28) points out that those citizens able to participate in the local food economy are more wealthy actors, and thus engagement is in part an expression of ‘cultural and material privilege’ rather than ‘truly ethical politics’, where, to paraphrase his argument, nostalgia for a romanticized idyllic of rurality is central to such consumption decisions. For Lauren Baker (2004: 306), who works in food security and has a PhD in environmental studies, Toronto’s community gardens ‘reflect the city’s shifting cultural landscape and represent an everyday activity that is imbued with multiple meanings’, where focusing on food security projects is a strategy to ‘regenerate the local food system’ while simultaneously getting high-quality food to economically disadvantaged residents.

Certoma, a political scientist, and Tornaghi, a geographer, explain that urban gardening initiatives in Toronto may be interpreted as forms of ‘political agency that contest, transform, and re-signify “the urban”’ (2015: 1124). Here, they describe that urbanites pushing to grow their own food on, for example, the private property of others through what is termed ‘soft-squatting’, are challenging ‘naturalized notions of private property and ownership’ (ibid.). Wekerle and Classens explain that such ‘initiatives articulate alternative visions of sustainability and food security that rely on principles of collaboration and a sharing economy that challenge prevailing notions of property ownership and food security’, where trust relationships are said to drive such re-negotiations (2015: 1176). Certoma and Tornaghi describe that urban food activism in Toronto is growing to include a resignification of urban private lands as sites of farming that could be used to feed people (Certoma and Tornaghi 2015: 1129). Wekerle and Classen argue that relationships between private property holders and landless growers in these urban spaces are ‘based on an ethic of care for the land, and for others’, which, they say, contributes the goal of Toronto’s urban food activists to redefine what private property is in urban space (2015: 1177).

Important for our project, citizenship is occasionally referred to in this literature. Alternative notions of citizenship include looking at participation or claims to land as ways people are asserting citizenship. For example, and similar to Certoma and Tornaghi (2015), Baker (2004: 306) describes the more than 110 community gardens in Toronto as ‘sites of place-based politics connected to the community food-security movement’ that are reshaping the local food system and making fresh food more accessible. Baker (2004: 312) asserts that Toronto’s gardening stories ‘both challenge and expand notions of citizenship’, as place and culture as said to be constructed through their participation. This citizenship is conceptualized as a ‘practice of food-system localization, as well as the embodiment of values of caring for the community and environment’, where such practices and values are said to then be incorporated into municipal policy (ibid.: 322).

Blay-Palmer and Donald explain that since the mid-1990s, Toronto’s ‘urban food economy’ has been characterized by successful food-processing firms that are making ‘specialty, local, ethnic,

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and organic' foods (2006: 383). It is this sort of phenomenon that makes Toronto especially responsive to the concept of a food council, they contend, in that not just civil society and government, but the food industry, could see the benefit of establishing such an institution (ibid.). Schiff explains that the success of the TFPC has spurred countless similar councils across the world, but the extent to which these councils actively engage in food policy planning or influencing varies widely, he points out, with some organizations omitting the word 'policy' and replacing it with terms such as 'systems' or 'security' to, he explains, reflect their alternative focus (2008: 210). This might also be because there are not as many interest groups interested in promoting/supporting such an institution (e.g., the local food industry, like in Toronto). Indeed, he states, these consortia act 'as voices for system-wide changes in governance for food policy and planning' that connect a broad array of stakeholders working in the local food system (Schiff 2008: 217). Not only do they connect these stakeholders, he points out, but FPCs are tasked with implementing projects that are meaningful to these stakeholders (Schiff 2008: 220). Harper has shown how in the USA, they are well-connected to governance institutions because their establishment is often at the initiative of government officials (Harper 2009: 5). This, Harper explains, allows them to influence policy that ultimately shape the food system environment that will allow initiatives of grassroots organizations and local businesses to succeed (Harper 2009: 23). Furthermore, Harper details, FPCs often identify problems in local food systems and propose innovative solutions, engage in research, and make policy recommendations (Harper 2009: 5). Often, they are active in rectifying problems to make food systems 'more environmentally sustainable and socially just', and deal with issues of coordination (Harper 2009: 19-20).

Governing food systems

Food councils are essentially inserting themselves into public policy as quasi-NGOs interested in influencing local markets, from the actual establishment of farmers' markets in city centers or creation of food kitchens or distribution centers, to advising local governments on the types of policies they should be enacting to protect various local interest groups in the hope of creating better market conditions for the groups of food actors they ideologically support. In this sense, they are attempting to engage in food governance activities. Councils are said to be 'new spaces for dialogue between public and private actors, and civil society on food issues', but Michel (et al.) argue, their work also highlights the 'limited capacity of policymakers to work in a transversal and intersectoral manner', despite the common interest of sustainable food policies (Michel *et al.* n.d.: 4). As noted above, much of the impetus for creating such councils is to rectify the issue of food scarcity or food insecurity. Food security as a concept is an outgrowth of civil society food activism focused on hunger and poverty (Koc *et al.* 2008: 123). In Canada, as a result of social activism in the food system, diverse institutions have emerged to address such issues that bring together civil society and government into new fields of collaboration (Koc *et al.* 2008: 126, 123). As Koc (*et al.* 2008: 125-6) explain, this a complex undertaking because Canada is a large and diverse nation where the needs of many different groups need to be addressed, e.g., 'aboriginal peoples, ethnic minorities, new immigrants, farmers, fishers, and workers'.

As such, one may look at these food councils as providing a service of care, or at least advocating for the establishment of organizations and funding for them by government, to redress the issue of food security. The journal *Social Analysis* had a special issue (number 3, 2014) entitled 'Stategraphy: Toward a Relational Anthropology of the State', where authors investigated civic

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engagement, welfare control, images of the state in rural settings, access to legal advice, volunteering in health care, and the distribution of EU food aid in rural areas of Europe. Here, we learn that food aid may be appropriated by local bureaucrats to distribute according to their own rules and also influence national policy (Dorondel and Popa 2014), highlighting the complex power issues that emerge from civic engagement in progressive projects to help particular communities. In specific reference to food networks, Goodman and Sage (2014: 2) explain that in their book volume on the subject, authors ‘touch on the ways that alternative food networks (AFNs) have effectively transgressed the boundaries of taste (in the Bourdieuan sense) that rendered them elite or niche phenomena, to become more conventionalised food supply chains that have allowed their products to be more accessible (although not necessarily more affordable) everyday items (see also Goodman et al 2012). Paradoxically, AFNs have also transgressed into the business of feeding poor and disadvantaged people in the guise of localised food justice schemes, while offering up transgressive cosmopolitan economies of care’. Although I do not necessarily believe it needs to be cast as a paradox or a transgression, as there are not new boundaries being crossed (there is a long history of community groups caring for at-risk groups, like church food kitchens or clothing drives, community centers, and school ‘bake-offs’ or other fundraisers), the point is that these AFNs perceive themselves as intervening in ‘care’ for marginalized groups, and perhaps in new ways than their communities have done so in the past. Perhaps this is because food kitchens/hubs are commonplace, but not food kitchens that specifically serve organic or local foods, for example. In this same volume, Berlan and Dolan (2014) look at Fair Trade as having embedded in its ethos an ‘ethics of care’ and a specific ‘moral economy of connection between producers and consumers [that] has — through its conventionalisation and standardisation — been transgressed in ways that re-align it along pathways of, in their words, “disconnection, distance and detachment”’ (Goodman and Sage 2014: 5). In a similar way, also in this volume, Cox *et al.* (2014) reveal how a similar ‘care ethics embedded in a local community supported agriculture (CSA) project in Scotland works to transgress the ‘care of the self’ in the form of eating local, fresh and healthy foods, to encompass the care of (unknown) others as well as the environment at a variety of different scales’ (Goodman and Sage 2014: 5-6). In these ways, food, community care, ethics, and NGOs come together as a single point of focus of inquiry in such a way as to open an avenue for our project to situate itself in contemporary anthropological debates.

In analyzing food councils, one might turn to the literature on civil society organizing, even though as Hearn (2001: 340) has pointed out, definitions of what constitutes civil society are limited, particularly in anthropology, as the term sometimes is a ‘catch-all’ for ‘everything “below” the state’. An interesting paradox that Hearn (2001: 342) reveals is that although civil society and the state are often placed in opposition to one another, many civil society organizations exist expressly to influence the state. Hearn (2001: 344) highlights how anthropological research may contribute to civil society literature, explaining that although some other social science disciplines may regard ‘submerged networks of kinship and clientship’ as ‘debilitating and parasitic’, anthropological focus on how networks and power relations work may reveal instead that they are ‘crucial for understanding how civil society articulates with the state’.

Our project may contribute to this larger, broader anthropological literature on the role of civil society. Although not in reference to food specifically, one volume by anthropologists Pardo and Prato (2011) investigates governance in urban settings more generally, and specifically how citizens perceive and interact with political institutions, drawing on issues of trust, authority,

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power, and questions of legitimacy. Here, the editors explain that: ‘It is generally agreed that the quality of law, bureaucracy and politics is crucial to the relationship between agency — individual and collective — and the system. It could be reasonably argued that the variations in such a relationship underlie the configuration of what Philip Abrams has called the “problematic of structuring” (1982, xv-xviii) — the power, that is, of purposeful individual action to negotiate and influence the system over time. Accordingly, it has been suggested (Pardo 1996, 17 and Ch. 7) that ordinary people have an important role to play in the negotiation of the moral order of their neighbourhood and beyond, and that a reasonably working balance in the relationship between citizenship and governance is directly dependent upon the recognized structuration of legitimacy and the attendant exercise of rights, obligations and responsibility on both sides of the spectrum (see contributions to Pardo ed. 2000)’ (Pardo and Prato 2011: 9).

The anthropological literature on NGOs, Fisher (1997: 442) highlights, ‘relies upon several key terms — participation, empowerment, local, and community — each of which has been given a variety of meanings and linked in different ways to analysts’ perceptions of the origins, capacities, objectives, and impacts of NGOs’. Such insights remind us that when engaging with civil society and NGO literature, we must be aware that such terms are imbued heavily with meaning. Additionally, Fisher (1997: 442) points out that NGOs as a concept is supported by a broad spectrum of interest groups, from large international development organizations to ‘radical critics of top-down development’, in part because there is a ‘general sense of NGOs as “doing good”, unencumbered and untainted by the politics of government or the greed of the market’. However, Fisher (1997: 452) cautions against pursuing the question of whether a specific type of NGO has a greater level of impact than another, as the literature on NGOs suggest that there is insufficient data and comparing cases is fraught with difficulties, which adds weight to the idea that an anthropological approach seeking to understand NGOs as a system rather than evaluating impact is a good path.

In other fields, it should be noted that political scientist Merilee Grindle (2007) wrote a volume about the decentralization of governance in Mexico, and while somewhat quantitative at times, touches on participation of civil society in local governance and how that changes daily life and relationships with local elites, and how things like taxes and local budgets change local power arrangements. Also interesting to note is how geographer Danny MacKinnon (2002: 307) unpacks how ‘governing through community’ works in practice between new governance agencies and rural communities in Scotland, and how managerial technologies like financial controls are used to keep local agencies accountable, showing how community development is regulated and accountability is enforced. To contrast, sociologist Jane Midgley (2015: 221-2) researched how a holistic food policy for Newcastle, England was developed with civil society participation, showing how the application for funding can create new pressures and expectations on actors that influence the ultimate projects and regional strategies and that local public sector actors shape the boundaries of what civil society believes is possible to achieve. Such studies are interesting for our own because they highlight the pressures to which civil society is subjected when it attempts to engage in governance projects.

There are also anthropologists that more acutely study power issues in civil society organizations that may orient our researchers towards a bird’s eye analysis of similarly situated institutions. Anthropologist Andria Timmer (2010: 264) highlights problems with NGOs that serve needy

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populations, albeit in the context of civil society organizations serving the Roma population in Hungary, revealing, and I paraphrase, how such organizations deny recipients agency, focus on the most marginalized members of what is usually a diverse group (and homogenizing them in the process), and paradoxically relies on reinforcing the marginality of these needy groups to perpetuate the organization's own funding and reason for existence. Such research helps to situate civil society organizations in a more nuanced field of power and interests. In the same field site as anthropologist Sain Lazar's ethnographic research in El Alto, Bolivia, Gill (1997) found that NGOs may act as ambiguous 'intermediaries' between financial donors and local residents, being more accommodating to state policies and being strategic in other ways in their efforts to attract financial support from local, national, and foreign actors. Additionally, NGOs emerged there from the decline of other representative organizations (labor, amongst others) and rather than empowering grassroots organizations have instead contributed to a phenomenon where the 'professional middle-class' ultimately 'speak for impoverished groups, while remaining largely silent about the trammelled rights of working people', reminding us that even well-meaning organizations may hold precarious positions in society (Gill 1997: 146). Anthropologists in developing countries like Wilde (2017: 47) have also found that even when local government attempts to incorporate grassroots community organizations into institutionalized governance structures to facilitate democratization, that new 'utopian disjunctures' may emerge due to the conflict between short and long-term demands. Here, tensions between the organization's ideological goals of democratic self-governance come into conflict with its reality of needing state financial and other resources support (Wilde 2017: 48). Such studies, though diverse, highlight the many pitfalls civil society may encounter in well-meaning initiatives to serve (or facilitate the serving of) vulnerable groups.

NGOs as a concept has also diversified. As intimated above, food councils are already somewhat ambiguously situated as quasi-NGO institutions because of their proximity to formal governance institutions. However, there are also 'DIY' movements that focus more on changing public opinion than creating new institutions. Do-it-Yourself activism may be conceptualized differently than other social movements, argues Poldervaart (2002: 148), because such activists do not focus on making demands on government, but rather focus on changing public opinion. Such an approach seems effective, as Poldervaart (2002: 145) cites Kooistra (2001: 11) in saying that Dutch government policies have been more influenced by the environmental movement than any other country, and that the movement has also greatly influenced the citizens and behavior of industries. Where both structures do overlap, Poldervaart (2002: 158) points out, is at the ideology of 'creating your own alternatives', where universal ideologies are rejected and utopianism embraced. In short, there are a diversity of organizational structures in the world of civil society and NGOs of which to be aware. They are bureaucracies, that as Wright (2004) has aptly explained, fit into existing cultural systems, where issues as broad-ranging as gender influence organizations, and where the deinstitutionalization of care into community hands may have empowering effects in unanticipated ways.

Indeed, researching food governance means analyzing the way that civil society engages with governance institutions, making it important to be aware that there is anthropological literature on studying bureaucracies. most notably and recently David Graeber (2015: 166), who points out that 'we have the notion that bureaucratic systems are simply neutral social technologies. They are just ways of getting from A to B', but that what is often overlooked is that 'it is the responsibility of [public] servants to do their masters' bidding, no matter what the bidding is. Insofar as their master

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is something called “the public”, however, this creates certain problems: how to figure out what, exactly, the public really wants them to do’. However, once civil society succeeds in gaining the attention of governance institutions in their midst, these same institutions can use their position to control civil society in new and unanticipated ways. This is where one may turn to research on audits. The literature on audit culture has grown in recent years and may be interesting for framing research on food governance in the sense that NGOs and project organizers are subjected to surveillance of different sorts, particularly if they are receiving public money from governance institutions that have an interest in the projects or organizations. This sets up interesting power dynamics between civil society and the state, as civil society organizations must meet the demands of their funders in order to guarantee their continued existence. Anthropologist Andrew Kipnis (2008: 277) shows how in the Chinese context, ‘technologies of governing’ may be perceived as ideologically rooted, where audits are sometimes contradictory and are part of a project of ‘crafting souls’ and ‘improving the “quality”’ of people to make governed citizen subjects ‘more visible and legible to leaders and bureaucrats’ (ibid: 282, citing James Scott 1998). Although in the context of workers in factories, anthropological research on audits and how these governance modes influence personhood would be, I think, interesting to look at from a more institutional perspective to see how NGO employees managing food-related projects must learn to embody certain governance values in their implementation of their projects (thus, see anthropologists Dunn 2004; De Neve 2009, 2012; Vannier 2010).

Discussions about civil society also articulate with those of neoliberalism. For a while in the 1990s, there was the idea that the state was actually ‘retreating’ in a way that would increase civil society engagement in governance (see Strange 1996). Instead, Kingfisher and Maskovsky (2008: 117) draw on Bourdieu (2003) to describe that neoliberalism instead has eroded ‘the “left hand” of the state — those organizations which potentially safeguard the “interests of the dominated, the culturally and economically dispossessed...”’ while defining neoliberalism ‘as “a mode of production that entails a mode of domination based on the *institution of insecurity*, domination through precariousness”’ (ibid.: 117, citing Bourdieu 2003: 29). Anthropologists are able to investigate neoliberalism as a set of not just ideologies, but practices that focus on agents, both individuals and institutions, that ‘help to articulate, operationalize, and disseminate policies and ideologies characterized as neoliberal. Because neoliberalism originated as a theory of political economy, the most common sites examined by anthropologists are those that comprise the state or are in dialogue with state institutions and actors, such as NGOs’, whether or not the state is characterized as weakening/retreating, or strengthening (Ganti 2014: 96-7). NGOs are interesting because they challenge the state, but they also can ‘reproduce inequalities in society’ (Ganti 2014: 97). Instead, NGOs have been conceptualized as the ‘glue’ in globalization that links state and society as intermediaries and are also made up of semi-elites, while simultaneously undermining governance capacity by taking over social service provision (Schuller 2007: 85). The role of NGOs in shaping the market, or engaging in local economies in ways to shape economic governance, has been investigated by Medina (2010: 250) in the context of Belize environmental management to show how NGO activities may ultimately shape the beliefs and values of state officials, characterizing the NGOs as governing the state, revealing, in my opinion, the power civil society still has in governance. Anthropologist Junge (2012) has similarly characterized NGOs as ‘shadow pseudopublics’ and problematized ‘active citizenship’ in associational life, which is essentially civil society engagement with governance, in their efforts to help direct the use of their city’s ‘participatory budget’. Here, community leaders see NGOs as working “in the shadows” of local

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development initiatives, leading to concomitant scrutiny of who is really calling the shots and who might be benefiting financially. Whereas some scholars have observed a clean distinction between grassroots associations, on the one hand, and top-down state and NGO projects, on the other (Eliasoph 2009), civic life in Berira Rio evinces a blurring of these lines as well as of the line between “NGO” and “community” (see Earle and Simonelli 2000) (Junge 2012: 412).

Creating food councils is a process of negotiating society’s role in shaping the institutional structure and priorities of local governance and inserting civil society into the administration of caring for citizens. In this way, the literature on neoliberalism and NGO (or civil society more broadly) engagement with governance highlight the myriad issues food councils may face in implementing their projects. The boundaries of state and society are contested in many spheres, including and especially the sphere of responsibilities for caring for marginal groups, which sometimes becomes wrapped up in questions of the implications for citizenship. For example, anthropologists Anjaria and Rao (2014: 410) ask the question ‘How does the to-and-fro between policy makers, state agents and citizens shape emerging projects and what consequences do citizens’ actions have for state structure?’, problematizing ‘the ambivalent meaning and position of “the state” in neoliberal projects’. To answer this question, the authors investigate local governance reform and the implementation of a new health insurance scheme. They problematize civil society engagement in local institutions undergoing reforms by drawing on citizenship and consequences for neoliberalism in general. They show that ‘neoliberal reform is co-produced by top-down and bottom-up processes’, conceptualizing neoliberalism as an experience and centering their analysis on ‘social agency’ and its consequences for state re-structure; they suggest that what emerges is ‘hybrid regimes of governance’ (Anjaria and Rao 2014: 411-2). Embedded in such research, and really all research on NGOs and the state, is the question: Who is responsible for what in governance and caring for a nation’s citizenry?

Finally, food councils are often promoting projects that focus on widening access to high-quality food, particularly to socioeconomic groups in economic precarity, such as urban suburbs and marginalized ethnic groups that live in ‘food deserts’. In this sense, there is an echo of the literature on post-socialist Europe on so-called ‘yearnings for “normal lives”’, where citizens at the margin of the state are calling for a functional state to help them get access to basic needs (Jansen 2014a: 241; Jansen 2015). Through an analytical focus on transition to the EU, they address individual agency in the context of the state (see Greenberg 2011). Jansen (2014b) conceptualizes the lack of mobility of marginal groups in urban peripheries as a ‘spatiotemporal entrapment’ that politicized their ‘understanding of the nesting of these different scales’ in the ‘everyday geopolitics of life’, showing how such large-scale issues are echoed in peoples’ everyday experiences, exemplifying how to problematize, for example international food politics, at a microlevel of everyday life in urban communities.

In that food councils are idealistic projects of upending the entire global food chain to fully democratize access to food to all socioeconomic groups, one may interpret them as a way of advancing utopias. Other utopian projects like Occupy Wall Street, which anthropologists Appel (2014) and Razsa and Kurnik (2012) have analyzed, are ethnographic studies of civil society organizing. However, the class aspect is something to investigate further, as food councils (like Occupy in some ways) are advancing an alternative economic paradigm that overcomes class inequalities in a utopian sense, but ironically requires the class inequalities to emerge because it is

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only the middle and upper classes who have the time to engage in such alternative networks. Thus, class issues are evident in these food systems and projects, as it is the middle-class that has time to volunteer for such organizations and do outreach for the poorer classes. Additionally, it is middle-class citizens who tend to have the time and money to enjoy alternative food systems. Indeed, anthropologist Gagné (2011) has written on farmers' markets in the USA, revealing the social demographics of them tend to be predominantly middle-class professionals buying food from small-scale farmers and focusing on the ideologies and practices embedded in farmers' markets. Class in general is an issue in urbanity, and one interesting article to problematize this is Guano (2004), who problematizes citizenship in an urban setting, looking at how in Buenos Aires, the middle-class blames their own perceived impoverishment on the poor, further marginalizing them and couching these grievances in terms of citizenship. She links the above ideas of normal lives to citizenship, by saying that narratives of difference between neighbors 'was part of a common strategy of reproducing social difference through a discourse that posited a white, middle class, and modern "normalcy" as the only legitimate modality for spatial and cultural citizenship' and where modernity and rights to the city are said to be challenged by the large lower class, reinforcing representations of classes through these narratives and reinforcing boundaries of exclusion and belonging (Guano 2004: 70-1).

Conclusion

Food councils are dynamic institutions with a broad mandate to serve their communities. They link state and society in novel ways that contribute to community wellbeing. There are many ways to approach our research of them as social scientists, and especially as anthropologists. The strands of literature reviewed here is not exhaustive, but rather sets our researchers on a path. Organizations and institutions are important anthropological subjects of inquiry as they have great influence on society and social change.

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