

POLICY AND ORGANIZING COMPLEMENTARITY IN COMMUNITY CHANGE CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the intra-organizational partnerships in the Sweet Home Chicago Campaign for affordable housing. It outlines how this particular community change campaign effectively brought together the policy and community organizing traditions of campaigning. After outlining the general histories of various campaign strategies, it identifies Kristina Smock's model of complementarity as a way of partnering disparate traditions. From Smock's work and the example of Sweet Home Chicago, the paper identifies five elements that mark the potential for a policy-organizing partnership driven campaign.

In the latter half of 2006, the rate of foreclosures in the Chicago area increased rapidly (Smith and Duda 2009). By 2007, 50 percent of renters and 43 percent of homeowners paid more than 30 percent of their income for housing, which is deemed to be unaffordable (Sweet Home Chicago Coalition 2009). From 2007 to 2008, foreclosure filings in Chicago increased 48 percent, with 20,592 foreclosures filed that year. The increase in foreclosures "exacerbated the housing crisis by increasing demand and decreasing the supply of affordable housing" (Sweet Home Chicago Coalition 2009, 4).

This state of affairs intensified community efforts already underway to fight gentrification and promote the preservation and creation of affordable housing (Theodore and Martin 2007). One group undertaking such an effort was the Sweet Home Chicago Coalition, which emerged from a city-wide affordable-housing campaign of the non-profit Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. This coalition pressured the City Council to pass the Vacant

Building TIF Purchase Rehab Program, which allows developers to receive money from tax increment financing (TIF) to purchase and rehabilitate vacant properties for the creation of affordable housing units (Field and Dworkin 2011).

More importantly, the Sweet Home Chicago campaign for affordable housing also created a new model for community change efforts, one that utilized "an equal partnership between the community organizing and public policy departments" (Field and Dworkin 2011, 1). Affordable housing has long been an intractable problem in Chicago, and many prior community efforts, using only an organizing approach or only a policy approach, saw few gains (Field and Dworkin 2011). To increase the potential for success, this campaign required a new model for community change. Thus, policy advocates and organizers forged a new partnership to generate a more powerful change effort. This paper analyzes the policy-organizing relationship that developed during the Sweet Home Chicago Coalition campaign, drawing on the respective literatures on the research and planning tradition, the community organizing tradition, and Kristina Smock's model of complementarity. Policy and organizing will be evaluated for their distinct contributions to the campaign, and then their partnership in this campaign will be evaluated as a case study for an emerging model of policy and organizing complementarity.

A HISTORY OF POLICY AND ORGANIZING TRADITIONS

While there have been many approaches to addressing community problems, two of the most divergent are the research and planning tradition and the community organizing tradition. These traditions have often worked in silos due to the fundamental disparities in their methods, priorities, and models of change.

The research and planning tradition has its roots in the early 1900s Chicago School of Sociology, whose notable members included Ernest W. Burgess, Louis Wirth, and Robert E. Park (LeGates and Stout 1996). These sociologists focused on the application of sociology to local communities, often bringing an ecological model to the forces that shape urban life (Wirth 1938; Burgess 1996; Sampson 1999). One of their lasting contributions is Burgess's theory that the expansion of the city occurs in a series of concentric circles. Concepts of social organization, ecology, and social psychology were integral in the early development of the research and planning tradition (Wirth 1938). Contemporary research and planning efforts for community change do not necessarily call upon these sociological concepts as they were formulated in the early 20th century. Of greater significance and endurance are the methods introduced by the Chicago School of Sociology.

This model for community change is technical, data-driven, and grounded in social science, rationality, and objectivity (Rothman 1995). Its methodology includes needs assessments, data and statistical analysis, and evaluation research; great value is placed on knowledge, and thus it gives primacy to experts rather than to community members for the choice and design of cost-effective community change plans (Rothman 1995). For policy advocates, knowledge is power.

The community organizing tradition began with the work of Saul Alinsky during the Great Depression (Fisher 1984). Finding union organizing to be an effective strategy by which workers could change their workplaces, he began using union organizing tactics in a Chicago neighborhood as a strategy for community members to change their community (Fisher 1984; Norden 1972). Alinsky built the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council by winning the support of existing community institutions (Fisher 1984). He invoked the self-interest of previously disparate groups, including Catholics, communists, and other neighborhood residents, to unite them for the goal of creating a stronger, more stable, improved neighborhood (Fisher 1984). Together, they won increased wages in the stockyards and experienced organizing successes into the early 1940s (Fisher 1984). Alinsky began doing the same thing in communities around the country, and his work has engendered an entire method of organizing for change. He sculpted concepts and terminology that are widely used today in community organizing: self-interest, leadership development, building power through democratic community organizations, the organizer as a catalyst, and the self-determination of communities (Fisher 1984).

Alinsky was not radical in his ideology. He believed in an interest-group model and emphasized the importance of all people engaging in the democratic process (Fisher 1984; Norden 1972). From his perspective, people hold the power to cause change by putting pressure on a target—the one who has the authority to create the desired change. However, Alinsky was radical in his tactics. He emphasized doing whatever was necessary, held originality sacred, stressed unpredictability, and sought always to apply pressure to the target of the campaign (Fisher 1984; Norden 1972). Tactics include “negotiation, arbitration, protests, and demonstrations; boycotts, strikes, and mass meetings; picketing, raising hell, [and] being diplomatic” (Fisher 1984, 49). Despite the social and economic changes that have transpired since Alinsky’s time and the proliferation of his model in often variegated forms, the core tenets of the community organizing tradition are the same: winning community change requires power, and for organizers, people are power.

THE SWEET HOME CHICAGO COALITION

The Sweet Home Chicago Coalition’s model of equal partnership between organizing and policy brought together Jim Field, the Director of Organizing, and Julie Dworkin, the Director of Policy, at Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (Field and Dworkin 2011; Field, personal communication, December 5, 2012; Dworkin, personal communication, November 28, 2012). Each found that the partnership strengthened their approach and made the campaign more powerful and effective. From the beginning, organizing focused on people power and policy focused on knowledge power—their respective areas of expertise. Each department came to understand its strengths, the strengths of the other department, and ways their strengths could work together in a shared strategy.

The organizing department built people power by creating a coalition. Organizers emphasized strategic coalition partnerships and structure, inviting only organizations that had “a strong organizing culture,” transparent and inclusive decision-making, a sense of campaign ownership, and a minimum of two people designated for campaign management (Field and Dworkin 2011, 5; Field, personal communication, December 5, 2012).

The policy department built knowledge power by engaging in “a year-long research effort to identify new potential funding streams at the city level to dedicate for affordable housing” (Field and Dworkin 2011, 8). TIF funds were identified as a potential source of funding for affordable housing, as they could be used only for certain purposes (including affordable housing) and the city had a large surplus of TIF funds. Following extremely in-depth research of TIF funds, the policy department drafted an ordinance designating 20 percent of TIF funding—almost \$100 million per year—for affordable housing. The coalition introduced this ordinance in the City Council in March 2010 (Field & Dworkin 2011). Coalition staff and leaders were well trained in the complexities of TIF funding, which increased their understanding of the policies and ability to negotiate with the city. Research, trainings, and reports on TIF funding were some of the primary ways in which policy advocates brought power to the campaign (Field and Dworkin 2011).

Following the development of the coalition and the ordinance, the organizing and policy departments strategized together to mobilize power to promote the ordinance. They employed a diverse range of tactics, including policy tactics such as reports about TIFs; organizing tactics such as direct actions; and tactics utilized by both approaches, such as the strategic use of media. Throughout the campaign, policy advocates continued to provide critical research about TIF districts. The policy department was also responsible for continuing to equip the coalition partners with the knowledge it needed to successfully advocate for it (Field and Dworkin

2011). Ongoing communication between organizers and policy advocates was critical to identifying issues on which the coalition needed further research and clarity.

Pure organizing tactics characterized by “strong, aggressive, direct action” were some of the most effective of the campaign (Field and Dworkin 2011, 10). They used relationship-building conversations (one-on-ones) with community members and key stakeholders to build people power and ensure strong turnout at events (Field, personal communication, February 6, 2013). For instance, the coalition brought hundreds of community leaders—in bright red shirts—to the City Council meetings every month for more than a year, putting pressure on the City Council and raising the profile of the campaign (Field and Dworkin 2011). Other direct actions included phone banking, visiting aldermen’s homes, distributing flyers, and protesting. As the campaign involved frequent events and actions, the policy department supported the organizers in managing these events, contributing to a strong partnership between the two departments (Field and Dworkin 2011).

Some of the campaign tactics required the strengths and participation of *both* organizing and policy. One tactic was to build relationships with city officials and negotiate with them (Field and Dworkin 2011). Another overlapping tactic was the use of media. The campaign worked with a media strategist, cultivated a relationship with a member of the *Chicago Sun-Times* editorial board, utilized online media, and had a constant media presence at the monthly City Council meetings (Field and Dworkin 2011). These efforts helped make Sweet Home Chicago part of the discourse in the City Council. Important within this media strategy was an effective framing of the issue. The campaign first used an “affordable housing” frame and terminology. However, this frame did not generate sufficient support in the City Council because many aldermen associated affordable housing with increased crime and decreased property values. Therefore, the coalition changed the frame of the campaign to rehabilitating “vacant and/ or foreclosed properties,” which did not have as many negative associations attached to it and was more effective in gaining Council support (Field and Dworkin 2011).

The broad combination of these tactics made Sweet Home Chicago a powerful and high profile campaign that won two victories. Though the proposed ordinance was never voted on, Mayor Daley introduced an alternative ordinance in response to the pressure for funding affordable housing: the TIF Vacant Building Rehab Ordinance, which was amended and passed on May 4, 2011. While this alternative did not designate TIF funds in every district for affordable housing—one of the goals of the Sweet Home Chicago campaign—it did give the City administration and

aldermen the option of designating TIF funds for affordable housing. This designated money would “allow developers to get up to 50 percent of the cost to purchase and rehab a multi-family vacant property from TIF funds if they made up to 50 percent of the units affordable” (Field and Dworkin 2011, 17). A second victory of the campaign was the passage of an amendment to the city’s existing Affordable Requirements Ordinance. The amendment decreased the income requirements for affordable housing in rental housing developments receiving TIF funds. Consequently, more units are available to families of lower income levels (Field and Dworkin 2011). The work of the Sweet Home Chicago Coalition continues today as policy advocates collaborate with the city to implement the ordinance and make it as effective as possible. Steps have been taken to dedicate specific TIF funds in certain districts for the rehabilitation of vacant properties and to expand the number of TIF districts that have the program. The ordinance has actually become more powerful and closer to the original goals of Sweet Home Chicago in its implementation than it was in its original passage. While the proposed ordinance was never brought to a vote, the campaign brought attention to the issue of affordable housing, won a new program for TIF funding, and paved the way for future work with the city on the issue of affordable housing (Field and Dworkin 2011).

ANALYSIS OF POLICY AND ORGANIZING PARTNERSHIP

Kristina Smock (2004) has proposed a model of community change that goes beyond the traditional divide between community organizing and policy advocacy.¹ In her theory of “complementarity,” organizations with different approaches develop intentional relationships with each other to bolster their ability to address community problems. Their approaches remain distinct and the differences in their value systems, methods, and priorities are acknowledged and valued. Each approach continues to focus on its strengths and areas of expertise, rather than trying to expand and take on the skills and knowledge offered by other approaches. For example, in a complementary relationship, a policy advocacy organization would partner with a community organizing organization to work towards a mutual goal, rather than a policy advocacy organization trying to learn community organizing skills and do both. By recognizing that approaches are quite distinct, practitioners can better understand their own strengths, limits, and boundaries, as well as areas in which other approaches can effectively complement their own model, without merging and diluting their idiosyncratic strengths (Smock 2004).

Smock does not, however, elaborate on how practitioners can create a complementary relationship internally between two departments of an

organization or externally between two organizations.² The partnership between the organizing and policy departments at CCH throughout the Sweet Home Chicago campaign is an exemplary case study for how divergent change models can work together in a complementary relationship. At the beginning, organizing thoughtfully built a strong coalition, with a clear structure and set of principles. Policy determined a specific revenue stream for affordable housing (Field and Dworkin 2011). The overarching media and campaign strategy, which maintained the focus of the campaign, allowed different aspects of the strategy to be implemented by different departments (Field, personal communication, December 5, 2012). Policy provided research, reports, and in-depth trainings about the ordinance and TIF funding. Organizing executed creative, strategic actions and consistently turned out hundreds of people for City Council meetings. Together, they raised awareness about affordable housing in the public, media, and city administration (Field and Dworkin 2011). Organizing and policy became a united and powerful entity by building a truly equal relationship, developing a clear and shared strategy, and by functioning within their areas of expertise. From this case study, five key components emerge as critical to the creation of a complementary partnership, extending Smock's model of complementarity.

Equality. There was genuine equality in strategy, decision-making, and management of the campaign. It was essential that no power imbalance existed between the partners (Field, personal communication, December 5, 2012; Dworkin, personal communication, November 28, 2012).

Cooperation. The personalities of key actors, a spirit of cooperation, and simply the ability "to get along" were significant factors in determining the success and sustainability of the partnership (Field, personal communication, December 5, 2012). With two people co-managing a fast-paced campaign, they had to work well together under pressure and have "each other's backs" (Field and Dworkin 2011, 6).

Communication. Clear and consistent communication was absolutely essential in the day-to-day operations, in the formation of a shared strategy, and in the resolution of disagreements (Field, personal communication, December 5, 2012).

Mutuality. The departments engaged in a joint effort to cultivate a deep and meaningful understanding of the other's strengths, weaknesses, and unique contributions. To this end, the key partners used a five-column chart to develop a mutual understanding of policy and organizing. The five columns were: 1) Pure Policy; 2) Strong Policy/Little bit of Organizing; 3) Policy/Organizing Partnership; 4) Strong Organizing/Little bit of Policy; 5) Pure Organizing (Field, personal communication, December 5, 2012). The use of this chart and intentional discussions about each approach

nurtured a shared consciousness about these questions: What is a pure policy approach? What is a pure organizing approach? How can we best work together? What are our differences? These conversations illuminated areas in which they could complement one another and helped to develop a mutual respect between the departments. All of these components brought maturity, understanding, and complementarity to the relationship, shifting it from a relationship of novelty and incongruence to a "seamless," equal, and powerful partnership (Field, personal communication, December 5, 2012).

Commitment. The final and most important element in ensuring the creation of a successful, complementary partnership is this: all parties involved must want to make the partnership work (Field, personal communication, February 6, 2013). In bringing together two approaches to tackle a tough community problem, many disagreements and misunderstandings might emerge. Additionally, new partnerships can be challenging as each approach tries to determine its place. For example, in policy advocacy, experts or staff members usually meet with city officials to negotiate policies or make a request for their support. However, in community organizing, staff members rarely represent the campaign; leaders—the volunteers directly affected by the campaign—represent the campaign in meetings with city officials. This is just one example of a fundamental difference in priorities that might arise when policy advocates and organizers strategize together. In instances when there are disagreements or roles are unclear, a successful partnership requires organizers and policy advocates who are deeply committed to working through their differences, determining how they can best work together, and creating a stronger complementary partnership.

When five CCH staff members were asked about the outcomes of the partnership between organizing and policy, all five independently reported that it made the organization and the Sweet Home Chicago campaign more powerful. When policy advocates encounter opposition, the only available tactic is to negotiate; there are few ways that they can forcefully push back. Policy advocates benefit from the organizing tactics that can move an initiative forward in the face of opposition. Similarly, organizers benefit from the in-depth research of the policy department. Policy advocates' deep understanding of TIF funding has allowed the coalition to be influential in the implementation of the ordinance, which has made it more meaningful and effective in its implementation than it was in writing. However, the coalition is only influential in the implementation negotiations because of the combination of knowledge power and people power built during the campaign.

Other community change practitioners would do well to consider this model for their efforts. The model of complementarity can be called upon

to assist organizations or departments with different values, approaches, and cultures as they try to work together for a common purpose. For practitioners developing a complementary partnership, this can be used as a case study to inform their efforts. Thought should be given to the five key components that made the complementary partnership within CCH successful: equality, cooperation, communication, mutuality, and commitment. Though the partnership began for the purpose of the Sweet Home Chicago campaign, it has become embedded in the organizational culture of CCH. When asked about how and why policy and organizing partnered, Julie Dworkin, the Director of Policy, commented, "The better question is...can you really be effective without both?" (personal communication, November 28, 2012).

NOTES

¹ Others have also offered models for bringing together different community change approaches. Most notably, Jack Rothman (1995) proposes that there are three basic modes of community practice: locality development, social planning/policy, and social action, which comprises community organizing. He postulates that these modes overlap in practice, and he promotes an "interweaving" and merging of different approaches (Rothman 1995, 46). This emphasizes commonalities rather than the distinct power of different approaches. He claims that practitioners should become familiar with and skilled in all three approaches, and draw from each when appropriate in a community change effort (Rothman 1995). However, Kristina Smock's model best fits the policy and organizing partnership analyzed here, as the partnership brought out the discrete strengths of policy and organizing, rather than merging them into one approach.

² Smock theorizes that complementary relationships between two approaches should not exist within one organization, but instead different approaches should be housed within separate organizations (2004). However, the case study offered here suggests that it is possible for one organization to do both policy and organizing, so long as they remain in distinct departments. Containing both approaches within one organization actually creates an even stronger partnership, one united by a common mission.

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