

Social Sustainability Assessment of Sprouts

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UBC FOOD SYSTEM PROJECT 2009
SCENARIO 5

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AGSC 450 GROUP 27

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION	3
Problem Definition.....	5
Vision Statement and Value Assumptions.....	6
METHODOLOGY	8
FINDINGS	10
Interview with Martin Gunst.....	10
Volunteer Satisfaction Findings.....	11
Customer Satisfaction Findings	12
DISCUSSION	15
Size.....	15
Society.....	16
Stability.....	17
Satisfaction.....	18
RECOMMENDATIONS	19
CONCLUSION.....	22
REFERENCES	23
APPENDIX.....	24

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the food system crisis has raised public attention. Issues such as an increase in obesity rates, a rise in food prices, climate change, and the shortage in resources are all of concern. In response, post secondary institutions such as the University of British Columbia (UBC) are beginning to promote sustainability in their curriculums and in their campus organizations. Food providers on campus are becoming more aware of ethical issues, such as environmentally sustainable practices for running a business.

A successful business must be economically, ecologically, and most importantly, socially sustainable. Our group approached the UBC Food System project with an innovative perspective. We assessed the social sustainability of Sprouts, a volunteer-run mini café and grocery store located in the Student Union Building at the University of British Columbia. Since social sustainability is a novel term and has not been previously assessed at Sprouts, our group provided a definition of what we perceive as social sustainability and identified four parameters which can be used to assess it. These include: size, society, stability and satisfaction. The assessment is performed on two populations, the volunteers and the customers of Sprouts. This report provides recommendations for improving social sustainability at Sprouts. In addition, potential future approaches of this project are also provided.

INTRODUCTION

The UBC Food Systems Project (UBCFSP) emerged under the collaboration of UBC community partners who shared a vision to see UBC as one of the leading examples of a sustainable food system on campus. Since the integration of this community-based action research project into the course curriculum of AGSC 450 in 2002, student groups have been

working together with multiple UBC partners, such as the UBC Farm and UBC Food Services, on a series of scenarios. These scenarios are designed to develop opportunities for these campus partners and collaborators to enhance the sustainability of their contribution to the UBC food system (i.e. food sourcing, waste management, food growing).

In 2009, a new partnership and scenario has been developed with Sprouts, a unique volunteer run organization that highlights sustainability as a fundamental component in directing their management. Located at the central campus community in the Student Union Building, Sprouts began as a bulk buying cooperative through the UBC Natural Food Co-op and has now expanded to operate mainly as a café and grocery store. Sprouts strives to provide students with the most affordable, healthy, and sustainable food on campus as well as to increase awareness about the importance of shared responsibility in our food system. This includes responsible consumption and the connection between consumers, the producers and the land from which our food came. This year, student groups collaborated with Sprouts in Scenario 5 to assess its sustainability, investigate the alignment of their practices with their principles, and develop recommendations to enhance its sustainability practices.

The purpose of this paper is to report our research on the social sustainability of Sprouts. Because our task has been refocused from what was originally assigned to us, our paper will begin with an explanation of why we redefined our problem definition and a brief group definition of social sustainability of volunteer run organizations. We will then articulate our group discussion on the vision statements of UBCFSP, our value assumptions that influenced our views and methodology by which our research was conducted. Next, we shall report our findings and discuss issues and recommendations for Sprouts and future AGSC 450 students.

Problem Definition

Our group had difficulty seeing how our original scenario connected to the broader problems in the food system if we only focused on investigating on Sprouts' current marketing demographics and assessing its menu items' nutritional values. From two interviews with the current Sprouts president, Martin Gunst, we learned that this robust, lively café which is already serving at full capacity had once suffered financial losses as a food co-op and had to close its doors (M. Gunst, personal communication, January 28 and March 11, 2009). We believe that the reason for this bankruptcy was due to inadequate economic and social sustainability, which could have arisen due to issues with paid and unpaid staff, for example.

Today, Sprouts has recovered from that down-time, serves as many customers as they can handle and has taken on new initiatives such as Community Eats, Sprouts Catering and The Sprouts Box. However, like any volunteer-based organization, worker turnover is unavoidable and the number of committed individuals plays a huge factor in the future direction of the non-profit organization. Sprouts and other sustainability-minded food outlets such as Agora Cafe, are struggling to fill the emptying positions of executives and volunteers. Even Brenda Sawada, (personal communication, February 25, 2009) the manager of the UBC Social, Ecological, Economic Development Studies (SEEDS), agrees that human energy and financial resources are the biggest limiting factors to the longevity of these sustainability-minded organizations and their part in developing a sustainable food system at the UBC campus.

As such, we proposed to investigate the social sustainability of Sprouts as a volunteer run organization, in the hopes of determining some key factors to its current success, as well as identifying possible areas for improvement. This involved background research on previous

volunteer organizations' management assessments, research on successful food co-ops with similar aims as Sprouts, and both worker and customer satisfaction assessments at Sprouts.

Definition of Social Sustainability

We identified four parameters (the 4 S's of social sustainability) to be evaluated in determining the social sustainability of an organization. One can say that an organization is socially sustainable when it is secure in all of these areas:

- ∂ **Size** – of organization and members, which affects the interactions within the organization and with the community
- ∂ **Society** – of the customers and volunteers, should be a community of diverse people with shared vision, it should provide a sense of belonging, support, and enthusiasm to its members, and encourage positive social interactions
- ∂ **Stability** – of the organization is determined by its ability to withstand competition from other businesses as well as the level of commitment of its volunteers, and consistency of customers
- ∂ **Satisfaction** – of workers and customers, to ensure sufficient human resources and to guarantee loyalty and continued motivation

Vision Statement and Value Assumptions

The UBCFSP coordinators, partners and coordinators have established and agreed upon a vision statement as a guide to achieve the goal of developing a sustainable food system.

The overarching goal of a sustainable food system is to protect and enhance the diversity and quality of the ecosystem and to improve social equity, whereby:

1. Food is locally grown, produced and processed.
2. Waste must be recycled or composted locally
3. Food is ethnically diverse, affordable, safe and nutritious
4. Providers and educators promote awareness among consumers about cultivation, processing, ingredients and nutrition
5. Food brings people together and enhances community
6. Is produced by socially, ecologically conscious producers
7. Providers and growers pay and receive fair prices

Group Reflections

Among the seven students in our group, all had agreed with statement # 4 that more education and awareness is needed in the market place for consumers with regards to food processing, food coloring and management of food. We feel that many manufacturers fail to disclose sufficient and satisfactory information regarding the processing and ingredients of food, which hinders consumers' ability to connect to the source of food.

Our group also had particular interest in discussing statements 1 and 3. It is difficult to imagine how ethnical and cultural diversity can be fully achieved if there is a shift towards localization of food. The Canadian climate does not appear to enable us to meet ethnic needs without importing international goods. Many of our group members feel that access to cultural food is important especially in a multicultural city like Vancouver, but are concerned as to the extent of which products should be imported to meet these needs. We feel that this is certainly an ongoing issue that cannot be easily resolved without compromising either one of the values. A possible revision of statement 1 that attempts to align more closely with statement 3 could be "Food is locally grown, produced and processed when possible and ethnic diversity is not compromised."

On a similar note, we feel that statement 7 could aid in bringing us a step closer to improving social equity and enhancing the quality of the ecosystem. First, statement 7 should be expanded to mention the providers and growers of both domestic and imported goods, in which the original academic version achieves: "Contains a balance of imported and local foods that come from socially and ecologically conscious producers to ensure long-term financial

viability.” (Rojas et al, 2007). With this in place, we can collaborate with producers to provide ethnically appropriate food through socially and ecologically conscious approach.

To no surprise, the operation of Sprouts demonstrates that its vision and guiding principle align closely with the UBCFSP vision statement. Sprouts endeavors to balance the demand of local, organic, fair-trade, minimally packaged, affordable and special dietary foods. It practices sustainability through their food sourcing, waste management, their café policies (no to-go containers provided), and Community Eats (free lunch made from donated food). Believing that food is the heart and soul of Sprouts, it strives to enhance the feelings of community and promotes the pleasures of eating around the food table.

Value assumptions:

Upon addressing this scenario, our group members have a good understanding of sustainability and recognize the intrinsic value of the land beyond its resources. Much of this moderate-weak anthropocentric view has been influenced by our education through the Land, Food & Community series as a part of the Land and Food Systems Faculty. In addition to our education, our passion to pursue a degree in Food, Nutrition and Health and our individual cultural and personal experiences also play a significant role in shaping our views about the vision statement and the UBCFSP.

METHODOLOGY

A multi-method approach employing both qualitative and quantitative measures was used to assess the social sustainability of Sprouts. Due to Sprouts’ very recent reemergence as a café in January 2008, there were no previous AGSC 450 papers for us to use as a starting point for our research. We therefore initiated our research with our first interview with Sprouts’ president,

Martin Gunst, on January 28, 2009. From the information obtained through this interview, we developed our project proposal, which was to evaluate the social sustainability of Sprouts. In order to develop a better understanding of Sprouts as well as to ask specific questions regarding management and executive team recruitment, a second interview with Gunst was held on March 11, 2009.

Email communications and personal communications during visits to Sprouts were made between group members and Gunst to address Sprouts' performance particularly in management to help develop surveys. We have provided copies of the ethics consent form to ensure that we met the ethical guidelines of AGSC 450.

To evaluate the specific factors that we had defined as social sustainability, we conducted a volunteer satisfaction survey (See Appendix-1) which assessed the satisfaction and motivations of both executive and general volunteers. Consultation of academic papers on the topic of volunteer satisfaction and motivation was used to help design the questions. For example Clary and Snyder (1999) identified 6 common volunteer motivators in their Volunteer Functions Inventory. These motivating factors were: to express important *values*; to better *understand* the world and its people; for positive *self-enhancement*; for *protective* effects against guilt, self-doubt, and other negative feelings; to fit into one's *social* reference groups; and to obtain *career* skills and opportunities (Clary & Snyder, 1999). We attempted to address each of these possible motivators in our survey.

The sample size was 28, and a total of 12 responses were collected. The surveys were distributed at Sprouts from Monday, March 9, 2009 until March 16, 2009, spanning seven days. Surveys were then collected and results were tallied and then inputted into Microsoft Excel for further analysis. Information regarding age groups, faculty and length of volunteer experience

were used to address trends to certain questions as comparing volunteer satisfaction rate with time commitment they made.

A customer satisfaction survey was also conducted during the same week to investigate whether Sprouts is meeting the needs of its current marketing demographic and to develop recommendations for future improvements. These surveys were critical to our evaluation of the *size, society, satisfaction* and *stability* of Sprouts. In the customer satisfaction survey, we asked general questions regarding the participants' faculty and residential status. Questions specifically addressing service quality, food products, visit frequency, and future improvements were also asked for a deeper understanding of general customer satisfaction (Appendix-2). Responding to both surveys was voluntary. All survey responses were anonymous to the AGSC project team.

Our literature reviews include previous and current volunteer-run organizations' management papers, reviewed journals and an array of websites. Information on other volunteer-run organizations was also obtained via interviews with the Agora Café's past, present and future managers. The focus of our literature review was to gain further insight into their management operations, as well as learn from their own experience and struggle with finding management for their organization. All qualitative and quantitative results were recorded for subsequent use by future investigators.

FINDINGS

Interviews with Martin Gunst

From our interview with Gunst, we found that Sprouts is trying hard in offering sustainable, healthy, and local food. It wanted to create a place of community, a social and

comfortable environment for students in the SUB. Gunst stated that they are not doing much advertising, because Sprouts is already running at its maximum capacity and they could barely handle the current amount of business, due to the limited number of volunteers they have. It was apparent that the lack of volunteers, especially long-term volunteers that could take over positions in the executive team, was one of the greatest barriers Sprouts was experiencing. Gunst believed that having a formal recruitment would be helpful for Sprouts to keep human resources sufficient.

Surveys

Volunteer Satisfaction Survey Results

The Volunteer Satisfaction Survey showed that many respondents enquired the Sprouts volunteer opportunity by themselves and many others stated they heard about Sprouts through events such as UBC Imagine Day (see Figure 1). Interestingly, most volunteers shared the values of the organization, with 11 out of 12 people ranking sustainability as the most important amongst other factors which include fair trade, social equity, organics, local food, and climate change. With the exception of two people, there was an overall negative response when volunteers were asked whether they were interested in joining the executive team next year. The majority of the other respondents (83%) were concerned about the amount of time they need to invest in volunteering at Sprouts, given that 50% of them work at Sprouts for '5+' hours a week. A total of 85% ranked Sprouts as a high priority among their other commitments.

The response for the question regarding the challenges that the volunteers felt Sprouts is facing is notable. There are 75% of the respondents who believed that Sprouts needed more training of volunteers, 42% felt the need to train executive volunteers, and 40% reported that

Sprouts is experiencing challenges in ‘coping with changing demographic of volunteers’ and the ‘premises of facilities’.

The survey also compared volunteer motivation before and after they volunteered at Sprouts. The initial volunteer motivation was socialization, supporting the community, and helping others. However, data showed that during the course of volunteering these motivators decreased. Instead, they continued to volunteer at Sprouts because they wanted to see and help Sprouts continue to prosper, and felt that they had made a commitment and would feel guilty leaving.

Generally high satisfaction with volunteers’ contributions and commitment to the organization were seen. The majority thought their volunteer job was challenging and interesting and felt that their work had made a unique and valuable difference to the people in the community. However, data trends indicate that new volunteers and less committed volunteers show less enthusiasm towards volunteering. They tend to experience more difficulties in finding support, and desired to be treated with more patience and passion from their senior workers. On the other hand, the senior volunteers who devoted an average of 5+ hours show higher satisfaction overall. This trend was found from comparing responses data from Questions ‘How many hours per week do you volunteer at Sprouts’, ‘Are you satisfied with your contributions’ and ‘Do you feel there is equality amongst all sprouts volunteers and their respective roles?’ Please refer to Appendix-1 for survey tabulations.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Results

There were 36 responses to our customer satisfaction survey from Sprouts customers. Our results indicate that 35% of these customers came from the Faculty of Arts, 14 % from the Faculty of Land and Food System, and 14% from the Faculty of Science (Figure 1). We found

that the current marketing demographic of Sprouts consists of a majority of off-campus residents (72% - Figure 4) and undergraduate students (74%), with others being staff, graduate students, and visitors from outside of UBC (Figure 2).

Among the 36 participants surveyed, 39 % of them visit Sprouts 2 to 3 times a week on a regular basis, showing a steady supply of customers (Figure 6). We found that over 50% of them came to know about Sprouts through their friends and colleagues and none from media sources such as poster or flyers (Figure 5). According to our interview with Martin Gunst, posters and advertisements were not the primary methods for promoting Sprouts due to the limited number of volunteers, and thus not an effective way to attract a great variety of other customers (M. Gunst, personal communication, Jan 28, 2009).

The integrated data of the surveyed population demonstrates comparable trends of factors that influence their food choices. Our data show that 89% of the customers generally spend less than \$5 dollars per visit (Figure 7), and almost 90% of them are most satisfied with the reasonable/fair prices of the foods. (Figure 9).

The customers also come to Sprouts for various reasons, such as the taste of food and the comfy environment. Sprouts' menu offers a wide variety of fresh and dry organic groceries as well as freshly made beverages and delicious hot lunches. In particular, our statistical evidence reflects that most customers favor the delicious soups and baked goods; it is reported that 83% and 81% surveyed customers ordered these food choices, respectively (Figure 8).

Sprouts café provides a unique comfortable environment for students to socialize with friends and colleagues. Our data indicate 78% of the participants like the way Sprouts provides a harmonious atmosphere and a pleasant ambience (Figure 9).

Sprouts takes initiative to protect the environment by providing reusable containers such as ceramic bowls and dishes as well as composting food wastes. According to the results corresponding to whether customers like the concept of local food, 75% of participants highly rated it as one of the top reasons they visit Sprouts. This shows that Sprouts is playing a considerable role in incorporating sustainable practices into their operations by promoting eco-friendly local foods (Figure 9).

Many of the participants responded that they are completely satisfied with Sprouts for its overall quality in service and food (Figure 11), and almost all survey participants (except for one unspecified response) indicated that they would recommend others to come to Sprouts (Figure 13). Nonetheless, 61 % of the customers indicated that they were least satisfied with Sprouts' confined space which lacks seating and legroom, and would like Sprouts to improve on its physical size to accommodate a greater number of customers (Figure 10). Also, 44% of the customers addressed that they would appreciate a wider variety of food products other than seasonal groceries (Figure 10) and recommended Sprouts to introduce Viet-style coffee. 22% of the customers find the waiting time for the foods longer than expected, and thus anticipate Sprouts to increase on the speed of service during the peak hours (Figure 12). Another 22% of the customers suggested that service quality can be improved if their "inquiries were routed to the appropriate person" and workers "respond in a professional manner" (Figure 12). A few of the participants additionally stated that they wish Sprouts opened during the summer to make available for summer marketing demands.

Since the survey was conducted on a voluntary basis, the statistical analysis of the sampled group may not completely reflect the satisfaction of the entire customer population. However, we intended to randomize the survey by not discriminating participants among their

age, gender, race and backgrounds. We also tried to eliminate our research bias by placing the survey for an entire week to capture customers during weekdays and weekends.

DISCUSSION

Volunteer based food co-op's such as Sprouts are initiated due to a common goal or vision of its founders and community members. Its existence relies heavily on the commitment and hard work of its volunteers. Unlike many other businesses, profit and pay are not key motivators. Instead, for these organizations to be sustainable, a number of requirements must be satisfied. Through the review of other volunteer based food co-ops, we have identified four such requirements or parameters which must be met in order for an organization like Sprouts to be socially sustainable. We will refer to these parameters as "The four S's of Social Sustainability." They include size, society, stability, and satisfaction as defined in the introduction. Each parameter is equally important and they are all interrelated. Barriers which impinge on the achievement of any one of the parameters will decrease social sustainability and ultimately the longevity of Sprouts. Thus, the social sustainability of Sprouts was assessed based on determining the extent to which these parameters were satisfied and identifying barriers to each parameter.

Size

The *size* of a volunteer-based organisation is defined not only by the number of its members, but also its resources to meet the demands of its customers and its initiatives. Survey results from Sprouts revealed a clear disagreement between what customers want and what Sprouts can provide in terms of its size. According to customer surveys, the main reasons for dissatisfaction are limited seating, lack of variety in the menu and insufficient soup to meet consumer demand. However, Gunst states that Sprouts is currently at full capacity, making more

profit than necessary and neither needs nor can support expansion due to limited physical space and volunteer resources (M. Gunst, personal communication, January 28, 2009). In addition, one of the reasons for the limited menu is that they are only certified to produce certain hot items. The production of items such as sandwiches would require additional certification of premises and training of volunteers which Sprouts cannot currently administer (M. Gunst, personal communication, January 28, 2009). In the long run, this consumer disappointment could hinder the satisfaction parameter of social sustainability.

When demand is greater than supply, it is necessary for growth to occur in order to meet demands. When food co-ops such as the East End Food Co-op located in Vancouver begin to flourish, there is a tendency to increase in size, warranting greater professionalism and organizational tactics such as middle management (Chaland, 2001). In most instances as was seen with the East End Food co-op, these changes are resisted by members, affecting the *society*, *satisfaction and stability* parameters of social sustainability.

Society

One of the missions of Sprouts is to create a *society* with diverse members and a sense of belonging which would foster community within the university (M. Gunst, personal communication, January 28, 2009). Although customer surveys reveal that customers are not content with its current size, Sprouts has actually grown significantly over the past year. This growth has already affected the *society* parameter of social sustainability. Although the growth has generated enough revenue to pay off old debts and accumulate some profit, Gunst states that there has been a decline in familiarity between volunteers and customers as the popularity of Sprouts on campus has increased (M. Gunst, personal communication, March 11, 2009). This observation is supported by results of the volunteer survey as 40% reported that Sprouts is

having challenges ‘coping with the changing demographic of volunteers’ as turnover has increased. This decline in positive social networking and loss of community endangers the *satisfaction* parameter of both volunteers and customers.

Customer survey results also indicate that there is a lack of diversity in Sprouts members which affects networking and interactions with diverse community members. There are 35% of volunteers that are from either the Faculty of Land and Food Systems or Arts. In addition, only 6% of the customers are staff members and 28% of the customers are either from the faculty of Land and Food Systems or Science. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Gunst states that Sprouts is currently having problems recruiting executives for next year (M. Gunst, personal communication, March 11, 2009). Moreover, due to the nature of the UBC community, Sprouts faces a unique *society* barrier. Unlike other food co-ops, the community members of Sprouts are constantly changing as students graduate and leave the community. In fact, customer survey findings indicate that only 6% of current customers are not UBC staff or students and 74 percent are UBC undergraduates. This finding threatens the *stability* of sprouts as there is a lack of consistency in its volunteer base. In fact, a majority of volunteers stated that they did not plan to continue volunteering at Sprouts after graduation.

Stability

The *stability* parameter of social sustainability is perhaps the most complex of the parameters as it is affected by a multitude of factors. One indicator of the *stability* of Sprouts is that it provides a unique service on campus and is thus relatively unaffected by other food outlets or competitors. However, *stability* also depends on the consistency of its members (volunteers and customers) which in turn is influenced by the extent to which *satisfaction*, *size* and *society* parameters are met. Consistency of society is expected to allow Sprouts to self-perpetuate itself.

However, the existence of Sprouts is already threatened by lack of volunteers for executive positions next year.

Through our research, we have identified key barriers to the *stability* of Sprouts. Firstly, Sprouts lacks a formal marketing and recruiting system. Results from volunteer surveys indicate that only 17 percent of the volunteers heard about Sprouts through its poster campaign or its Facebook group. For a successful volunteer program, it is necessary to conduct marketing campaigns to increase awareness about the organization and its initiatives so as to reach potential candidates (USDA, 2009). However, Gunst indicates that Sprouts conducts little marketing in order to raise awareness about Sprouts as it is already generating more revenue than necessary (M. Gunst, personal communication, March 11, 2009). Although volunteer positions and specific job descriptions are advertised on the Sprouts website, this effort only reaches a small demographic and is not as effective as marketing to a larger audience. Again, this is evidenced in the lack of diversity in both Sprouts customers and volunteers.

Currently, Sprouts is considered a club, and does not need to pay rent. However, how long Sprouts is able to keep their club status is questionable, considering that it is a food provider, competing with the Alma Mater Society's own food businesses. Although Sprouts is currently generating some profit, they may have to increase in *size* in order to support this rent and thus address its current barriers to *size* in order to be sustainable.

Satisfaction

Survey findings indicate that the *satisfaction* of both customers and volunteers are being achieved. In general, customers are satisfied with the service, atmosphere and vision of Sprouts. This is a key indicator to their continual loyalty towards Sprouts. Much of the success of the East End Food Co-op is attributed toward the loyalty of its members which results from their

satisfaction with the organization (Chaland, 2001). Amongst the customers surveyed, 70 percent visit Sprouts at least two to three times per week. However, this may indicate response bias on customer surveys as only satisfied customers may have participated in the surveys.

All volunteers appeared satisfied with their position and the extent to which Sprouts met their needs. This is an indicator of their likelihood to continue to volunteer. However, many volunteers stated that lack of time prevented them from volunteering more hours. This contradicts the finding that most volunteers considered volunteering at Sprouts a high priority. Only 50% volunteered more than 5 hours per week.

Sprouts clearly faces a number of barriers which prevents them from satisfying one or more of the four parameters of social sustainability. Sprouts should consider making some changes in order to ensure its viability in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through our research we have consulted a wide range of resources in an effort to tackle the question of social sustainability. Our aim was to form useful recommendations for Sprouts and for future AGSC 450 students on this topic. We have created four primary suggestions that could help Sprouts better achieve social sustainability.

1 - Scale Back

While it would be a great pity to eliminate some of Sprouts' current projects, we feel that scaling back could offer many benefits in the area of social sustainability. Specifically, we are suggesting cutting back on some of the extra initiatives that Sprouts offers, such as the workshops, the catering or the Sprouts boxes. This suggestion may seem to contradict the Discussion where we mentioned there is a high demand for all of Sprouts services; however

Sprouts is clearly suffering from a lack of resources to meet this demand. Rather than burning out their staff, we feel that scaling back will be more productive in the long run.

First and foremost this creates less work for the volunteers running the organization. Seeing as workload is a strong deterrent for many volunteers (a theme raised in both our interviews with Martin Gunst and with the Agora managers), a smaller work and time commitment would hopefully entice more volunteers to join Sprouts, as well as volunteer for executive and coordinator positions. Furthermore, scaling back would make managerial positions less intimidating to potential candidates and hopefully easier to balance with a full course load. Scaling back is being done at Agora, in an attempt to make their management more socially sustainable (Vanessa Perrodou, personal communication, March 17 2009).

Ultimately, organizations such as Sprouts and Agora that are run solely on volunteer work of students, must keep in mind that while the enthusiasm of one leader can push these organizations forward, it is the dedication of many that will keep them running in the long term. These organizations need to be kept at a scale that is conducive to this, a size that keeps the workers involved and gives them a sense of ownership over the organizations, and one that can foster a social community, as we have seen that “meeting others/socialization” was a strong motivator for Sprouts’ volunteers. Many food co-ops have switched from volunteer to paid staff due to increase in size. However, as seen at Sprouts, having some members paid and others as volunteers creates a divide between the staff. Thus, organizations need to be kept at a size where they can in fact be run by volunteers.

2 – Marketing

Sprouts could benefit from recruiting a more varied customer base. Judging from the customer surveys, the majority of Sprouts customers are from the Faculty of Arts, Science or

Land and Food Systems. However, we know that their delicious products and sustainability mandate would appeal to students from all faculties on campus. By recruiting more customers, Sprouts would not only enjoy more business, but also be able to draw upon a larger pool of people for potential volunteers, which would ensure Sprouts' ability to continue to prosper. Also, since our volunteer survey determined that 34% current volunteers heard of Sprouts' volunteer opportunities by word of mouth or through a friend, a wider customer base would hopefully increase this spread of information. Furthermore, marketing could help promote Sprouts' message of sustainable and fair-trade food to more UBC students, which is a part of the organization's goals.

3 - Creation of a recruitment plan

By creating a specific timeline and specific avenues for recruiting volunteers, Sprouts will hopefully be able to avoid their current predicament of a lack of management for next year. Recruitment promotions should be geared to engage possible motivations for the volunteers, such as the ones identified in our research. This also ties into the idea of keeping the organization on a scale that is sustainable in the long term. The task of recruiting future volunteers and management for an organization is crucial to its survival, and should be included in the job description of the executives and coordinators. Attending events such as volunteer fairs or Clubs Week are time consuming. Cutting back on the time executives spend in other areas of their positions, for example by scaling back Sprouts' operations (recommendation 1), will allow for more time that can be devoted to essential tasks such as these.

4 - Organizational Recommendations

We spent a great deal of time and thought as to how Sprouts could better structure their organization to attract more volunteers. In the end we concluded that most of these would not

work out. For example, our group agreed that paying Sprouts staff would not solve their problem of a shortage of executives, but rather create a multitude of questions on who should be paid and how much they should receive. The only plausible option would be to pay perhaps one full or part-time president. As the person with by far the most responsibility, the president might be sufficiently separate from the rest of the volunteers that changing it to a paid position would not create resentment amongst the rest of the staff.

We also recommend that each coordinator and executive to take on an assistant throughout the year, in the hope that this assistant could take on the full role the following year. While we realize that this would be difficult to implement, because students often do not want to commit their time so long in advance, we do feel this would greatly ease the transition from one year to the next.

Our inquiry into social sustainability has left many questions. One thing that is clear however, is the importance of this topic. Without social sustainability in our organizations, we will not be able to achieve the goals of these organizations; they will collapse before they are able to truly make a difference. We hope that future AGSC 450 students will continue this investigation. Two key areas which could use more focus are the procurement of volunteers, as well as the difficulty of maintaining leadership. Future groups could work together with Sprouts to create and implement a recruitment plan, such as the one we have recommended above.

CONCLUSION

Social sustainability is a complicated topic with no easy answers. We assessed Sprouts on the four S's of social sustainability. The size of Sprouts was found to be too small to meet demand, yet too large to be sustained by its volunteer workforce. Its sense of society is

weakened due to factors such as the changes in the demographics of the volunteers and the decline in familiarity between volunteers and customers. This weakened sense of society is also interrelated to the stability of Sprouts, as the supply of volunteers and executives is inconsistent. Although both volunteers and customers are satisfied with Sprouts, in brief we propose some recommendations to ensure future viability, such as scaling back on current projects, improving the current marketing strategies, creating a recruitment plan and restructuring the organization.

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APPENDIX

Appendix I – Volunteer Survey

Sprouts Volunteer Survey

- What faculty are you from? _____
- How old are you?
___ 18-20 _____ 24-30
___ 21-24 _____ 30+
- Are you male or female?
___ Male
___ Female
- Can you use one word to describe your volunteer experience at Sprouts?

- What are your responsibilities at Sprouts? _____
- How many hours per week do you volunteer at Sprouts?
___ 1-3 hrs _____ 3-5 hrs _____ 5+ hrs
- How long have you been volunteering at Sprouts? _____
- Where did you hear about Sprouts volunteer opportunities?
___ A friend who volunteers there _____ From shopping there
___ I enquired myself _____ Word of Mouth
___ Poster/Brochure _____ Volunteer Website
___ Facebook _____ other
- Have you participated in any other activities that were coordinated through Sprouts in last year? Yes/No
- Amongst your other commitments, where do you rank Sprouts' importance?
Bottom of the list/low/middle/high/top of my list
- Please rank the following in order of importance to you.
___ Fair trade _____ Organics
___ Sustainability _____ Local food
___ Social equity _____ Climate change
- Do you feel that Sprouts is facing challenges in any of the following areas? (check those that apply)
___ Resources and or budget for running sprouts

Coping with changing demographic of volunteers

Training of volunteers

Training of executive volunteers

Premises of facilities

Are you satisfied with your contributions and/or commitment to the organization?

Yes No

Do you feel you are getting good support from the organization?

Yes No

Which of these factors motivated you to begin volunteering? Check all that apply

Education Requirement

Work Experience

To meet others/socialization

Personal Development (such as: _____)

Support Community and help others

Sprouts' values mirror my own

Other (please specify: _____)

Does your role at Sprouts allow you to accomplish what you wanted from volunteering at Sprouts?

Why do you continue to volunteer at Sprouts?

Education Requirement

Work Experience

To meet others/socialization

Personal Development (such as: _____)

Support Community and help others

Sprouts' values mirror my own

I want to see and help the Sprouts organization continue to prosper

I made a commitment and would feel guilty leaving

I intend to quit as soon as possible

Other (please specify: _____)

Do you feel you need more training sessions?

Yes No

Are you included in the decision making process at Sprouts ?

Yes No

If not, do you want to be included? _____

Do you feel there is equality amongst all Sprouts volunteers and their respective roles?

If not, do you think there should be? Please explain: _____

—

How long do you intend to stay a volunteer with Sprouts?

Finish this year then see

Definitely be back next year

- ___ Will stay as long as I'm at UBC
- ___ Will stay as long as I'm living in Vancouver

☞ Would you consider joining the executive team? Why or why not?

If you mark something other than agree or strongly agree, please elaborate why in the comments area.

1) There is a positive climate of teamwork amongst staff and volunteers.

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree
Comments: _____

2) I have the support and guidance I need to accomplish my volunteer activities.

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree
Comments: _____

3) Working at Sprouts is challenging and interesting.

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree
Comments: _____

4) I would recommend volunteering at Sprouts to a friend

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree
Comments: _____

5) My volunteer work makes a unique and valuable difference to the people in the community.

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree
Comments: _____

6) I am satisfied with my volunteer placement

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree
Comments: _____

7) I have made friends at Sprouts

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree
Comments: _____

8) I am happy with my level of responsibility at Sprouts

Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly Agree
Comments: _____

Appendix II – Customer Survey



Customer Satisfaction Survey AGSC 450 Group 27

A. General background

- 1) What faculty are you from? _____
- 2) What's your "status" here at UBC?
 - Undergraduate
 - Graduate
 - Faculty
 - Staff
 - Other: _____
- 3) Gender
 - Male
 - Female
- 4) Do you live on campus/ off-campus?
 - Yes
 - No

B. Specific questions

- 5) How did you know/find out about Sprouts?
 - discovered it when walking around the SUB
 - friends/colleagues
 - internet (ie. Facebook)
 - posters/flyers
 - Other: _____
- 6) How often do you visit Sprouts on average?
 - My first time
 - Once a semester
 - 1-2x a month
 - 3-4x a month
 - Once a week
 - 2-3x a week
 - Almost everyday
 - Everyday
- 7) What is your average spending per visit?
 - <\$5
 - \$5-10
 - >\$10
- 8) What do you order/purchase? (check all that apply)
 - Baked goods
 - Soup & bread
 - Drink (coffee, latte, etc.)
 - Grocery items / produce
 - Fruit (fresh / dried)
 - Fair trade items (chocolate / coffee beans?)

- 9) What do you like about Sprouts / Why do you come?
(check all that apply)

- Food tastes good
- Reasonable prices
- Comfortable environment/atmosphere
- Provide organic/fair trade
- Meets my dietary needs (gluten free/ vegetarian / vegan)
- Appreciate Sprouts sustainability/eco-friendly practices
- Provide local food
- Good customer service
- Convenient
- Know the people
- Meets my needs; explain: _____

- 10) What would you like to see more of?

- Variety in food (baked goods / soups / bread / sandwiches
other: _____)
- Bigger space
- Lower prices
- More local food
- Other: _____

- 11) How satisfied are you of Sprouts café?

- 0 – not at all, I wouldn't consider coming back nor recommending to others
- 1 – not entirely
- 2 – neutral
- 3 – somewhat satisfied
- 4 – good
- 5 – completely satisfied, I would recommend to all my friends and would like to come more often if I could

- 12) How can service quality be improved?

(Check all that apply)

- the service quality is perfect
- Speed of service during lunch hours
- Speed of service during other times
- Staff respond in a professional manner
- Your inquiries are routed to the appropriate person
- Other: _____

- 13) What are you most satisfied with?

- 14) What are you least satisfied with?

- 15) Would you recommend Sprouts to other people?

- Yes
- No

Appendix III - Figures

Figure 1

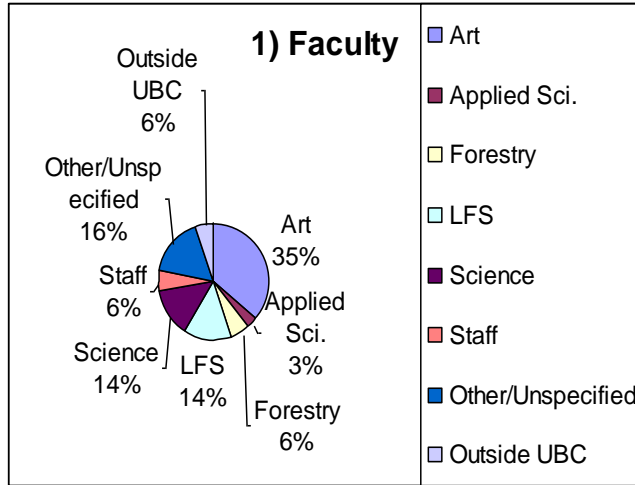


Figure 2

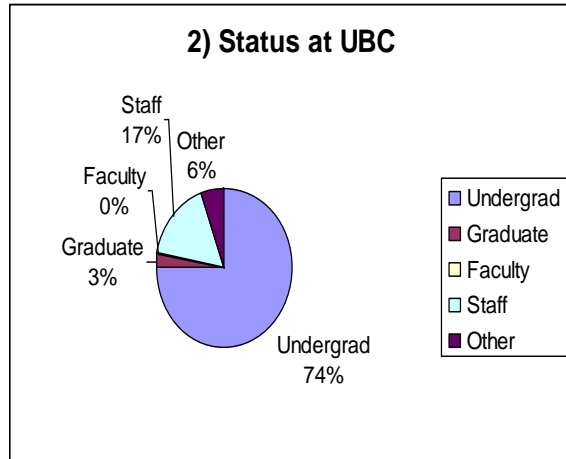


Figure 4

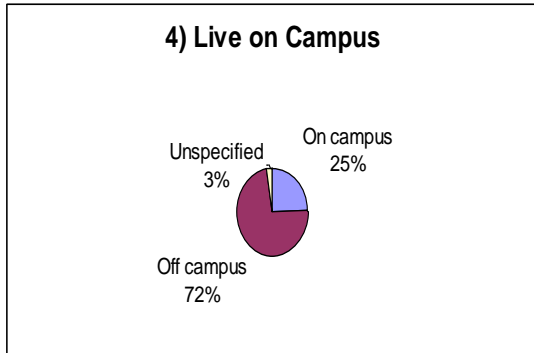


Figure 5

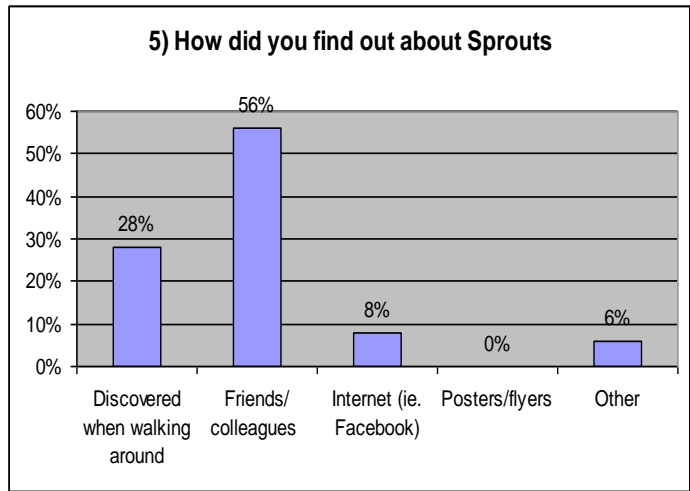


Figure 6

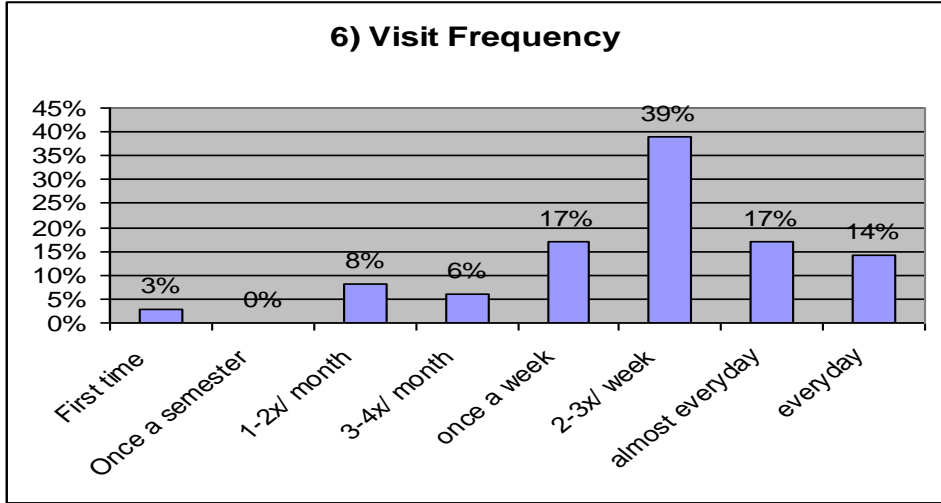


Figure 7

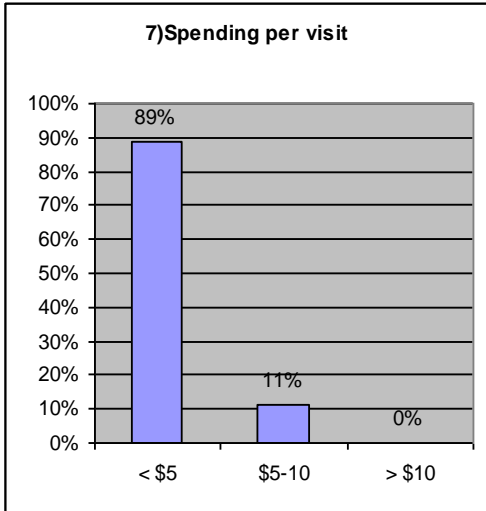


Figure 8

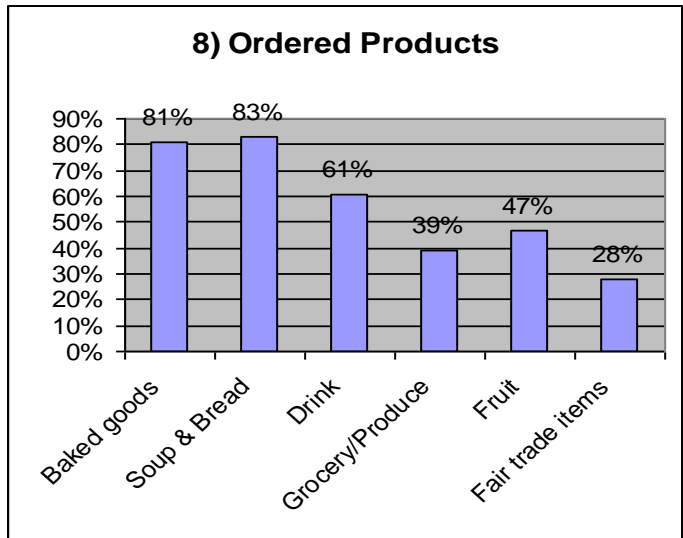


Figure 9

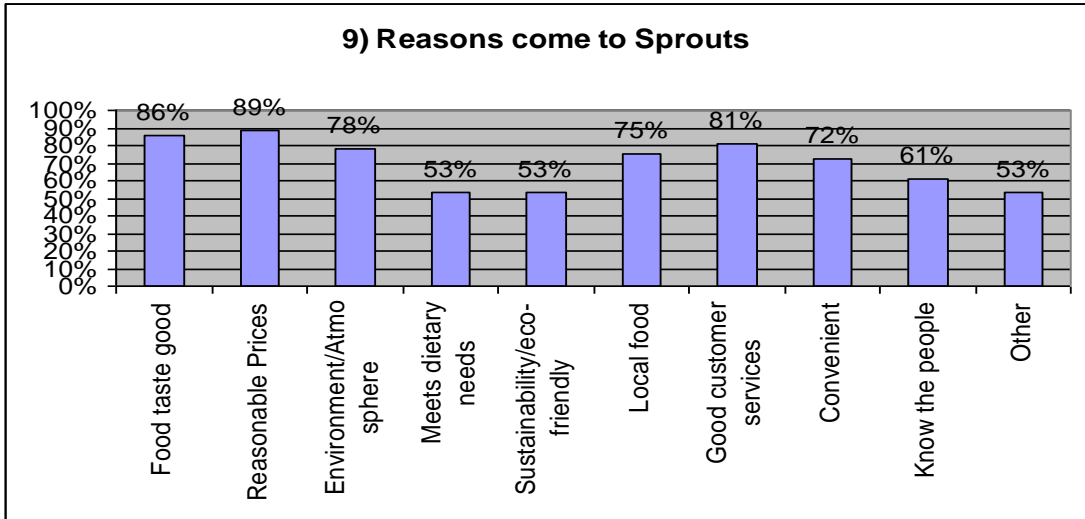


Figure 10

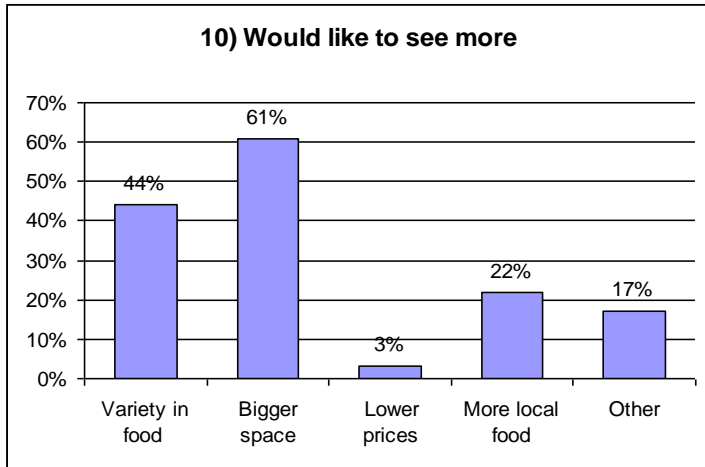


Figure 11

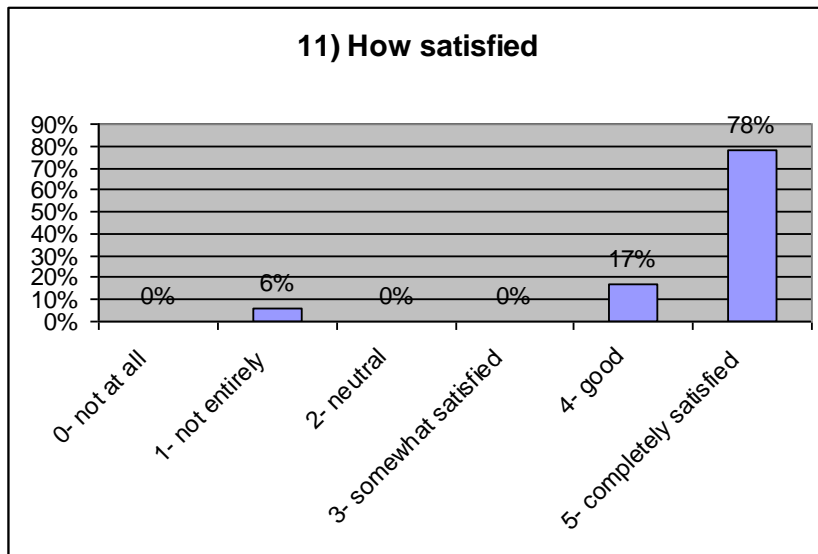


Figure 12

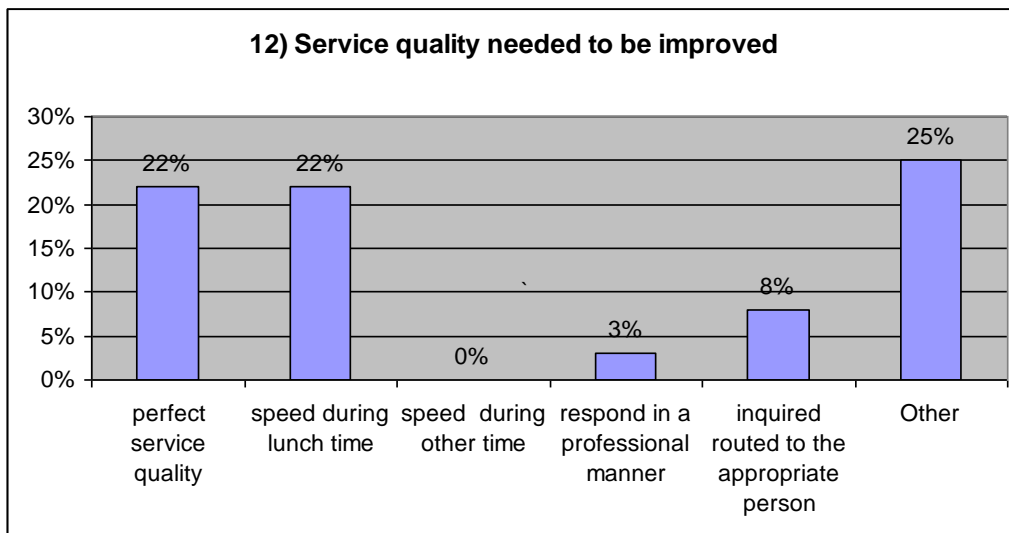


Figure 13

