

The Jazziness of Local Food Practice Work: Organization Level Ingenuity and the Entrepreneurial Formation and Evolution of Local Food Systems

ABSTRACT. Local food systems (LFSs) are complex and diverse social structures. The processes that influence the formation and evolution of LFSs are obscure, relatively uncoordinated, and somewhat mysterious. The current study develops a stronger understanding of such processes through a qualitative exploration of the influence of routine practice work at the organization level on the entrepreneurial development of two distinct LFSs in the Southwest region of the United States (U.S.): Southeastern Arizona (SA) Albuquerque/Santa Fe (ASF) LFSs. Data were gathered between August 2014 and September 2017 through semi-structured interviews with and direct observations of 53 local food practitioners operating in one of the two LFSs. Theoretical principles of institutional entrepreneurship, embedded agency, and practice work guided the study. The findings reveal three forms of ingenuity (technological, organizational, policy) that regularly emerge through the day-to-day organization level work of local food practitioners. The system-level influence of these ingenuities, whether intentional or not, are argued to be indicators of the embedded agency of the practitioners and their capacities to serve as institutional entrepreneurs. Implications for both practice and future research are discussed.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, there has been an intensifying focus on the re-localization of communities and economies. This movement toward re-localization is partially in response to the economic, ecological, and social injustices of neo-liberal economic policies and the global concentration of capital (Harris 2009; Hines 2013; Ingram and Rao 2004). Re-localization has also been attributed to entrepreneurial responses to consumer demand for more intimate and ethical connections to the products and services that are consumed (Gonzalez and Waley 2013; Winfree and Watson 2017). These and other variations in the ideologies, values, and strategies that motivate re-localization bring needed diversity and vibrancy to local systems. Yet, the organization and system level work required to facilitate the formation and evolution of local systems remains mostly overlooked (Lockie 2009; Mars and Schau 2017a; Massey 2005).

Social movements are composed of multiple organizations that sometimes cooperate, other times compete, and still other times remain disconnected all together (Diani and McAdam 2003; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Soule and King 2008; Zald and McCarthy 1980). Such inter-organization complexity also characterizes local systems (McCann 2002). Surprisingly, studies that seek to understand the organization and system level processes that help shape and sustain the complex and multifarious composition of local systems are scant (Mars and Schau 2017a). Here, we help address this paucity of research through an exploration of how the routine tasks and activities performed by organization level practitioners influence the form and function of what is arguably the most pervasive type of local systems: local food systems (LFSs) (Kurland and McCaffrey 2016). Our intent here is to bring greater attention and understanding to the influence of the everyday work of individuals and organizations on the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of LFSs, which we contend has been mostly overlooked by scholars. Accordingly,

we ask, “In what ways does organization level work contribute to the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of complex and diverse LFSs?” Figure 1 provides a key of the acronyms used in the order each appears in the paper.

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LFSs are representative of a robust and diverse movement to develop and expand the impact of alternative production and consumption models to the corporatization and globalization of agriculture (Allen 2010; Guthman 2008a, 2008b; Hinrichs 2003). The diverse and vibrant fabric of LFSs is well documented (Connell, Smithers, and Joseph 2008). Local food practitioners are known to be motivated by a range of community, financial, political, socio-cultural, and spiritual agendas, beliefs, and values (Mars and Schau 2017a; Lyson 2014; Tregear 2011). The organizational forms and strategic initiatives that shape the structure and impact of LFSs also vary widely to include community gardens (Macias 2008; Turner 2011), community-supported agriculture (CSA) (Hayden and Buck 2012; Uribe, Winham, and Wharton 2012), farmers’ markets (Beckie, Kennedy, and Wittman 2012; Wittman, Beckie, and Hergesheimer 2012), and farm-to-institution initiatives (Bagdonis, Hinrichs, and Schafft 2009; Heiss, et al. 2015). Furthermore, the ways in which LFSs emerge and evolve vary from one locale or region to another adding greater complexity and heterogeneity to the broader local food movement (Hinrichs 2003).

LFSs are particularly ambiguous and fluid social spaces that are void of formalized geographic, economic, and political borders (Feagan 2007; Hinrichs 2003; Tregear 2011; Trivette 2015; Wittman, et al. 2012). Moreover, LFSs typically lack formal governance models that determine and oversee the credibility of particular activities and initiatives (Higgins, Dibden, and Cocklin 2008; Mount 2012; Thorsoe and Kjeldsen 2016). The ambiguousness, informality,

and multifariousness of LFSs threaten to isolate local food practitioners and the organizations in which they work from other actors and organizations within the same system regardless of the compatibility and/or contestation of mission and strategy (Mars and Schau 2017a). Yet, there is a certain jazziness, or skilled improvisation, to local food work that seems to naturally meld distinctive objectives, logics, and practices into rhythmic patterns. Here, we aim to develop a stronger understanding of such melding and illustrate how the routine, but often ingenious work performed by local food practitioners at the organization level converges to support system level institutional entrepreneurship.

The fluidity and diversity of work performed by local food practitioners adds further complexity, and perhaps even mystery, to the development and functionality of LFSs. This observation is not a phenomenon that is unique to LFSs. Rather, it is representative of a longer quest by social scientists, including Adam Smith, to confront and overcome the abstruseness of “the invisible forces of human systems that held [hold] a society together and enabled [enable] it to grow and prosper” (Wight 2015, p. 153). To date, however, local food studies rarely extend beyond single organizations and/or systems and thereby fail to adequately capture consistencies and variations in the processes that enable the formation and evolution of such systems (Mars and Schau 2017a). Additionally, the grand narrative on local food is empirically driven by high profile cases, initiatives, and trends that are notably innovative and/or provocative (e.g., Feagan and Henderson 2009; Hinrichs and Lyson 2007). Consequently, the nature and aggregate influence of the more routine activities and tasks that are regularly performed within the organizations that compose LFSs remain largely overlooked. We address this paucity of research through an exploration of the routine organization level activities and tasks that shape the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of two distinct, but similar LFSs located in the

Southwest region of the United States (U.S.): Southeastern Arizona (SA) LFS and Albuquerque/Santa Fe (ASF) LFSs.

Conceptual Framework

We frame this study using constructs pulled from three closely related theories within the neo-institutional tradition: institutional entrepreneurship (Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence 2004), embedded agency (Zietsma and Lawrence 2010), and practice work (Whittington 2006).

Institutional entrepreneurship is a categorical type of what neo-institutionalists refer to as ‘institutional work’ (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006, Lawrence, Suddaby, and Leca 2009).

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) define institutional work as “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions” (p. 215).

Institutional work counters the traditional view that field-level change occurs primarily through exogenous shocks (Fligstein 1991). Instead, research on institutional work illustrates the ‘embedded agency’ that practitioners have to create, maintain, and disrupt systems and fields through their routine organization level work (Zietsma and Lawrence 2010). Simply stated, embedded agency is the capacity of practitioners to affect the conditions of those institutions that otherwise constrain their thoughts and actions. This agentic perspective is consistent with the structurationist view that the actions of individuals situated at the organization level is both influenced by and influential over the systems and fields in which they are positioned (Giddens 1984).

Institutional entrepreneurship involves the tacit practices and explicit strategies of practitioners at the organization level that actuate the mobilization of resources (i.e., financial, human, political, social), arrangement and modification of belief systems, and establishment of shared meanings and practices across emergent systems and fields (Fligstein 2001; Fligstein and

McAdam 2012; Greenwood and Suddaby 2006; Maguire, et al. 2004). While institutional entrepreneurship can be coordinated, it can also occur more naturally through the improvised, unplanned confluence of the activities and strategies pursued within and between the organizations that make up emergent and evolving systems and fields (Hwang and Powell 2005). The diversity of work performed by institutional entrepreneurs is largely shaped by localized conditions and contexts that vary from one organization and system to the next (Lawrence and Phillips 2004). Presently, research on the performance of institutional entrepreneurship within and between LFSs is strikingly sparse (Mars and Schau 2017a).

The agency of practitioners to influence the system- and field-based environments in which their organizations exist and operate (Giddens 1984) is at the theoretical core of institutional entrepreneurship (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006). Practitioners engage their embedded agency by confirming existing or promoting new practices and values through their everyday organization level work (Maguire, et al. 2004). In doing so, they are able to establish, whether purposefully or not, influence over the legitimization and diffusion of practices throughout the formation and evolution of systems and fields. Theories that espouse the virtues of agency in the institutional context are sometimes criticized for emphasizing the intentional and neglecting the unintentional consequences of human action (Garud, Hardy, and Macguire 2007). However, theoretical advancements that illuminate the potential for unintended system- and field-level influence through routine practices push the notion of embedded agency beyond the narrow confines of heroic intentionality (Zietsma and Lawrence 2010). Instead, the performance of routine organizational level practices is now seen as a subtle catalyst to the system- and-field-level legitimization of activities, strategies, and values. Accordingly, practitioners are situated within their organizations to act as institutional entrepreneurs (Gurad, et

al. 2007). To date, the expression of embedded agency by local food practitioners during their routine practices and the associated implications on LFS development has not captured the theoretical attention of local food scholars. Such attention is especially warranted considering the facilitation and negotiation of legitimacy through the routine work of practitioners is likely more pronounced in LFSs than in other more formally established and governed systems and fields (Jarzabkowski 2005).

Lastly, the routine activities and tasks that institutional entrepreneurs perform at the organization level help negotiate and resolve the conflicts and tensions that come with the ambiguities, inconsistencies, and uncertainties that inherently occur across complex and pluralistic systems and fields (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006; Greenwood, et al. 2011; Kraatz and Block 2008; Zietsma and Lawrence 2004; Whittington 2006). Such ‘practice work’ is an expression of the embedded agency of practitioners during the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of shared systems and fields (Garud, et al. 2007). It is important to note that institutional entrepreneurs most often engage in practice work that is more routine and incremental than extraordinary and radical (Delbridge and Edwards 2008; Smets and Jarzabkowski 2013). Over time, this routine work shapes and reproduces the understanding and acceptance of what are and what are not legitimate activities and strategies at the organization, system, and field levels (Smets, Morris, and Greenwood 2012; Van Wijk, et al. 2013). Here, we identify the practice work that is regularly performed at the organization level of two distinct LFSs and explore how such routine, yet often ingenious work becomes an expression of entrepreneurial agency at the system level. We generate new insights on what we argue are otherwise overlooked processes that help shape the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of LFSs.

Methodology

Study Design and Sites

We used a qualitative, multiple case study design to explore how the practice work of various local food practitioners at the organization level contributes to the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of LFSs. Consistent with the Yin's (2003) case selection strategy, we selected the SA and ASF LFSs as the two cases in which to bound the exploration. These LFSs were selected based on having similar demographic, economic, geographic, and socio-cultural features. The focus on two LFSs with analogous features allowed us to identify themes associated with institutional entrepreneurship, embedded agency, and practice work that transcend beyond a single system (Baxter and Jack 2008). We are careful to note that our primary intent is not to make comparisons between and illuminate contradictions in the processes that spur entrepreneurial development within each LFS. Instead, the inclusion of two cases enhances the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings (Riege 2003).

LFSs are not confined to formal geographical boundaries (Feagan 2007) and as such the make-up of both the SA and ASF LFSs can be discerned in multiple ways. We recognize the SA LFS as consisting of the neighboring counties of Cochise, Pima, and Santa Cruz. Cochise and Santa Cruz Counties are best described as being rural with an estimated combined population of 171,755 residents spread across a total of 7,457-square miles (U.S. Census, 2016). Pima County is mostly urban with an estimated population of 1,016, 206 residents living within a 9,189-square mile space. Nearly 97% of this population resides within the Tucson metropolitan complex. The demographic and geographic mix that characterizes the SA region is consistent with the established understanding that LFSs are diverse systems and reliant on short supply chains that traverse rural and urban settings (Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000).

Small-scale farming is a prevalent component of the agricultural sectors within the three SA counties. For example, in 2012 approximately 57% of the 2,184 farms that were in operation across these counties ran on less than 50 acres (Agcensus 2012a). Additionally, 263 of the farms operating in the three counties had sales of \$100,000 or more in 2012, while 1,921 had sales of less than \$100,000. Pima County sustains the bulk of the market activity that occurs in the SA LFS, which includes at least 22 farmers' markets and four community-supported agriculture (CSA) operations (Mars and Schau 2017a). The organizational texture of the SA LFS also includes, but is not limited to you-pick farms and roadside stands, a range of community-based organizations (e.g., highly acclaimed seed bank, multiple food banks), and a popular local food magazine. Additionally, Tucson is the only city in the U.S. that has been designated as a City of Gastronomy by the United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (UNESCO 2016).

We identified the ASF LFS as being composed of the following five neighboring counties: Bernalillo, Sandoval, Santa Fe, Torrance, and Valencia. The combined population of these counties is estimated to be 1,055,952, with approximately 675,000 people living in Bernalillo County and, more specifically, the Albuquerque metropolitan complex (Mid-Region Council of Governments of New Mexico 2017a). The collective economic underpinnings of the region include an urban economy based mostly in the City of Albuquerque, the art, cultural, and tourism economy that is primarily anchored by the City of Santa Fe, and a surrounding agriculturally-based rural economy (Mid-Region Council of Governments of New Mexico 2017b). Local agriculture and food has been identified as a regional government priority with emphasis being directed at community wellness and economic development (Mid-Region Council of Governments of New Mexico 2017c). Like the SA region, the demographic and

geographic make-up of the ASF region has fostered a diverse LFS that is reliant on short supply chains that span its rural and urban communities and economies (Marsden, et al. 2000).

Small-scale farming and ranching are also prominent in the agricultural economy that spans the five counties of the ASF LFS. For instance, in 2012 67% of the 4,946 farms in operation across the five counties operated on less than 50 acres (Agcensus 2012b). Moreover, 145 of the farms within the region had sales of \$100,000 or more in 2012, while 4,801 had sales of less than \$100,000. The ASF LFS includes approximately 50 farmer's markets (New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association 2017a) and no less than 12 CSAs (New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association 2017b). The bulk of these farmers' markets and CSAs operate in or around the Cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Similar to its SA counterpart, the ASF LFS sustains smaller enterprises such as roadside stands and you-pick farms and is supported by community-based organizations (e.g., farm-to-table initiatives), a system-wide food co-operative (co-op) that provides retail and distribution services, and a widely read local food magazine.

Sampling

We purposefully selected the study participants using theoretical, maximum variation, and chain sampling strategies. Theoretical sampling (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007) guided our recruitment of study participants who through their organization level practice work were likely to act as institutional entrepreneurs within their respective LFS. Maximum variation sampling techniques (Patton 2002) were used to generate a sample that includes multiple types of local food practitioners across the rural and urban areas of each LFS. These actor-types are distinguished according to the following four categories: producers (e.g., farmers), purveyors (e.g., farmers' market vendors), organizers (e.g., CSA directors), and narrators (e.g., local food magazine editors) (Mars and Schua 2017b). The activities of individual practitioners sometimes

reflected multiple roles. In such cases, we categorized these multi-faceted practitioners according to the primary nature and focus of their work. The development of a heterogeneous sample that is representative of both the rural-urban mix and diverse sets of organizational-types that typically characterize LFSs enhanced the overall trustworthiness and transferability of the findings (Malterud 2001). Chain sampling was applied throughout the data collection process in order to grow the sample to the point of saturation (Fusch and Ness 2015). By using these three strategies, we generated a heterogeneous sample composed of 53 participants with 36 working within the SA LFS and 17 within the ASF LFS (see Figure 2). The higher number of SA LFS practitioners included in the sample compared to that of ASF LFS practitioners is due to the initiation of the study in SA and indicative of the point at which saturation specific to practice work was reached. Lastly, we assigned all participants with randomly selected pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.

(insert Figure 2 about here)

Data Collection

Data were collected in three ways. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the local food practitioners included in the sample (Miles and Huberman 1994). The majority of these interviews involved single participants. However, group interviews were conducted with two SA purveyors, three ASF organizers, and the two ASF narrators. The individuals within each of these small groups worked within the same organizations. A common protocol was used for all interviews. This protocol was first designed to identify the routine activities and tasks performed by the practitioners at the organization level (i.e., practice work). Second, questions were developed to reveal how, if at all, the practitioners viewed the contributions of their practice work to the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of their respective LFSs (i.e.,

embedded agency, institutional entrepreneurship). The length of the interviews ranged from 33 minutes to just under three hours. When possible, the interviews were conducted at the locations in which the participants perform much of their organization level work. Such ‘on-site’ interviews provided us with greater context and more intimate understandings of the practitioners’ practice work.

We also conducted over 110 hours of direct observations between both LFSs. These observations took place at a total of seven farmers markets, two CSAs, a community-supported bakery (CSB), and six small-scale farms. One of us also spent nearly twenty hours with the editor of an ASF local food magazine visiting numerous production and market sites located across the LFS. In doing so, we were able to observe without manipulation many of the participants within the settings in which they typically perform their practice work (Yin 2003). The sites in which the observations occurred were diverse in terms of setting (e.g., rural v. urban) and organizational-type (e.g., CSA, CSB, farms, farmers’ markets). We recorded the observations through handwritten, extensively detailed field notes. In general, the observations provided us with a more comprehensive, contextually rich, and nuanced understanding of the organization level practice work that contributed to the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of both LFSs (Maxwell 2013).

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data using a ‘hand coding’ strategy in order to gain an intimate understanding of the agendas, beliefs, perspectives, and values described by the participants during the interviews and expressed throughout the observations (Ryan 2009). Deductively, we developed a structured coding framework (Miles and Huberman 1994) using the theoretical constructs of institutional entrepreneurship (Maguire, et al. 2004); embedded agency (Garud et al. 2007), and

practice work (Whittington 2006; Zietsma and Lawrence 2010). This analytical strategy enabled us to identify patterns and themes relevant to how the practice work performed by local food practitioners at the organization level enhanced their capacities to act as institutional entrepreneurs at the system level.

We analyzed the data over the course of multiple rounds of analysis with insights being recorded, organized, and tracked using a qualitative memo writing technique (Corbin and Strauss 2015). We first identified inter-code relationships through a round of axial coding (Glaser and Strauss 1967) that involved all of the data gathered through the interviews and observations. Second, we narrowed and refined these initial inter-code relationships into trustworthy patterns and themes through three rounds of both idiographic and nomethic analysis (Gelo, Braakman, and Benetka 2008). These two levels of analysis were conducted specific to the practitioners within and across each LFS, as well as between each LFS. Finally, we inductively analyzed the data using an open coding strategy with the intent of uncovering any patterns or themes relevant to the guiding research question, but not otherwise revealed through deductive analysis (Corbin and Strauss 2015).

Limitations

The findings we generated are specific to the SA and ASF LFSs. However, the inclusion of two LFSs in a single study enhances the likelihood that the insights we developed are relevant, if not applicable, to other LFSs not included in the study. We worked to further enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis and overall transferability of the study through data and researcher triangulation, member checking, and the maintenance of an audit trail (Creswell 2007; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Malterud 2001). Lastly, we continued to grow the sample until saturation was met (Fusch and Ness 2015). Saturation was recognized specific to the

organization level practice work that was performed by the practitioners regardless of the LFS in which they operate. Despite such steps, we are unable to state with certainty that our findings are representative of all the forms and ways in which practice work occurs within either of the two LFSs.

Findings

An overall theme surfacing from the data is the consistent focus practitioners place on day-to-day, organization level operations. By necessity, this primary focus involves the practitioners being alert and responsive to system level developments and trends, and vice versa remaining attentive to how their own work impacts the system. The following comment shared by Sullivan, a SA greenhouse grower, captured this common (and unsurprising) finding:

The best thing I can do for my community is make sure my business stays open and my produce continues to be as available to as many people as possible. Of course, I need to know what is going on around me and be willing to help [the system] when and how I can. But, my focus needs to be here [greenhouse].

While common across the sample, the nature and intensity of organization level focus varies from one practitioner to the next based on factors such as actor-type (producer, purveyor, organizer, narrator), experience (diversity of activities, time active in local food sector), and mission.

A second more nuanced, yet powerful theme that emerges from the data is the ingeniousness of the practitioners' practice work. Ingenuity is considered to be ideas (novel or otherwise) that are created or called on with the intent of solving economic, political, social, and/or technological problems (Homer-Dixon 2000; Lampel, Honig, and Drori 2014). The practitioners indicate the ingenuity that is associated with their practice work occurs mostly at the organization level with little inter-organizational coordination, but also without purposeful

isolation or protective strategies. Practitioner ingenuity is characterized according to three forms: technological, organizational, and policy.

Technological Ingenuity

The practitioners across both LFS's commonly express the need for ingenuity as a feature of their practice work. In some cases, ingenuity is needed to solve the technological challenges that otherwise hamper production and distribution. Charlie, a SA organic farmer who supplies a CSA and a number of restaurants, describes the need to constantly adapt his growing practices to the unique geographic features and weather conditions of SA. He states,

I have to constantly experiment in order to grow food here in a sustainable way. I do it, though. Sometimes it is like drinking a milkshake through a straw. Slow and thick! But, I do it. For example, I have figured out through never ending experimentation and unexpected problems a number of all natural pest control strategies that work for my crops.

Similarly, Lance, an organic farmer in the ASF LFS, creates and refines hoop house technologies in response to both the challenges and opportunities he frequently encounters as he works to scale his local farm operation. He explains, "I learn and innovate as I grow. Literally. Creating my own farm-grown solutions is as normal as any other part of my work." The technological experimentation and problem solving Charlie and Lance describe are a consistent feature of the practice work performed at the organization level by the producers and purveyors within both LFSs.

A common problem that confronts producers and purveyors within both LFSs is the limited availability of processing facilities. Such scarcities are mostly the result of rigid food safety regulations coupled with the high cost of building licensed facilities. No practitioners within either LFS had designed and implemented viable solutions to this dilemma at the time when data were collected. However, practitioners in both systems were beginning to formulate

ideas for how to better control and scale their production capacities in ways that are safe, economically viable, and in most cases ecologically conscious. Philip, a self-described CSB in the SA LFS, applied for multiple small business development grants that if awarded will allow him to build a small grist mill. He states,

If I can control my own mill, I can begin to grind wheat that is grown right here in our community. Otherwise, pre-ground Sonoran wheat, our [SA] heritage grain, is just too expensive to buy in bulk. Also, there is no community mill in Tucson. Can you believe that?

Similarly, Caleb and Jacob, brothers who raise and harvest up to a dozen hogs per year on their family farm outside of Albuquerque, were beginning to explore the possibilities for developing their own licensed slaughtering facility. Their goal is to develop a lower cost option for themselves and potentially other local small-scale farmers who commercially raise and sell livestock. Caleb describes,

The only slaughter facility in the area that we can use is operated by the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] and is more than an hour drive from here [their farm]. It really cuts into our profits and makes it hard to do much more than we are right now, which is not enough in the long run. I am beginning to think about how to build our own facility on-site in an affordable way. The safety requirements make it really expensive, but we have to do something different soon or later.

Similar to Caleb's vision for an on-site slaughterhouse that is accessible to other local farmers, Philip, the SA baker, intends to make his mill accessible to other local bakers and restaurateurs. He explains, "I support my community through my bakery. I want my future mill to help local farmers sell more of their products here and local food entrepreneurs be more local with the ingredients they use!" These two examples of technological ingenuity illustrate how organization level practice work that is pursued in response to system-wide conditions (e.g., processing scarcity) has the potential for impact that extends beyond single organizations.

Organizational Ingenuity

The practice work performed by the practitioners also involves the creation and implementation of ingenious responses to the various economic and structural challenges and opportunities that are regularly confronted at the organization level (see Lampel, Honig, and Drori 2014). The organizational ingenuity described by the practitioners span four specific contexts: resource acquisition and product distribution, accessibility, workforce and consumer development, and community marketing.

Resource Acquisition and Product Distribution. First, the limited access to processing facilities that require technological ingenuity also spawns organizational ingenuity. Catherine, a SA producer of fresh ceviche and salsas, indicates the lack of access to a commercial kitchen had limited her ability to increase the productivity and sales of her local food business. She reveals,

All the [commercially licensed] kitchens in the area [SA LFS] are tapped out. I have finally managed to rent kitchen space for a pretty low price from a restaurant owner when his place is closed. It is not the best because the hours are late and inconvenient, but at least I am now able to keep up with my customers. For now anyway!

The organizational ingenuity that Catherine describes illustrates how practice work at the organization level leads to new networks and alliances that eventually contribute to the formation and evolutions of LFSs.

Organizers in both LFSs regularly design new distribution strategies with the intent of scaling the reach and impact of their work. For example, CSA directors in both LFSs describe a constant need for new ways to diversify the types and amounts of products they were able to offer their members. According to both directors, ongoing diversification is necessary both as a means of appealing to existing and prospective members and enhancing control over the availability and robustness of weekly packages. Pierre, an ASF CSA director, indicates,

We [CSA] are always trying new ways to expand the farmers we source from and the value-add products we offer to our members. Whether it is finding new ways to run my

pick-up and delivery routes to how to make the CSA work better money-wise and logistics-wise for our suppliers, we are always busy trying new ways to be better.

Likewise, Rosco, the director of a SA CSA, states,

I quickly learned members need to know how to cook the many different types of produce that they get in our [CSA] boxes that they have seen or cooked with before. If they can't cook what we provide, they'll leave us. So, I have had to respond. I have developed partnerships with chefs and bakers who will provide cooking demonstrations for our members. This has become a neat and kind of unique part of our model.

Thus, organizational ingenuity is a primary aspect of the daily work the CSA directors perform in order to bring versatility and durability to their local food operations and consequently their LFSs.

Accessibility. The farmers' market managers also underscore the importance of organizational ingenuity to their practice work. Specifically, the managers must consistently experiment with new ideas on how to make their markets more economically and geographically accessible to current and prospective customers, as well as financially viable to purveyors.

Karen, a manager of the farmers' market operated by the largest food bank in SA, indicates she is "constantly coming up with and trying new ways of reaching people in the [lower income] communities we serve. We are always trying new locations, days, and times. We have to be flexible and willing to learn from our mistakes." Similarly, a primary focus of Laura, the director of one of the largest farmers' market in the ASF LFS, emphasizes the importance of continually refining strategies for balancing market demands with social mission. She reveals,

we [market leadership team] spend a lot of our time thinking of how to meet the high demands of our higher income customers while also meeting our mission and commitment to help the nearly 15% of individuals and families living within our community that are considered to be food insecure.

Laura points to her and her leadership team's efforts to establish the market as a participant in the Double Up New Mexico Food Bucks (2017) program as an example of the practice work that

is routinely pursued in response to ongoing economic and social opportunities and pressures. This statewide program doubles the amount of locally sourced fruits and vegetables low income consumers can purchase using their Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards. In general, such organizational ingenuity is a common feature of the practice work the practitioners carry out in order to enhance the functionality, viability, and impact of their enterprises and, fortuitously, their LFSs.

Workforce and Consumer Development. Organizational ingenuity is also evident in the practice work practitioners perform in order to meet the workforce demands that otherwise constrain the function and growth of their enterprises. Devon, a manager at a ASF food co-op, faces constant pressure to design and deliver workshops to local farmers and ranchers wanting to distribute their harvests through the co-op. He describes,

I am always working on new ways to train our local suppliers [farmers and ranchers] on topics such as pricing, scale, and so on. If they can't run their farms and ranches in ways that keep them operational, we [co-op] have to deal with the effects of product scarcity.

Similarly, Charlie, the previous mentioned SA organic farmers, explains,

I have to run a residential internship program on my farm to not only help others start their own [organic] farms, but to also try to find talented people to help me with my own. Plus, they [trainees] go on to do their thing with local food in our community, which is awesome!

Devon and Charlie provide such training with the primary intent of supporting the success of their own organizations. However, the organizational ingenuity these practitioners apply to their practice work also inherently benefits their LFSs by increasing the availability of entrepreneurial and technical talent.

Producers, purveyors, and organizers within both LFSs also include consumer education as a standard component of their practice work. Sylvia, a SA goat farmer, described her effort to

educate consumers about the espoused health benefits of goat milk products over other dairy alternatives when stating:

People need to know how what they buy effects their health. The more I teach them the more they buy my products and the many other great things you can get for yourself here [farmers' market]. We [producers, purveyors, and market organizers] make a living and they [consumers] live well. Yay!

Similarly, Virginia, a manager of a large SA farmers' market, offers, "People are able to buy what they want here, and learn what they need from local agriculture and what their community needs from local agriculture. Customer knowledge is our best marketing strategy!" The educational engagement with consumers that Sylvia and Virginia describe illustrates how the organization level practice work of producers, purveyors, and organizers builds sales for their own operations and promotes broader consumer participation in their LFSs.

Community Marketing. In some cases, the organizational ingenuity that stems from organization level practice work innately influences the public narrative and overall recognition and image of each LFS. In particular, the primary focus of the narrators' practice work is on sharing stories about the many ways in which local farmers, chefs, entrepreneurs, advocates, and other community leaders contribute to the form and function of each system. Melanie, the editor of a ASF local food magazine, continually seeks new storylines during her many daily and weekly interactions with practitioners and stakeholders. She describes the purpose of her work as, "bringing local food and all the work and effort that goes into it to life for the readers and the community." Leigh, the editor of a SA local food magazine, expresses a similar perspective on the intent and value of her work and the magazine. She offers, "the stories we run either celebrate the accomplishments of our [local food] entrepreneurs and leaders, reveal current challenges, or help create future opportunities." These examples further depict how routine

practice work at the organization level enhances the embedded agency of practitioners to influence the entrepreneurial development of the systems in which they operate.

Of course, organizational ingenuity can, in certain instances, arise from practice work that is purposefully designed to have system level impact. This is especially true of organizations with the principal mission of fostering system level developments and advancement. Consider, for example, the practice work that takes place within a non-profit marketing association with the aims of strengthening the ASF LFS value chain and limiting New Mexican grown food exports. Patricia, a director of this association, indicates the association regularly delivers professional development trainings to producers, purveyors, and other organizers, as well as to community wellness workers and policy makers. She states,

We are constantly developing new ways to spread knowledge across the value chain. Without local customers, farmers will ship their foods elsewhere or not survive at all. Without affordable and convenient product access, customers can't or won't participate [in local food consumption].

Other organizers in both LFSs with system-oriented missions (e.g., community farm manager, farm-to-table initiative director) also described engaging in organization level practice work with the specific purpose of creating and scaling system level impact.

Policy Ingenuity

The ingenuity that characterizes the practice work within both LFSs is also sometimes policy-oriented. In particular, those practitioners who primarily work to influence the policies that shape the formation and evolution of their LFSs routinely call on ingenuity. Barbara, the director of an ASF farm-to-table initiative, has spent nearly 20-years developing novel responses to constant shifts in the local, state, and national policy environments that influence LFS development. Throughout this time, she has remained especially focused on creating unique partnerships between businesses, community organizations, and government agencies that allow for collective

advocacy of policy reforms that favor local agriculture and food systems. Barbara describes the routine nature of her policy work as follows:

I have been focused on building out local food and farming systems for a long time now. I see my contribution as the one who sets up networks and alliances. I see my policy development work as the one always looking to tie the knot between those [local farmers and food entrepreneurs] who are doing the on the ground work.

The system-wide networks, synergies, and policy reforms that have been fostered through Barbara's practice work further reveal how the routine work of some at the organization level feeds directly into the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of the LFSs.

Policy ingenuity is also a common aspect of the administrative duties performed by the organizers. In particular, all of the farmers' market organizers continually engage in practice work involving the design and refinement of internal policies that control purveyor participation and the nature and scope of the products being sold. However, the perspectives and degrees of rigidity that influence this policy work vary from one market to the next. For example, Sally, the director of a mid-sized SA farmers' market, explains,

I have to set things [purveyor eligibility guidelines] up so that farmers and entrepreneurs closest to here [market location] have priority, nobody gets in with things not local, and most of what is sold here is as local as it can get. I have to make these rules as clear and consistent as I can.

She went on to clarify that her goals are to have approximately 75% of the products sold at her market be food and to limit as much as possible the competition between purveyors who sell similar types of goods. Sally states,

My sellers and customers will stop coming if I do not make it [market] right for people living and working here in our backyard! I have to be strong, but also be willing to adjust the rules to match changes in the needs of my sellers and the wants of my customers. I am always adjusting the rules to be fair and relevant, but not at the expense of our mission.

Clyde, the founder of another SA farmers' market, takes a notably more liberal approach to the development and recalibration of the policies that guide purveyor participation in his market. He says,

The survival of my business is dependent on customer traffic. Yes, local food is the primary feature, but I need [product] variety to bring people here. So, we do have more artisans and crafts people than many other markets. We also let in some people with food products that are made or bought outside of Arizona. I create soft guidelines that can be easily adjusted as I go along. I rely on flexibility to make us all successful.

The different perspectives shared by Sally and Clyde specific to purveyor participation in their markets point to the variations that sometimes exist between otherwise similar organization level policy ingenuities. The diversity in the design and execution of organization level policies such as those just described allow for inter-organizational diversity in the interpretation and expression of legitimate activities across both LFSs. In other words, organization level policy variations influence how particular LFSs form and evolve in the relative absence of formal governance models.

Lastly, we did not identify any formal mechanisms or strategies within either LFS that had the explicit purpose of promoting the cross-organizational diffusion of the various ingenuities that were described by the practitioners. On one hand, a number of the ingenuities described by the participants inherently foster synergy and, in some cases, collaboration and innovation between the organizations that share and shape each LFS. Recall, for example, Caleb's vision for a slaughterhouse that could be shared across the ASF LFS, Sally's effort to control competition for the purveyors that sell at her SA farmers' market, and Barbara's advocacy for system-wide policy reforms across the ASF LFS. On the other hand, however, the ingeniousness of local food practitioners that underpinned their organization level practice work converged to influence the development of LFSs without system-level coordination or

orchestration. Metaphorically speaking, the formation and evolution of the two LFSs through the organizational level practice work and ingenuities that we have featured here has occurred more like impromptu jazz jams than well-structured symphonies.

Discussion

Research on LFS development typically focuses on a single organization, specific initiative, or growing trend within a given system. Consequently, relatively few studies exist that explore in the aggregate the diverse types of work that occur at the organization level during the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of LFSs (e.g., Mars and Schau 2017a). Even more scant is research that considers such work across multiple LFSs (e.g., Beckie, et al. 2012, Whittman, et al. 2012). Here, we have contributed to this more limited body of scholarship by illustrating the ingenious nature of the practice work performed by local food practitioners within a variety of organizations across two distinct, yet similar LFSs. We generated insights on how such routine practices equip local food practitioners with the embedded agency to influence, whether purposefully or not, the entrepreneurial formation and evolution (i.e., institutional entrepreneurship) of their LFSs.

With the exception of system-oriented organizers such as Barbara and Patricia, local food practitioners included in this study performed routine activities and tasks with the primary intent of developing and sustaining their own organizations. This organization level work was diverse in terms of form and function and motivated by a multitude of agendas and values. Consequently, a notable degree of variation in the practice work has fed into the entrepreneurial development of each LFS. Consistent with the typically unplanned nature of institutional entrepreneurship (Hwang and Powell 2005), this assorted work permeates up to the system level

in uncoordinated ways, which in turn contributes to the fluid and heterogeneous nature of each LFS (see Figure 3).

(insert Figure 3 about here)

LFSs operate mostly without formal governance or oversight (Higgins, et al. 2008; Mount 2012; Thorsoe and Kjeldsen 2016). Also, little is known about the inter-organizational processes that enable the emergence and persistence of LFSs (Mars and Schau 2017a). We have revealed examples of the ways in which organization level practice work influences the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of LFSs. Such influence is an indication of the individual capacity of local food practitioners to serve as institutional entrepreneurs at the system level via their routine practice work performed at the organization level. Accordingly, the practice work and ingenuities that are featured here illuminate the embedded agency of local food practitioners and their situated position to act as institutional entrepreneurs within their LFSs. In short, what is routine at the organization level becomes an expression of entrepreneurial agency at the system level.

Ingenuity and practice work do not inherently involve entrepreneurial activity or evoke innovation. Indeed, the ingenuity that characterizes the organization level practice work of those local food practitioners who participated in our study is neither remarkably entrepreneurial or innovative. Yet, the findings reveal numerous examples of how such routine organization level work incrementally contributes to the diversity, resiliency, and vibrancy to each LFS. In this regard, the institutional entrepreneurship associated with the formation and evolution of the LFSs is at least in part linked to the routine work of local food practitioners and characterized by improvisation. The introduction of organization level ingenuity and practice work opens a new line of inquiry for better understanding the intra- and inter-organizational processes associated

with the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of LFSs (see Lounsbury and Crumley 2007). Our findings suggest organization level ingenuity within LFSs is naturally oriented toward cooperation and collaboration rather than conflict and competition. We urge further research that explores the complexities and processes that are associated, whether formally or informally, with this collaboration-competition dynamic.

The quiet ingenuity that local food practitioners apply to their daily work allows them to overcome technical, organizational, and policy challenges, persist as businesses and organizations, and continue to create impact within their communities. The simplicity of the ingenuity that occurs at the organization level makes the aggregate impact of such instances at the system level opaque; perhaps even illusive. Consequently, the grand narrative on LFS development has mostly neglected the impact of the routine in favor of celebrating cases of explicit innovation (e.g., Bagdonis et al. 2009; Hayden and Buck 2012; Heiss et al. 2015) or the overt confrontation of bureaucratic barriers and sources of systemic oppression (e.g., Allen 2010; Guthman 2008a, 2008b; Hassanein 2003; Hinrichs 2003). We do not argue that these established lines of inquiry should be abandoned. Rather, we admonish the need for deeper exploration of how together organization level practice work serves as a powerful, deceptively ingenious entrepreneurial thrust to the local food movement. The recognition of organization level practice work and the embedded agency it affords practitioners at the system level equips local food scholars with a new theoretical perspective from which to more holistically analyze the entrepreneurial dynamics of an entire system (as opposed to single cases and initiatives).

More pragmatically, the development and refinement of system level strategies that more purposefully coordinate and circulate the ingenuities that occur through organization level practice work is encouraged. Such purposeful coordination and circulation can serve as a catalyst

for the system-wide adoption and improvement of the ingenious solutions that are otherwise confined to single organizations. The concerted effort to increase the cross-organizational exchange of everyday ingenuities also has the promise of enhancing the embedded agency of practitioners and subsequently their intended influence over how challenges and opportunities are confronted and acted on at the system level. Similarly, the open exchange of ingenuities can help elevate the input of the many different practitioners that compose and sustain LFSs and thereby foster greater collective voice and equity across these highly heterogeneous systems (Lyson 2014). We believe future research in this area is particularly promising given the underlying orientation toward collaboration over competition that was consistently expressed here by the study participants.

Strategies for creating and/or enhancing the system level exchange of ingenuities do not need to be complex. For instance, organizers and narrators are well positioned to facilitate web-based forums on which producers and purveyors can easily post the challenges they encounter and share the solutions they develop. These forums should be made accessible to community leaders and policy makers as a mechanism for better communicating the conditions and dynamics that influence the formation and trajectories of LFSs. Also, narrators, such as the local food journalists we have included here, are encouraged to make stories about the everyday ingenuities of producers, purveyors, and organizers a consistent component of their publications. By doing so, the prevalent running of stories that highlight compelling cases of local food entrepreneurship and innovation can be balanced with those that showcase the less provocative, but equally important contributions that practitioners consistently make through their organization level practice work.

Lastly, the potential for generating synergy through the coordination and promotion of

practice work can also serve as an informal governance mechanism throughout the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of LFSs. The lack of formal governance over LFSs allows for notable variation in the interpretation of the legitimacy of activities that occur along system-specific value chains (Bloom and Hinrichs 2011; Higgins, et al. 2008; Mount 2012; Thorsoe and Kjeldsen 2016). This variation leaves open the risk of inconsistencies in practice, stakeholder confusion (e.g., consumers, policy makers), and the co-option of local food as a superficial marketing strategy by large-scale retailers (McCaffery and Kurland 2014). The development of exchange mechanisms is one way of establishing system-wide norms of legitimacy and mitigating the risks that come with systemic fragmentation and informalities. Ergo, the organization level ingenuity that occurs through practice work can in the aggregate also become a system level policy ingenuity.

Conclusion

In this study, we have asked, “In what ways does organization level work contribute to the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of complex and diverse LFSs?” By pursuing this question, we have illustrated three forms of ingenuity (technological, organizational, policy) that emerge from the routine practice work of local food practitioners. These forms of ingenuity have been relatively overlooked and undervalued within the grand local food narrative in favor of more extraordinary cases of entrepreneurship and innovation. While not always innovative, such routine ingenuities consistently enable local food practitioners to serve in the critical role of institutional entrepreneur throughout the formation and evolution of LFSs. Moreover, the thoroughness and complexity that occurs through the system-level convergence of routine practice work transcends, perhaps somewhat ironically, the simplicity and narrowness of any single case or initiative, however innovative or entrepreneurial.

Our findings also indicate that the organization level ingenuity born out of the practice work of local food practitioners occurs in impromptu ways with little to no formal coordination between actors and organizations. Nonetheless, we argue that the ingeniousness that underpins such organization level practice work converges to serve as a primary input to the entrepreneurial development and evolution of the two LFSs. This convergence occurs through a natural blending process much like that which happens during an impromptu jazz session with each musician (i.e., local food practitioner) working creatively to produce a sound that is unique to them (i.e., organization level ingenuity), but in rhythm with the overall tune (i.e., entrepreneurial development of the system). Future studies that are directly focused on the emergence and dissemination of local food ingenuities at the organization level are encouraged. In particular, research that examines local food ingenuity more deeply and across additional LFSs may reveal patterns of ingenuity that occur through more coordinated, cross-organizational collaboration. Indeed, we remain open to the possibility that the convergence of organization level ingenuities at the system level may in some cases be more like a jazz ensemble than an impromptu jam session with the former involving local food practitioners attentively feeding off of and contributing to each other's individual ingenuities. This synergistic dynamic may in turn work to enhance the entrepreneurial vibrancy of LFSs. Conversely, motives and strategies that drive local food practitioners to protect the ingenuities they develop from system-wide replication and adoption could also be revealed. In this case, the system level environment would likely resemble a chaotic mix of solos rather than a naturally blended tune.

Here, we chose to focus on two analogous LFSs. Future research that builds on our study should include comparisons between LFSs that are more unlike than alike. By doing so, the effects of variations in systemic conditions on the performance, ingeniousness, and synergistic

dynamics of organization level practice work and institutional entrepreneurship could be more thoroughly analyzed. Examples of the types of system level variations that warrant such attention include, but are not limited to degrees of development (e.g., nascent versus well-established LFSs), policy environments (e.g., LFSs with conservative oversight versus those with liberal oversight), and geographic climates (e.g., LFSs with short growing seasons versus those with longer growing seasons).

We close with a final note regarding the relevancy of practice work to the informal governance of LFSs. First, the theoretical notion of practice work provides a new lens through which to explore how the abstract and fluid boundaries that depict legitimacy within a particular LFS are negotiated through the activities and tasks that practitioners routinely perform within their organizations. Second, the detailed articulation of the ways in which organization level practice work occurs provides local food practitioners and leaders with new insights on how to more strategically foster and govern the entrepreneurial formation and evolution of their shared systems.

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Figure One. Acronym key

Term	Acronym
Local food systems	LFSs
Community-supported agriculture	CSA
United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization	UNESCO
Southeastern Arizona	SA
Albuquerque/Santa Fe	ASF
Southeastern Arizona Local Food System	SA LFS
Albuquerque/Santa Fe Local Food System	ASF LFS
Community-supported bakery	CSB

Figure Two. Sample composition (n = 53)

Local Food Actor-Type Categories								Rural-Urban Representation			
Producers		Vendors		Organizers		Narrators		Rural		Urban	
SA	ASF	SA	ASF	SA	ASF	SA	ASF	SA	ASF	SA	ASF
LFS	LFS	LFS	LFS	LFS	LFS	LFS	LFS	LFS	LFS	LFS	LFS
11	6	19	2	5	7	1	2	17	6	19	11

Figure 3. Practice work-organization level ingenuity-institutional entrepreneurship process

