

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION

A) Intent of the Study

The first chapter of this dissertation discussed how local food has become a third wave in challenging the dominant structures and processes of North American agri-food systems. It also outlined a variety of agri-food research investigating the social relations and developments strategies of groups within this movement. This dissertation has taken up the challenge of moving this field forward through a political economic account of local food development at a regional scale. The regional scale of empiricism and analysis provides a view of the organization and impacts of individual local food projects in relation to the demographic and cultural shifts that have enabled them, as well as the ways in which rural and urban development relationships pattern the geographies of local food.

In order to produce such a regional account of the political economy of local food, a theoretical and methodological foundation for the study was developed based on insights from related agri-food research and creative applications of structural and qualitative social research frameworks. Emphasis on structural accounts and sectoral organization of agriculture and food systems peaked in the early 1990's political economy literature, being increasingly supplanted since that time by efforts to understand how agri-food social movements and changing patterns of consumption are producing new political economic opportunities. In particular, the new emphases have been on the plural, partial, and nuanced challenges to dominant agri-food structures – an alternative research agenda to structural, singular, and heroic accounts of agri-food systems. This research is often framed in terms of emerging new value chains, the values and regulatory systems underpinning the construction of value in such supply chains, and critical commentary assessing the politics of social relations in these supply chains. As local food is one calling for alternative agri-food movements, there should be a balance between structural reductionism and more nuanced cultural and qualitative accounts of the production and reproduction of local foods.

With this background of agri-food research in mind, the questions guiding this study of regional local food political economy were chosen in order to provide plural and differentiated representations of local food development in Eastern Kansas. In particular, this research has sought to answer questions about the characteristics of local foods, what is valued in local foods as opposed to global and/or anonymous foods, and how this value is created by which participants. Furthermore, the project has also sought to describe the distribution of this value through local food networks and the influence of individual local food projects in shaping these distributions and the types of participation likely to lead to success as a result. These issues will ultimately define whether local food can be a transformative force in North American food systems, and in particular what ends and interests its insurgent practices will serve.

A triangulation of theory and methods has been critical in bridging case studies to represent region-wide local food trends in a way that addresses the above research questions. Loosely structured snowball sampling helped to identify local food participants and triangulate the dimensions of their participation. Network analysis was used to tie participants together into a common web of participation, and it was also used to find communities within this structure of relation. Conventions theory was used to interpret the values motivating participants and ordering their relationships, providing a perspective for understanding some of the forces binding together the structural communities identified through network analysis. Spatial analysis provided another perspective on the embodiment and structuring of relationships by noting how the network relationships were manifested through spatial projects, alliances, and insurgencies. Collectively, these methods and analytical frameworks provided a means for identifying local foods, for characterizing the value of these foods, and for representing difference in the distributions of participation and empowerment.

Ultimately, assessing the status and dynamics of value, the geographies of participation, and the spaces of development in the burgeoning local food movement have the potential to feed back on broader topical and theoretical issues of contemporary regional, national, and global political economy. First, as mentioned above, this study addresses both the structure of local food relations and also the plurality, partiality,

multiplicity, and differentiation of local food projects challenging and transcending this structure. It offers a perspective that balances structure and agency in agri-food relations through theoretical triangulation, helping to identify patterns but also representing these patterns as tentative and dynamic. Second, concepts such as value, power, and governance are important middle-level concepts linking dialectics between structure and agency to the landscape of social and environmental relations facilitated through the pursuit of new agri-food relations. Third, local food initiatives amount to a re-scaling of agri-food relations, connecting this landscape of relations to wider political economic developments. The aim of this chapter is to elaborate on these connected themes after a summary of lessons from network, conventions, and spatial analysis. In particular, the themes will be used to create a general statement of the political economy of local food relevant to posing further research questions and spurring local food project and policy recommendations.

B) Results and Lessons

1) Networks

The networks of local food flows revealed in this study are clustered both geographically and topologically. Powerful manufacturing and distribution conglomerates are uniformly excluded from the networks as a way of local food participants challenging dominant agri-food relations and emphasizing alternative producer and consumer interests in new agri-food relations. The clustering of local food networks reflects variations in food types, in types of participants, and in modes of relating as local food participants struggle to perform the functions traditionally performed by consolidated intermediaries. Examining these variations is a first step toward understanding that not all local food is equal and which forms of the local food movement are most prevalent and powerful.

Community structure network analysis provides a means of dissecting the complex network of relations mapped from snowball sampling data of local food flows in the study region. Performing this analysis on the Eastern Kansas local food dataset revealed relevant network communities centered on each of the major urban areas within the study region. Lawrence hosted a moderate-sized community partially divided between

restaurant- and retail-oriented food pathways, but with significant cross-linking uniting the community into a coherent whole. Manhattan hosted a small community, largely divided into two different retail-oriented groups and only a slight restaurant presence. Kansas City hosted large sub-communities of both restaurant- and retail-oriented local food pathways with little cross-linking of the sort found in Lawrence and producers usually dedicated to one or the other marketing avenue. The division between restaurant- and retail-oriented pathways was therefore a consistent feature of these communities, reflecting different priorities between restaurant and retail food contexts which network analysis is not able to evaluate.

Within each division of these communities, and at times between them as well, key participants were critical in tying together the communities into networks. These key participants tended to be intermediaries such as restaurants or retailers, suggesting that the exclusion of powerful processing and distribution intermediaries does not free local food development from the interests of powerful intermediaries. Rather, it suggests that the structural divisions in these networks between restaurant- and retail-oriented local food pathways may be driven by the power of restaurants and retailers to enable or limit partnerships with producers based on their specialized individual and group priorities. Yet, for some commodity types and network communities, producer groups appear to be the key participants weaving networks. Producer cooperatives, well-capitalized individual producers, and producers with strong marketing emphases were all found enrolling significant numbers of restaurants and/or retailers who otherwise were not active participants in local food supply chains. This suggests that local food supply chains may privilege intermediaries, but that any such privileging is open to contestation and renegotiation. Network analysis of the form used in this study is incapable of moving beyond these suggestions on its own, leading to a further evaluation of the priorities and privileges in local food relationships through conventions theory frameworks.

However, there is obviously another perspective that is rather important in affecting the form of networks. Divisions and alliances in network communities related to the power and priorities of participants cannot explain why one network community is larger

than another, or why communities with similar proportions of restaurants or retailers have substantially different proportions of interconnections with each other and with producers. There is something important about the geography of the region, about the geography of commerce and culture in each urban area, about the proximity and transportation links between urban areas, and about the geography of land use in the region that all are the foundation for the interconnections and divisions outlined with network analysis. To explain why Manhattan, as a city approximately half the size of Lawrence, has much less than half of the local food activity of Lawrence, and that Manhattan local food differs substantially in quality and characteristics from that of Lawrence, a consideration of their respective commercial and cultural geographies is critical. The spatial analysis devised for this work has been used to add some additional perspective on these geographies underpinning the patterns of local food networks.

2) Conventions

The common divisions noticed in network analysis between retail- and restaurant-oriented local food supply chains was an important basis for using conventions frameworks. The hypothesis was that the values and priorities were substantially different between active restaurants and retailers in local food networks, and that these differences were related to the structural divisions found in networks. This hypothesis was tested by an evaluation of the values and priorities shaping the restaurant and retail local food pathways according to the “orders of worth” and “worlds of production” conventions theory frameworks.

Within restaurant-farm pathways, two agendas were found relating to the common pursuit of upscale independent restaurants to define a powerful and appealing restaurant image. The first agenda examined involves placing local food values at the center of the restaurant identity, designing menu, restaurant atmosphere, dialogue with customers, and relationships with suppliers around seasonal variability, regionally appropriate ingredients, distinctive information about production style and producers, and long-term planning and commitment to local producers. The “orders of worth” conventions framework describes these restaurant conventions as expressions of ecological, domestic, and civic values. The second agenda involves restaurants that splice local food into a

restaurant image largely defined by other aesthetics. The example given was that of an “authentic” Tuscan restaurant, interested in fresh produce, touching the hearts of consumers by emphasizing the restaurant’s support of local food, but requiring such local foods to build on the image of fine Italian dining and atmosphere that draws its customers. Most restaurants that purchase local foods do so for more shallow reasons such as these, to use ecological, domestic, and civic values in the service of exotic restaurant image, almost as a form of brand development. In a way, however, the two agendas are not so different. They both use local food to differentiate their restaurant image in the market of upscale dining, an instrumentalism at the core of any successful contemporary restaurant.

Market competition is also an important driver in retail-farm local food relationships, where competition in the food retail sector has been increasingly intense in recent years with the entrance of mass retailers like Wal-Mart and health food retail chains like Whole Foods into most major regional and local markets. Reaching out to local producers and featuring their products in retail stores is a way of competing with such national retailers by offering distinctive regional products that can never be found in such stores. This helps to construct an identity of regionalism and localism for such retailers, although, just as with restaurants, some retailers are more committed to the values underpinning the appeal of local food than others. While recognizing that ecological, civic, and domestic values are important, supermarkets generally place market competition at the forefront of their programs to incorporate local foods into their stores. On the other hand, independent health food grocers, especially cooperatives, are more reflexive about their local food priorities. Competing for customers is still important for such stores, but part of their niche appeal is based on holistic positive involvement in the health of food systems as well as collaborative efforts to spread this holism throughout the community. Some are better at placing these alternative values on equal footing with market values, as seen in the comparison of Lawrence’s Community Mercantile and Manhattan’s People’s Grocery, and styles of governance become very important for such organizations. However, across each of the types of retailers there is a common thread as compared with restaurants; retail offers opportunities for greater

volume of local food sales at the same time as it places greater barriers to entry in terms of production volume, consistency and reliability of product, and labeling and coordination issues.

The other side of the local food coin is the response of producers and consumers to restaurant and retail agendas. The demands of restaurants for small quantities of fresh and specialized produce commend themselves to small-scale and often organic vegetable farmers. Aggressive marketing by such producers can help to establish a wide array of upscale restaurant customers and support larger and more intensive farming, but most producers instead focus on low volume high value farmers market sales with a few restaurant customers on the side. Retailers, especially supermarkets, attract a different kind of producer. They are generally middle-sized farms and produce relatively common fresh produce, meats, and dairy products. The larger size is important for the greater production volume required by retailers, but specialized production methods and the need to coordinate personally and closely with supermarket managers also put an upper limit on farm size. Producer cooperatives are becoming more common as a way of further increasing product volume, attaining economies of scale in processing, and sharing the burdens of marketing while maintaining specialized methods of production. The different market pressures on restaurants and retailers thereby privilege different producer strategies as both seek to incorporating alternative values into new supply chains, leading to structural divisions between the two local food pathways noted through network analysis.

These market pressures exist as a manifestation of customer priorities in consuming not only foods, but also representations of these alternative values. The tendency toward instrumentalism and the need to translate actual relationships into representations of values create incentives for misleading marketing and communication toward consumers. However, earnest and transparent attempts by restaurant and retail innovators to convey information and resonate with consumers' non-market value sets have their own market appeal, helping to promote some degree of concerned and reflexive consumption by challenging existing practices. Through engaging alternative values and forms of communication, the meaning of local food may have established itself as fresher, more

specialized foods, more ecological production and consumption practices, avoidance of traditionally powerful intermediaries, and authentic traceability of foods. Yet, the value of local food in an economic sense is the result of much more than innovative appeals to alternative values. Value is also produced through the spatial contexts within which these values are engaged, the topic of the final analytical paradigm of this study.

3) Spaces

Geographical and spatial difference is extremely important in the political economic development of local food. Basic geographical analysis in Chapter Four revealed that most local food flows from rural to urban areas, representing a differentiation of spaces of production and spaces of consumption. It is not that food consumption does not exist in the countryside, nor that production ceases beyond the farm gate, but the sampling bias of this study has been toward disenfranchised rural producers looking to the rise of concerned consumerism in vibrant and affluent urban areas for innovative marketing strategies under the guise of local food. Network analysis supported this observation by recognizing the topological clustering of local food networks around the urban centers of Eastern Kansas. However, these urban centers are not uniform, monotone centers of consumption; they each have centers of commerce within them where local food initiatives find sites and where local foods themselves are sometimes welcomed and sometimes forced into urban commercial contexts. Restaurants and retailers are not just active competitive agents in an abstract marketplace; they are active participants in the processes of urbanization and urban spatial production. As such, local food needs to be considered as a part of these evolving urban spatial dialectics as much as it might be a new marketing angle for eco-agricultural production movements that are re-conceptualizing and re-organizing rural landscapes.

Chapter Seven used an ad hoc typology of space to evaluate how local food values are produced through spatial arrangements and how these productions of space strongly influence the kind of ecological, social, and corporeal food relations resulting from local food development. It was found that restaurants and retailers produce space for local foods in accordance with the wider spaces that join them to their respective urban contexts. Each restaurant and retailer has organized its spaces to fit with certain physical,

discursive, associational, and metabolic-material realities of the commercial districts in which they reside, and the ways in which these organizations have organized space to resonate with these contexts limits their flexibility, creativity, and openness to alternative values. To a certain extent, full and reflexive incorporation of local foods into a restaurant or supermarket would require a wholesale reevaluation of what it means to be one of these organizations. In their existing socio-economic spatial formats, they will likely always privilege reduced values and instrumental aims no matter how inclusive and holistic they strive to be. Pending a revolution in urbanism, local food development seems wedded to existing realities of urbanization, whether they are the affluent elitist consumption, suburban sprawl, art-centered gentrification of older neighborhoods of expanding metropolises, or the stagnated downtowns and price conscious consumerism of smaller towns.

Within these constrained realities of innovation, there are a wide variety of spatial projects involved in the reform of agri-food relations according to local food principles. Some restaurants open their doors widely to local producers, feature plentiful local food information on menus, and even organize special producer events or host farmers markets in the restaurant, while other restaurants limit purchases to a few trusted local producers, a few of their specialty varieties, and superficial mention in menus. Some supermarkets profess desire and support for local foods but delegate authority and responsibility to incapable store department managers who make little exception for local foods. Other supermarkets leverage strategic distribution and marketing assets, spatially produced in and of themselves, to customize sections of their stores and supply chain systems for local foods. One health food cooperative comprehensively studies and reforms its policies and programs for building its store around the concept of local foods, while another relegates local foods to bracketed spaces in a store refrigerator or a tiny farmers market outside the store on Wednesday afternoons. As the typology of agri-food spaces helps to reveal, local food spaces in Eastern Kansas are definitely relational, plural, disrupted and the source of disruption, just as Massey stipulates (Massey 1999).

This typology of space has also revealed some important lessons about the politics of these local food spatial projects, and values revealed through conventions analysis

play a role in these politics as well. The Lawrence network community provided an example of the power of collaborative values and spaces in supporting local food growth, where a long-standing cooperative health food grocer has collaborated with commercial interests over time to support a farmers market and a critical mass of receptive downtown restaurants. Together, their consistent emphasis on ecological values and supporting disenfranchised farmers has helped to incubate the growth of a strong cadre of small-scale, organic, local producers and a strong consumer demand based on open discussion of ecological and social issues pertaining to food production and consumption. The Manhattan network community offers a contrast to the Lawrence community, with divisiveness amongst participants, lack of public dialogue, spatially disparate commercial districts, and competition stifling innovation and growth. In Kansas City, the scale of local food participation fuels differentiation in the local foods market, as producers tend to specialize in marketing to either restaurants and farmers markets or supermarkets. Such differentiation is the result of instrumental competition among restaurants and retailers for market share in well-developed sectors of the food economy, but instrumentalism also fuels closed governance, misleading marketing, and defensive appeals to localism. Despite some notably open and collaborative linkages in Eastern Kansas local food networks, there is a serious lack of open participation, transparent governance, and independent oversight in the region's local food developments. This situation leaves the responsibility for guaranteeing equitable social relations and politics in local food development to vigilant consumers and honest producers, an unfair responsibility for these parties given the increasingly complex scales of local food networks.

4) Summarizing: The Political Economy of Local Food in Eastern Kansas

Local food circuits cut out powerful intermediaries from supply chains, the food consolidators, processors, and manufacturers that have organized and flourished through the anonymous commodity relations and global supply chains that are abhorred on so many levels by local food advocates. These local food circuits must therefore find ways of establishing themselves and ordering agri-food relations in the absence of the services and roles provided by these intermediaries. The benefits of cheap staples, standardized

high volume manufacturing, and consolidated distribution systems are absent in local food systems, and local food pathways must find other ways of attaining economic viability. The most obvious and accessible route to reasonable sales volumes and revenues is through the pockets of concentrated affluent consumers in urban areas. Rural consumers and the poor are usually excluded as a matter of course, as wide rural distribution of goods is practically impossible without sophisticated and concentrated distribution systems, and poor consumers can rarely afford the high value/cost products that are required to compensate for a lack of economies of scale in production, processing, and distribution. The increasing numbers of farmers markets and efforts to promote small-scale urban agriculture are beginning to counter this exclusionary tendency of local food, but these effects are marginal compared with most local food development. In contrast to conventional commodity-oriented agri-food spaces, access for both producers and consumers to the formalized local food networks of this study is limited to small subsets of their respective populations and/or small proportions of production and consumption activities.

Within these broader structural patterns lie the individual participants in local food relations, the values that drive them, and the spaces through which they forge and sustain relationships. The challenges of creating new relationships in the absence of traditionally powerful agri-food intermediaries has led to a wide diversity of relationships, some models of which have been rather successful and others of which have struggled. A few restaurants have successfully wedded their restaurant image to alternative values and spatial arrangements in finding ways to comprehensively source a majority of their ingredients locally, and they have done so in urban neighborhoods with strong consumer regard for authentic spaces representing these values. Most other restaurants sourcing local foods expect these foods to align with their existing value sets and spatial arrangements, not to mention making coordinating with producers easy on their chefs. However, there are an increasing number of restaurants active in local food networks, representing a substantial demand for local food that is complementary with forms of direct marketing. On the retail front, cooperative grocers have traditionally been strong champions of local food values and principles, but structural/geographic limitations and

private competitive governance priorities can inhibit their role as incubators of equitable and collaborative local food development. Alternately, supermarkets are emerging powerhouses in local food trade, merging spaces of high volume retail sales with a commitment to engaging alternative values for the sake of competing with other retailers for market share. They may not be revolutionary champions of alternative agri-food relations, but they are beginning to lead large-scale growth of local food supply chains. Each of these cases exemplifies how powerful cultural and/or economic intermediaries in food systems are partnering with producers to renegotiate the production and representation of spaces and values in ways that can be known, traced, and valued by consumers.

Managing the right combination of spaces, locations, and scales of activity is no easy task, and individual organizational flexibility, commitment and capitalization are the common keys to commercial success in local food supply chains. The requirement that products find their way to areas of concentrated consumption requires either high value products, at least a moderate scale of production, or both. There are plenty of hobby farms pursuing low volume, high value marketing at farmers markets, but few offer livable incomes to their farmers. Aggressive diversification of marketing is the key to economically viable local farming, and the current opportunities through restaurants and retailers privilege producers that take production and marketing seriously, including capitalizing their production and/or exploiting their own efforts. Leaving the enrollment of producers into local food pathways to the individual abilities of producers provides incentives for the reduction of diverse civic and ecological values to instrumental market values along with the growth of local food networks. It also does nothing to guarantee or promote efficient distribution, transparency of marketing claims, or equitable producer-intermediary-consumer relations. The result is an increasing competition among producers for limited consumer markets based on common products with less-than-comprehensive ecological and social guarantees. It also results in the strengthening of exclusive urban spaces of consumption and rural-urban production-consumption circuits that do not necessarily encourage the fair distribution of the value produced through local food relations or progressive rural and urban development agendas. The landscape of

opportunity could look very different if there were more collaborative partnerships among producers, intermediaries, and consumers to ensure open access to networks, diverse products, and that all stakeholders have a voice in the production of local food spaces and landscapes.

C) In the Context of Agri-food Literature

1) Criticisms of Localism and Critical Theory

The analyses of local food networks in this dissertation validate a number of important critical concerns at the forefront of contemporary agri-food research. The transformative potential of embedding local food relations in alternative values is tempered by prolific instrumentalism and dependence on market relations in the actions of restaurants, retailers, and producers, just as Hinrichs (2000) noted in the case of farmers markets and CSA's. Defensive localism (Winter 2003) commonly substitutes for reflexive and informed consumerism in the cases where little information about production and supply chain relations are authentically communicated at the point of sale or consumption. In addition, the efforts of producers to save their livelihoods and promote their particular production ideals often reinforce the instrumentalism and defensive localism that obscure the social and ecological relations of local food networks, an example of militant particularisms (Harvey 1996; Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003) limiting global cooperation toward social and ecological justice. Such critical concerns certainly throw into question the ecological, civic, and socio-economic benefits assumed in the re-ordering of agri-food relations based on local food.

Some of the deepest concerns about these tendencies have been voiced by Patricia Allen and David Goodman regarding the exclusionary trajectory of current local food interests. Their tag-team argument is that instrumentalism, defensive localism, and militant particularisms combine in force to encourage specialty niche production for affluent consumption, ignoring the "missing guests at the table" in the form of both urban and rural poor with little access to such foods and rural peasantry unable to make the transition to niche production and distribution (Allen 1999; Allen 2004; Goodman 2004). There is certainly evidence for this in my study as well in the prevalence of socially and geographically exclusive urban upscale dining and suburban supermarket consumption in

local food networks. Producers in distant rural areas and/or with poor transportation infrastructures also find their options constrained in developing new products and markets in the local food economy. While the criticisms of un-reflexive and exclusionary production and consumption strategies are fitting in this account, there is another important angle to consider in the production of access to local foods and the politics of local food social relations.

Ultimately, local food is about the production of space, scale, and difference in agri-food social and ecological relations, and each of these are produced in geographically uneven ways. It cannot be assumed that agri-food orders constructed at the local scale are equitable, progressive, or serve environmental interests; the question is what kind of politics are being constructed by localism and with what outcomes (Born and Purcell 2006). Melanie Dupuis and David Goodman (2005) have argued that a reflexive politics of localism requires acknowledging the interdependence of alternative and conventional forms in agri-food relations – that local places not just be viewed as context for alternative activities, rather as actively produced. This reveals a further important question about the indebtedness of local efforts to broader scales of activity and the spaces aligned with these activities, a question linked to a wealth of critical debate about the social construction of space and scale. In Eastern Kansas, local food in downtown farmers markets, pockets of upscale restaurants, the sprawl of suburban supermarket shopping centers, or cooperative grocers is heavily indebted to the historical development of urban centers based on regional, national, and global flows of capital and people. Furthermore, the current political economic-ecological conditions of rural spaces interact with these urban areas to create a wide variety of scales of local food activity. Indeed, local food cannot be understood independently from the historical geographical trends in agri-food capitalism, population demographics, and consumer culture; the local food movement is in fact a part of the processes of contestation grounding these trends in the present and propelling them into the future.

2) Interpreting the Production of Space and Scale

The key intellectual work to which Dupuis and Goodman direct us is what they call the “new politics of scale”, a tradition arising from recent debates about the socio-spatial

processes that relationally constitute scale. In particular, they recommend the work of David Harvey, Doreen Massey, and Michael Watts with regard to their respective work linking place-based projects with broader spatial processes in ways that challenge the purity and primacy of the local scale. The work of Doreen Massey and David Harvey has been very helpful in this regard throughout this study, and this section is intended to build on the interpretations of socio-spatial processes identified in previous chapters in identifying their roles in scaling and politicizing local food.

The core exhortation of Doreen Massey is that we need to carefully rethink space and politics; along these lines, she has recommended considering space as relational, multiple, disrupted and the source of disruption (Massey 1999). It is a somewhat intuitive recommendation, but the implications are challenging to put into practice. From this perspective, space is no longer a context or surface which is occupied by objects; instead, space and time both produce and are the products of these objects, as the multiple relationships that constitute the objects play out in both space and time in defining and making real such objects. This is true at many scales, and the typology of space developed in Chapters Two and Three and used in Chapter Seven was based on highlighting different scales and dimensions of relationally constituted space. Physical space as used here is perhaps a crude vestige of non-relational thinking, but it represents the Cartesian/Euclidean three-dimensional space which subjects/objects occupy and order as the product of their other interactions. Metabolic-material space represents an often smaller scale where chemical interrelations produce the ripeness and fragility of fruits and vegetables, the perishability of fresh meats and milk, and the olfactory, textural, and visual interactions between food object and producer/consumer subject. Discursive space is an often abstract and symbolic space, a space of interactive interpretation between active subjects and patterns of physical and metabolic-material space that come to be meaningful through symbolism. Finally, associational space is also abstract, but at the same time concrete, the space through which relationships in places are linked to other proximate and distant locales, a recognition that place is a product of multiple local and trans-local agendas and engagements (Amin 2002; Castree 2004). For Massey, politics

in this relational frame of space and place is a matter of evaluating the “power geometries” that shape socio-spatial relationships.

The spatial typology based on Massey’s argument certainly has import in describing the local food networks of this study. Employing a perhaps problematic scalar ontology (Marston, Jones et al. 2005; Jones, Woodward et al. 2007), the production of these networks involves the production and arrangement of these socio-spatial types across a number of scales. The small-scale production and marketing arrangements of local foods are founded on personal-scale relationships between people, food, plants, and animals interacting in a number of dimensions of space. The networks are also embedded in landscape-scale productions of space on the farm, on the road, in the warehouse, in the restaurant, in the retail store, and in the urban developments to which many of these processes are wedded. At another scale, the local food movement is beginning to define an open and ambiguous regional territory of agri-food processes defined once again by proximate and often overlapping urban-rural relations. Even so, this regionalization of the local food movement is greatly dependent on national and global scale organizations of food flows and capital as they produce the urban spaces in which local food is an insurgent participant. Across these scales of activity, the power geometries of local food are still centered on intermediaries, even as many of the more powerful corporate processing and manufacturing conglomerates have been excluded from these networks. The power of restaurants and retailers is evident throughout this chapter in mediating access to the urban spaces of engagement, exchange, and consumption that drive local food economies. They may not be as overt or systematic as major food processors and manufacturers, but restaurant and retail intermediaries still consciously mediate the translation of metabolic-material space into discursive-symbolic space in subtle and powerful ways. Some perform these functions with relative transparency and reflexivity, while many more do so in instrumental and often misleading ways. The politics of local food is very much in question due to these simultaneously hidden and visible powered relationships.

These intermediaries also bridge distant places/spaces of activity into new geographies of agri-food relations. Aside from the unique characteristics of each

participant and urban area, it is relatively clear from this study that smaller cities can encourage more socially intimate and cohesive local food networks without the challenges of distributed consumption in larger metropolitan areas. Of course, demand for local food is much higher in large cities, potentially supporting a much more substantial productive force for local foods. However, the social construction of this demand through cultural activities, community, and the development of urban commercial spaces is perhaps more incoherent. It is likely that these patterns are reproduced in some measure throughout the United States, leaving important questions about whether local food networks can possibly be sufficient as a force for social justice and ecological reform in rural land use distant from major and minor cities. This is a challenge for those who wish to re-make food systems through local food. Perhaps what is needed is a movement that goes beyond localism.

Recognizing the fundamental relational and spatial basis of politics in agri-food systems through the local food movement is an important first step toward reflexive localism. However, assessing justice or injustice of these relations, spaces, and politics is another matter, one that David Harvey tackles in his book *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (1996). He argues that addressing injustice is not about trying to equalize all geographies of difference, but rather it is necessary to identify oppressive differences – differences that make a difference in terms of justice – and the core processes driving these oppressive differences. To do so requires foundational values with which to ground notions of justice and evaluate the relevance of individual differences to justice/injustice. It also requires an attention to core processes rather than the injustices they produce. Efforts to address injustices often involve supporting the identity projects of the victims of injustice rather than seeking to extinguish the processes the lead to victimization, thus unwittingly perpetuating the system of injustice. This is the core of Harvey's adaptation of Raymond William's distinction between alternative and oppositional aims for social movements, and the importance of transcending militant particularisms toward common efforts to halt injustice. Movements that seek to develop alternative processes often fail to adequately address the underlying processes propelling the unjust arrangements to which they seek alternatives, precisely because they do not

identify and oppose the underlying socio-spatial processes causing the injustice within their own efforts. To identify such processes requires the ability to transcend the militant particularisms of place to see common problems in other places and seek the common causes of injustice. As with other movements, the local food movement is composed of many individual place-based projects that often fail to openly and publicly seek common values and aims that unite their militant particularisms in an organized movement in opposition to injustice (Allen, FitzSimmons et al. 2003; Allen 2004).

There is evidence of un-examined, un-intended consequences from un-reflexive militant particularisms throughout the local food networks presented in this study. Most of the developments serve consumers located in or mobile enough to frequent upscale shopping venues, and with the disposable income sufficient to afford more expensive foods. Appeals to the militant particularisms of middle-upper class consumer concerns about food quality and safety fail to address these concerns for marginalized socio-economic groups and locales. The civic values of consumers and producers were consistently mobilized in order to save the family farm through local food production/consumption. However, producers expressed an uneasy tension between working together and fending off competition, and the sites of purchase and consumption rarely displayed evidence of consumers paying close attention to the kinds of production they were supporting. This especially includes issues of farm labor and ecology, which only received attention when individual producers were actively marketing the virtues of their own methods. This is not to say that the local food movement on the whole is not an improved alternative to conventional agri-food supply chains and commodity relations, but there are substantial silences among local food participants preventing the formation of a coherent movement toward ecological and social justice in our evolving local, regional, national, and global food systems. In the end, the injustices and not the global-ness of dominant agri-food relations drive the local food movement, and local food advocates need to encourage much more public discussion about how these injustices can be addressed at all scales instead of reinforcing the global-local binary. Championing the local can be a part of such strategies, but it must be carefully qualified what kind of localism is sought, including the economic-ecological geographies that are

produced by the plural, incomplete, and disjointed motivations and valorizations local food relationships.

Joining the perspectives of both Doreen Massey and David Harvey leads to some important implications for local food advocates and participants. By this point it is clear that promoting social and environmental/ecological justice in agri-food relations through emphasizing local food requires close attention to the values and processes of economic and political valorizing by all local food participants. There needs to be public dialogue involving all food stakeholders about what social and ecological/environmental justice mean and how best to advance these concerns. Furthermore, there needs to be attentiveness to the spaces upon which current efforts rely and the utopian space-times that should be the focus of advocates of just agri-food systems (Harvey 2000). There are signs of this kind of dialogue taking place in the collaborative local food network centered on Lawrence, Kansas, but even in this place are profound dependencies between advancing local food development and processes of socially exclusive urbanization. When the power geometries of local food appear to be concentrating through urban spaces and organizations, justice in local food development may require contesting the very organization and localization of entities like restaurants and retailers in order for them to place social and ecological values on equal footing with those of the market. This is clearly a challenge of re-conceptualizing and re-organizing identities as well as agri-food relations, something David Harvey warns is frequently freighted with the confusion of lost identity and the desire to return to the previous oppressive conditions (Harvey 1996). Despite the challenges, the local food movement is faced with an emerging political economic force that is already re-ordering the spaces, places, and politics of agri-food relations by redefining the measures of value and success for small farms, restaurants and retailers, and consumers. If local food efforts are to bring forth social justice, ecological health, and economic viability in these spaces, places, and politics, their participants must engage a more expansive and inclusive dialogue about the nature of justice and agri-food political economy than is evident at present.

D) Furthering Conclusions

1) Recommendations for Local Food Participants & Policy

The local food movement is comprised of a very wide variety of interests dedicated to challenging anonymous and exploitative agri-food relations through the development of alternative socio-ecological and political economic arrangements. These efforts are definitely beginning to reshape the political economic landscape of agriculture and food for producers, consumers, and intermediaries, alike. Farmers markets, CSA programs, new producer cooperatives, strengthened consumer cooperatives, and food policy councils have been some of the most noted institutional outgrowths of this movement in North America, and they all feature an expanded politics of consideration and reflexivity about the quality and provenance of foods. Yet, this study has shown that organizations that are strongly wedded to the anonymous and exploitative conventional agri-food systems – restaurants and supermarkets – are now also beginning to establish and coordinate their own versions of local foods. These developments certainly engage an expanded set of values and modes of valorization manifested through local foods, but instrumentalism and the requirements of satisfying the production of urban and rural economic spaces limit the extent and balance of these alternative valorizations. As a result, this work has largely supported the conclusions of other agri-food researchers that there is nothing essentially non-exploitative and transparent about agri-food relations at a local scale, nor does it necessarily follow that advocating local food promotes local-scale agri-food relations. As Allen, FitzSimmons, et al (2003) put it:

“We are concerned that alternative AFIs ... may, through their silence about social relationships in production, inadvertently assume or represent that rural communities and family farmers embody social justice, rather than requiring that they do so. Only a symmetrical attention to the embedding in food commodities of social and ecological relations of production *and* consumption can fully support the transformative goals of environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social justice to which so many in this movement aspire.” (p. 74)

One of the key conclusions of this dissertation has been that environmental, social, and economic justice are produced spatially, even as they are socially constructed. To require that local food projects produce these forms of justice is to require that the spaces of local food are accessed and produced through just means as well as in the service of

just ends. There certainly needs to be greater spatial awareness in the local food movement, both in terms of expanding the notion of local beyond a simple accounting of food miles toward an understanding of the scales of economic development, the rural landscapes, and the urban districts of commerce produced through this agenda. There also needs to be better accounting and accountability of the modes of access and production of space in terms of governance. This may involve creative adaptations of existing spaces of exchange such as farmers markets, restaurants, or supermarkets to welcome a more comprehensive array of consumer and producer stakeholders, or it may involve creating new collaborative organizations to enable effective coordination of currently disorganized sets of participants such as independent restaurants or small-scale producers. Only in ways such as these can local food participants collectively establish and guarantee the just democratic production of ecological, economic, and social value through local food while at the same time encouraging the growth of the local food economy. Local food participants of all kinds definitely have an important role to play in organizing to these ends and countering cultures of competitive private interests with vibrant collaborative democratic participation.

This may be an impossible expectation for grassroots organizing by local food participants. Most local food producers and consumers are drawn to this form of marketing due to the systematic disenfranchisement of their interests in conventional agri-food commodity chain and marketing models, while most intermediaries are at best torn between competitive commercial interests and those of serving alternative producer and consumer values. Even the most dedicated and collaborative participants find it difficult to organize with others through equitable means due to the great variations in militant particularisms among participants. Food and agriculture policy at local, state, and national scales in the US could do much to encourage collaboration among disparate participants based on common principles. The prospects for just development of local food systems depends on reduced barriers to entry for all participants, equitable spaces for experimentation that are also safe for failure, and the representation of diverse stakeholders in each of the spaces of local food. In addition to local and state food policy councils, local chambers of commerce and state and national departments of agriculture

and commerce can also play prominent roles in public discussion over the meaning and value of local food, in establishing and legitimating open governance principles for local food programs, and in creating incentives and regulations for the proper application of these principles.

In the near term, there are a number of local food efforts that would benefit from coherent policy and vigilant participatory activism. Facilitating greater producer and restaurant collaboration in the forms of producer cooperatives and restaurant associations could have a great impact on enrolling more restaurants and producers into restaurant-farm pathways, and both key participants and public policy can have an important influence on the democratic formation and governance of these types of organizations. Supermarket-farm local food pathways are troubled by barriers to entry for producers and the segmentation and competition of the retail sector by supermarket chains. Ensuring environmental and economic accountability, as well as transparent representation of foods, for the emerging wave of supermarket local food programs may become an important regulatory task for government, just as it has for the organic foods market. Government policies could also facilitate supermarkets establishing accountability standards and adequate representation of producer and consumer interests in advance of regulation as a matter of good business practice. While institutional sales and internet-based local food coordination were not prominent in the networks of Eastern Kansas in 2005, they have since become focal points for research and extension as well as producer organizing. Ensuring fair access and representation for all producer and consumer interests through these programs should be at the forefront of coordination efforts.

In the long term, local food has a role in defining the kinds of rural and urban spaces that will be produced and reproduced in the coming years in North America. Open and public dialogue about this role should be engaged at all levels of government to make sure that local food embodies and represents progressive principles at the heart of western democracy. However, government and advocates of these progressive principles must make every effort to manifest this dialogue in the place-based sites and spaces of local food. Only by ensuring that space for local food is produced according to progressive and democratic means of negotiation and collaboration can we expect the

environmental, social, and economic outcomes of local food development to reflect these ideals.

2) Reflections and Opportunities for Further Research

This dissertation has been an investigation into the emerging political economy of local food in Eastern Kansas. Its main strengths have been in sampling and representing regional patterns of local food flows through networks, in interpreting the values and strategies driving local food supply chains through an attention to the negotiation and compromise of values and conventions, and in noting the dependence of these networks and values on spaces of production and exchange. This research shows that local food advocacy is indeed producing widespread and diverse networks of food flows, as well as widespread concern for prioritizing ecological, civic, and interpersonal values in coordinating these flows. However, the environmental, social, and economic impacts of these networks and alternative valorizations are most often unknown, unknowable, and/or un-debated. The political-economic-social-ecological complexity of local food networks creates profound difficulties in assessing impacts such as these, but the private interests and militant particularisms driving much of the local food development also disrupts knowledge and discussion of these effects in ways that limit progressive democratic management of the production of local food spaces. Questions about the governance of local food supply chains and the dependence of local food on competitive spaces of production and elite spaces of consumption cut to the heart of the environmental, economic, and social justice issues which advocates claim local food addresses.

These conclusions are certainly important given the increasing public clamor over local foods and interest of major commercial interests in capitalizing on this shift in consumer and producer culture. However, there are a number of dimensions in which this particular study falls short or offers a skewed perspective on the political economy of local food. One of the most fundamental issues is one of scope, where the limitations of snowball sampling and network definition bias the study toward established organizations and formal relationships. While the challenges of applying quantitative network analysis to local food networks are significant, even the limited data used in this analysis has provided some very keen insights into the geography and scale of local food

development in Eastern Kansas. Yet, this geography ignores the more tentative and informal political economy of contract production and one-off sales, especially with regard to direct producer-consumer relations through farmers markets, community-supported agriculture, agri-tourism, and direct internet sales. I excused myself for this bias on the basis that these forms have each been featured relatively closely in other regions through case-studies (Hinrichs 2000; Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Hinrichs, Gillespie et al. 2004; Che, Veeck et al. 2005; Lamine 2005), although it would be very interesting to investigate the geographical patterning of more informal local food networks using the methods in this dissertation.

In addition, the study falls short of substantive commentary about the conditions of production and consumption through local food networks. The complexity of the networks prevented substantive sampling of local food labor conditions, farm ecologies, ownership and capitalization of production, consumer demographics, and the social construction of consumer values and priorities. This study's interviews provided sporadic and anecdotal evidence that there are large differences among these factors throughout the local food networks of Eastern Kansas, but without well-designed sampling of these issues spatial and geographical representation of local food networks offers a very limited picture of the regional local food system. Further study on each of these topics would provide a much more robust basis for comparisons between network communities, spatial projects, and the geographical patterning of local food systems. These comparisons would be very relevant to the study of local food politics and for promoting social, environmental, and economic justice through local food.

Another limitation that could be improved in subsequent research involves the representation of compromise and power in this study. Compromise is a central concept in interpreting how local food relationships are created and maintained through conventions theory. In particular, local food relationships were found through conventions theory frameworks to rely on a variety of independently justifiable moral valuations of economic activity, and compromise is at the core of reconciling the tensions and uncertainties between the multiple values underpinning each local food link. While the conventions frameworks offer a nuanced perspective on the values that contribute to

the construction of value in local food, it offers no frameworks for nuanced interpretations of the processes of negotiation and compromise. Another way of putting the issue is that this study fails to entertain the nuanced dynamics of power and influence that shape individual agri-food relationships. Power in this study is described based on ad hoc interpretation of the framing of values and the ordering of space, as well as a crude identification of key participants based on their central positions in the network structure. This sort of grounded theory of power has been adequate in suggesting who powerful actors might be in local food networks and for what reasons, but such an approach lacks the ability to relate empirical narratives of power to broader agency in shaping the scales and regional landscapes of local food.

Another way of illustrating this continued difficulty researching power in alternative agri-food relations is through the continued tension between local and trans-local patterns in theories of space and scale. Derived from discussions of space by Massey and Harvey, spatial analysis has proven itself as a way of linking proximate and distant local food projects as dialectically intertwined processes in the production of space. It is possible to correlate private strategies and militant particularisms with observed spatial orders, but spatial analysis in itself does not provide a way of conceptualizing collective power in terms of the ability of groups to order districts, landscapes, and the production of scale. Linking individual level relational politics to broader regional and national politics of local food is desirable in making conclusions about the extent to which and in what ways the growth of local food does or does not produce social and economic justice. Harvey uses dialectical frameworks in his suggestions about these relationships, but the complexity of the dialectical development processes coursing through local food networks limits the interpretative capacity of dialectical thinking in this study. Complex dialectics of relational politics present a profound wrinkle in translating between local and trans-local politics, producing nonlinear interdependencies in the social construction of regional agri-food systems that are very difficult to represent.

The political economic account of local food in this dissertation is therefore troubled on a number of fronts. It makes significant strides in representing and analyzing

local food systems in terms of motivational values, alternative forms of valorization through the production of spaces, and the linking of these spaces through extended networks of food flows. Yet, much more work along these lines would be required to explore appropriate methods for better representation of consumers and informal forms and spaces of participation, and also for more explicit and nuanced representation of power at the interpersonal/inter-organizational and trans-local/regional scales. Adapting the methods used in this study to incorporate these kinds of diverse actors and manifestations of power might allow further research to engage questions about how competing interests shape urban and rural city/landscapes in the aggregate (e.g. how the efforts and interests of urban farmers intermingle with and disrupt those of corporate capital in the form of supermarket local food programs to collectively produce difference in urban and rural areas). Such research would be able to make nuanced comments on the transformative potential of local foods in dialectical socio-economic terms.

There is, however, another dimension of local food research in need of increased attention from agri-food social scientists. Evaluating claims of environmental, social, and economic justice by alternative agri-food advocates certainly requires appropriate frameworks for assessing justice in socio-economic relations. Several researchers have argued the importance of bio-politics in this age of agri-food political economic restructuring (Fitzimmons and Goodman 1998; Goodman 1999; Whatmore 1999; Whatmore 2002; Stassart and Whatmore 2003). The production of rural and urban ecologies is a large part of the economic development accompanying the growth of local food provisioning. One wonders how climate change will affect the production of these ecologies. On another front, how does the strong emphasis of local food advocates on reducing food miles obscure other energy-ecology and political economic relations, especially in an era of rapidly escalating energy costs when food localism promotes less efficient coordination and distribution methods than consolidated conventional counterparts. Furthermore, how do the ecological relations of production and consumption shape the topologies and spatial nestings of local food projects? These kinds of questions require a more extensive conversation between political economy and political ecology in researching alternative agri-food movements. Ultimately, these

intellectual engagements are important in seeking greater holism in analysis of social, economic, and environmental justice through local food agendas.

Despite the need for greater theoretical and empirical sophistication and holism, the limited vision of this dissertation suggests tentative and qualified success by the regional local food movement in Eastern Kansas with regard to its aims. The rapid developments in farmers markets, public dialogue and consumer awareness of local foods, producers catering to local markets, and foodservice and retail intermediaries sourcing locally have greatly expanded the ability for all participants to engage in an expanded politics of agriculture and food. The discourses, ecologies, and personal spaces of exchange and production of local foods have collectively opened a diverse and diversifying field of opportunities that were previously hidden and/or underdeveloped. We must stop short of claiming that the local food movement and economy are inherently just, or at least benign, as hidden agendas, instrumental aims, and uncritical and undemocratic governance can undermine justice at any scale. Indeed, each of these issues is evident throughout the local food projects in Eastern Kansas, constraining access and modes of participation in local food networks throughout the study region. Local food is not necessarily destined to appropriation by local elites and the power of organized capital, though, and critical public participatory vigilance in exposing local food production and exchange relations as well as reflexive research and accounting of local food impacts will be necessary in developing truly progressive outcomes from local food development.