

Article

Community and Cultural Entrepreneurship and Value Co-Creation in the Local Food Marketscape

Matthew M. Mars

Department of Agricultural Education, Technology and Innovation, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721, USA; mmars@arizona.edu

Abstract: Local food entrepreneurs are confronted with unique challenges when it comes to sustaining their firms and scaling their pro-community impact within geographically confined marketspaces. Yet, the strategies for overcoming these challenges remain under-studied within the community development and local food literatures. The current study addresses this scholarly gap through a qualitative case study of a southern Arizona artisan baker who follows a community-supported business model that strategically engages customers as value co-creators and stewards of a sustainable and scalable local consumption space. The study is conceptually framed by a set of principles that span community entrepreneurship, cultural entrepreneurship, and value co-creation. Data include semi-structured interviews with the baker and a sample of customers ($n = 31$), 20+ h of direct observations, and 3419 posts made within the bakery's social media environment. The findings inform the theoretical development of a novel local food value co-creation model.

Keywords: community entrepreneurship; cultural entrepreneurship; local consumption space; local food entrepreneurship; value co-creation



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1. Introduction

The local food movement has grown and diversified over the past several decades to include a multifaceted agenda that ranges from social and eco-activism to land regeneration to the re-localization of communities and economies [1,2]. Likewise, the access points through which consumers can participate in the movement have expanded to include community-supported agriculture (CSA) shares, farmers' markets, farm-to-table restaurants, and most recently conventional retail outlets (e.g., supermarkets) [3–5]. This market breadth resulted in the generation of \$9 billion of local food revenue in the United States in 2020 [6].

The re-localization of food production and consumption and the generation of associated pro-community impacts (e.g., cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, health and wellness, social justice) is heavily dependent on entrepreneurs who intentionally confine the scale of their firms to localized boundaries and short supply chains [1,7–9]. Yet, the efficacy of entrepreneurship as a strategy for advancing the local food movement is a point of debate. On one hand, local food entrepreneurship is viewed as a counter-mechanism to the economically, environmentally, and socially unjust effects of globalized and corporatized agriculture on local communities and economies [10–12]. On the other hand, critics argue that over-dependence on entrepreneurial strategies threatens to dilute the resistance elements of the local food movement agenda through the integration of a market-dominant logic that ultimately ties back to corporatization and globalization [13–15].

More specific to the current article, scholars have questioned the long-term sustainability of local food firms and the scalability of the pro-community impacts they generate. At the heart of said concerns is what Born and Purcell term the “local trap” [16] (p. 195)—the firmly held assumption that confining the scale of food production, distribution, and consumption is a necessary input to more just and sustainable food systems. Similarly, local

food entrepreneurs are faced with a persistent “dilemma of scale” due to the precarious balance between a steadfast commitment to the local food movement agenda and the economic constraints that come from limiting production and distribution to confined, highly dense local marketspaces [8] (p. 629). Surprisingly, there is a paucity of research on the strategies local food entrepreneurs pursue to sustain their firms in ways that do not compromise the ‘localness’ of their operations or their alignment with the local food movement agenda [8,9]. In other words, how local food entrepreneurs work to escape the local trap and overcome the dilemma of scale without neglecting their commitments to generating pro-community impacts are under-studied.

The current study aims to address the aforesaid scholarly gap through a qualitative exploration of how the local food movement value proposition is advanced through the integration of customer engagement with firm-level business models and entrepreneurial strategies. More specifically, I consider the role of local food consumers as value co-creators who directly contribute to both the market success of local food firms and the scaling of the pro-community impacts generated by said firms. The guiding research questions are:

- (1) How, if at all, do local food entrepreneurs engage and motivate customers as value co-creators?
- (2) How, if at all, does value co-creation between local food entrepreneurs and customers contribute to the economic sustainability of local food firms?
- (3) How, if at all, does value co-creation between local food entrepreneurs and customers contribute to the scalability of the pro-community impacts of local food firms?

The research questions are pursued through a qualitative case study of an artisan baker in southern Arizona (AZ) who has implemented a community-supported business model (CSBM) that directly engages customers as value co-creators. Data consist of semi-structured interviews with the baker and a sample of customers (N = 31), field notes recorded during 20+ h of direct observations, and a sample of 3419 posts made on the bakery’s social media sites over a five-year period.

The next section provides further review of the literature on the challenges and opportunities associated with local food entrepreneurship and the implications of such entrepreneurship on community development and transformation. Then, the theoretical framework used to guide the exploration and analysis is articulated. The framework is composed of key principles associated with community and cultural entrepreneurship as well as value co-creation. Thereafter, the methods used are described, the results are presented, and a concluding discussion of the theoretical implications of the study and its contribution to the community development and local food literatures is provided.

2. Literature Review

Consistent with the local food movement agenda, entrepreneurial approaches to the re-localization of food production and consumption are widely considered to be community development mechanisms [8,17–19]. Researchers have associated a range of pro-community impacts with local food entrepreneurship that converge to foster economically, environmentally, and socially just, vibrant, and sustainable communities [1,10,20]. From this vantage point, local food entrepreneurs provide consumers with a wide (and growing) range of opportunities to access local food and through their consumption choices contribute to the vibrancy and well-being of their communities [10].

Local food entrepreneurs are sometimes portrayed as heroes and heroines (if not martyrs) who take the needs of their communities upon their backs, willingly and courageously sacrificing their own financial prosperity for the greater good of those within their surrounding locales [21]. Commonplace heroization characterizes local food entrepreneurs as autonomous agents who work *for* and *on behalf of* community stakeholders rather than as collaborative agents who work *with* and *alongside* community stakeholders. Yet, the latter characterization is more accurate with the success and impact of local food entrepreneurs, and their firms most often requiring access to community-based resources and networks [20,22]. Examples of such community-based support for local food entrepreneurs

include firm exposure via public relation campaigns, local policymaking, and subsidized access to production resources (e.g., community kitchens) [22,23].

Likewise, the success of local food firms and the pro-community impacts they aim to generate inherently rely on consumer participation in local food market activities [24–26]. Such consumer participation depends on the development and scaling of local consumption spaces—distinct and evolving market-based environments that intimately connect consumers with their local communities through their consumption choices and routines [27]. While entrepreneur-led models that create and provide consumer access to local consumption spaces (e.g., CSAs, farmers' markets) are well studied, research on how consumers themselves contribute to the sustainability of local food firms and the scalability of the pro-community these firms generate is far less developed.

Customer engagement in the value creation process may also further enhance the capacities of local food entrepreneurs to overcome challenges that are inherent to bounding their firms to localized marketspaces. While there is no formal governing standard on what is considered 'local food' in geographic terms, a distribution radius of 250 to 300 miles is a commonly referenced parameter [28]. Regardless of specific distances, the production and distribution activities of local food firms are by definition bound to relatively dense marketspaces that offer little opportunity for scaling [8]. Local food entrepreneurs must integrate creativity, experimentation, and ingenuity with their business models and operational strategies to persist, if not thrive, within locally bounded marketspaces [29].

Community-supported business models (CSBMs) are one innovation that local food entrepreneurs have adopted to mitigate the risks and overcome the challenges that threaten the success and pro-community impacts of their firms. CSBMs involve customers investing in community-centered firms by assuming risk and contributing 'sweat equity' on behalf of entrepreneurs in ways that include, for example, pre-ordering products and partaking in production and distribution activities (e.g., volunteering during crop harvests, co-creating/representing firm brands) [30,31]. Community-supported agriculture (CSA) is the most common CSBM in the local food sector with customers buying shares of crops from local farmers prior to planting and harvesting, thereby betting on bountiful harvests, providing farmers with upfront capital, and mitigating the financial risks of potential crop failure [30]. CSBMs also extend beyond crops to include, for example, fisheries [32] and specific to the current study: bakeries [33]. Beyond contributing to the sustainability of local firms, CSBMs serve as "market-mediated communal connections" [26] (p. 276) that empower consumers as investors in localized enterprise and enhance their connections and contributions to community via vibrant and impactful local consumption spaces [27]. To date, however, the literature on how local food entrepreneurs engage customers as value co-creators is relatively scant [24,34].

3. Conceptual Framework

To reiterate, the current article contributes to the gap in the community development and local food literatures regarding the strategies local food entrepreneurs use to sustain their firms within the bounds of localized marketspaces and in alignment with the local food movement agenda. Specifically, new insights are generated into how consumers are engaged and motivated as value co-creators who work in tandem with entrepreneurs to sustain local food firms and scale the associated impacts within their communities—a role not otherwise accounted for by community development and local food researchers. The conceptual framework that guides the study is composed of principles pulled from three theoretical discussions. First, principles of community entrepreneurship guide the analysis of how the local food entrepreneur featured in the case positions his bakery as a community-oriented business and asset that warrants collective support and investment. Second, principles of cultural entrepreneurship guide the analysis of the strategies the local food entrepreneur uses to mobilize and empower customers as value co-creators. Third, principles of value co-creation guide the analysis of customer motives and approaches to participating in the bakery's CSBM and how doing so stands to benefit the bakery and/or

the southern AZ community. The following sub-sections detail the specific principles pulled from each of the three theoretical discussions.

3.1. Community Entrepreneurship

Here, community entrepreneurship is defined as the revitalization and transformation of communities and environments through the mobilization and enactment of collective resources. This definition is consistent with conceptualizations provided across the community development, planning, and entrepreneurship literatures. Community development and planning scholars have associated community entrepreneurship with the collective, system-level capacity of local actors to come together to solve immediate and longer-term problems that threaten the quality of life and well-being within shared environments [35–37]. Similarly, entrepreneurship scholars have framed community entrepreneurship as a process involving the system-level convergence of human, natural, and social capital with the intent of transforming the environmental and social conditions of locales and regions in just, place-based, and sustainable ways [38–40]. The synergistic element stressed across these compatible views is the importance of community-based asset pooling to include not only monetary, human, and social resources but also “various local sources such as scenery, natural resources, history, or [and] local traditions and culture” [38] (p. 223).

The value proposition of community entrepreneurship is commonly recognized through local business creation and associated system-level economic gains (e.g., job creation, increased tax revenues) [41,42]. Yet, the scope of community entrepreneurship is far more diverse and complex to involve inter-organizational networks, multifaceted collaborations, and system-level coordination aimed at community change and transformation [43]. Buratti, Sillig, and Albanese [44] captured this scope when identifying the following three characteristics of community ventures: (1) founded by entrepreneurs/innovators living in the surrounding community, (2) have multiple goals that align with the livability and collective well-being of the surrounding community, and (3) involve in various ways the active participation and/or leadership of community members and collaborators.

Four principles from the holistic conceptualization of community entrepreneurship are included in the current framework. Specifically, community- and place-based asset pooling [38–40] informed the identification and analysis of the inputs to sustaining the bakery and its corresponding local consumption space as well as scaling the resulting pro-community impacts. Three additional characteristics of community entrepreneurship—community-located founders, multifaceted community-centric goals, and community collaboration—guided the analysis of the organizational structure and community development strategy undergirding the bakery and its CSBM [44].

3.2. Cultural Entrepreneurship

Strategy and organization scholars conceptualize cultural entrepreneurship as a storytelling process that entrepreneurs engage to legitimize new ventures and markets and over time accumulate and deploy diverse resources and capital in support of scale and impact [45,46]. Cultural entrepreneurship is especially salient when it comes to disrupting and refining and/or displacing existing markets with new and innovative alternatives [47]. For example, local food producers and purveyors act as cultural entrepreneurs who contribute to the creation, diversification, and scaling of local food markets through the stories they convey to consumers [48].

The influence and impact of cultural entrepreneurs depends largely on their individual credibility within relevant social contexts, whether community- and/or market-oriented, and the subsequent legitimacy they convey to internal and external audiences. At the firm level, legitimacy is gained through a mix of performance and the strategic communication of that performance in ways that reflect and symbolize the agendas and values held by internal and external audiences [44]. The strategic framing and broadcasting of innovative activities, successes, and aspirational initiatives by firms over time work to gain the

trust and commitment of external actors needed to create, sustain, and scale field-wide change [49]. Strategic storytelling is the core element of cultural entrepreneurship and thus vital to the subsequent transformation of communities, fields, and/or markets [46].

Wry et al. [50] emphasize the legitimization function of storytelling to the cultural entrepreneurship process when conceptualizing “growth stories” as: “Stories told by group members theorizing [51] opportunities for new actors to affiliate with the group and pursue variants on its core practices. When growth is intertwined with a group’s purpose and core practices, new members will be more likely to tell stories that external audiences can readily fit together (p. 450).” Growth stories not only establish and reinforce legitimacy in the present tense but also project and declare the likely outcomes should collectively support of current and proposed initiatives continue [52]. The role of growth stories in the cultural entrepreneurship process have been mostly considered relative to conventional firms competing within and/or disrupting mainstream markets [50]. Departing from this more common scholarly thread, the current study explores how the community- and market-oriented storylines conveyed by the baker function as growth stories that continually legitimize his entrepreneurial practices in the context of community development, motivate his customers to act as value co-creators, and support the sustainability of his baker and the scalability of its associated pro-community impacts.

3.3. Value Co-Creation

Marketing scholars have shown how firms increasingly engage and leverage their customers as partners in the creation, production, and promotion of new offerings, whether products or services [53,54]. Consumers can participate in value co-creation by providing input during the creation and development of offerings, by increasing access to and the usability of offerings (e.g., peer-run support service forums), and through peer-to-peer promotions and other viral-like marketing activities [55]. Co-creation fosters customer loyalty and sustains their willingness to serve as ‘prosumers’ who champion the various value propositions that underpin firm offerings [56,57].

Specific to alternative and local food system development, customers are increasingly treated as value co-creators through their direct involvement in the operations of CSAs, culinary education and knowledge exchange networks, and gastrotourism initiatives [33,56,58,59]. Customer co-creation goes beyond supporting the development of individual firms to include participation in the engenderment of market- and system-level change. Primary examples of system-level customer co-creation is found in the promotion of new aesthetic taste regimes and the scaling of food-based resistance movements [25,60,61].

Customer participation and citizenship behaviors are the primary dimensions of value co-creation [62]. Participation behaviors are those activities that involve customers contributing directly to the production and delivery of firm offerings [63]. Participation behaviors are performed by customers seeking out information from firms and conversely, providing firms with knowledge and insights that are unique to their consumer experiences, perspectives, and preferences [62]. Value co-creation depends on information seeking and sharing being carried out through customer-firm interactions that are personal and involve customers informally abiding by firm directives as ‘pseudo-employees.’ Citizenship behaviors entail customers engaging in self-driven, pro-social activities that contribute to the success of firms by expanding and enhancing the experiences available to other consumers [64]. Citizenship behaviors also entail advocating on behalf of firms, assisting other consumers in accessing and benefiting from firm offerings, and tolerating periodic episodes of sub-par firm performance [62]. Customers using social media platforms to promote the experiential, environmental, and/or social value propositions of firms is a clear example customer citizenship behavior. Revilla-Camacho et al. [63] clarified the distinction between participation and citizenship behaviors with the former directly benefiting customers through the enhancement of firm performance and the latter bolstering the recognition and status of firms without generating direct benefits for the customer co-creators. Here, the concept of value co-creation, and more specifically participation and citizenship

behaviors, guide the analysis of why customers participate in the bakery's CSBM and how them doing so creates value for both bakery and/or the southern AZ community.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Research Design and Setting

I use a single case study design [65] to qualitatively explore how an artisan baker engages in community and cultural entrepreneurship to support a CSBM that empowers customers as value co-creators who contribute to the sustainability of the bakery and scalability of its pro-community impacts. The single case study design enables the interpretative analysis of social phenomena as viewed through the experiences and perspectives of study participants [66]. In epistemological terms, the aim of interpretivism is not to objectively determine the causation of behaviors and occurrences (as is the case with positivism) but rather to make sense of "the meanings and actions of actors according to their own subjective frame of reference" [67] (p. 210). When it comes to theory building, an interpretive approach allows for the revelation of unique perspectives on social phenomena and the development of rich descriptions of the underlying conditions and complexities [68].

Outlier cases provide qualitative researchers with effective paths to generating new theoretical insights that are likely to otherwise remain hidden in studies of typical, more routine cases [69,70]. Accordingly, the bakery featured in this article, Barrio Bread (Due to the unique attributes of the case, the baker provided permission to use his real name and that of the bakery. Per the institutionally approved human subjects protection protocol, customer interviewees have been randomly assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity), was purposefully selected based on several exceptional ("outlier") qualities: the bakery's unique CSBM, the baker's high-profile reputation and brand identity across the surrounding locale and region, and its leading-edge spin-off into heritage grain purveyance. Specifically, Barrio Bread is a well-established bakery located in Tucson, AZ, a metroplex area in southern AZ that is home to nearly 1,000,000 people and is a recognized food and agriculture destination as evidenced by its designation as a City of Gastronomy by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [71]. Barrio Bread operates using a CSBM that requires customer participation in one of two primary direct-to-consumer distribution options: (1) pre-ordering through an online storefront and picking up in-person at the bakery on a designated day and time, or (2) waiting in an outside queue ("the breadline") that regularly stretches a city block or longer. While more predictable and convenient, the online pre-ordering/in-person pickup option is the lesser used of the two. As will be further described in Section 5, the appeal of the breadline includes more choices when it comes to bread types (although certain breads often sell out early in the day), customer socializing, and participation in a local food consumption experience that is unique to southern AZ. Don, the bakery founder, is a globally recognized artisan baker who holds numerous accolades, including the 2022 James Beard Outstanding Baker Award [72]. The reputational capital and brand identity that Don has accumulated and developed enhances his capacity to engage in cultural entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the local and regional status that is tied to his personal brand, in conjunction with the bakery's CSBM, empowers Don as a community entrepreneur and innovator as in part evidenced by his leadership in the development of a regional heritage grain economy.

4.2. Data Collection and Sampling

I rely on three sources of data, the first of which is a population of 3419 posts and comment threads from Barrio Bread social media sites that span 2017 through 2022 [73]. The bakery's social media environment includes multiple platform sites that together host over 10,000 followers. According to the baker, the approximate topical distribution of the 3419 posts is 60% bakery promotion, 15% community building and education, 15% on collaborative projects, and 10% personal posts. The second source are field notes that record over 20 h of direct observations of the Barrio Bread enterprise to include production activities and consumption routines (e.g., "the breadline") [74]. The third source are

individual, semi-structured interviews with the baker and 31 Barrio Bread customers [75]. The baker interviews include both informal conversations during production observations as well as five semi-structured interviews conducted throughout the duration of the study. The semi-structured interviews with the baker probe the intentionality and purpose of his strategy for empowering customers as value co-creators to include elements of his role as a community and cultural entrepreneur. Interviews with customers probe their experiences and motivations as bakery patrons, perspectives of the connection between Barrio Bread and the southern AZ community and environment, and recognition and understanding of their participation in the co-creation, sustainability, and scalability of the bakery and its associated pro-community impacts.

The baker was purposively selected as an interviewee based on his role as the bakery founder/entrepreneur, and as previously indicated, his practice alignment with the theoretical principles of community and cultural entrepreneurship. The customer interview sample was developed using a maximum variation sampling strategy [76]. Specifically, participants were recruited through an open call that was distributed through the bakery's social media sites. While the sample is limited to current Barrio Bread customers, I did not restrict participation to specific consumption routine characteristics (e.g., length of time as a bakery customer, shopping frequency). As a result, the final sample is varied by customer histories and experiences, shopping patterns and routines, preferences, and views and practices specific to local consumption.

4.3. Data Analysis

The interview, observation, and social media data were all qualitatively analyzed. The qualitative analysis of interview and observation data is standard practice [77]. While often analyzed quantitatively due to big data qualities, social media posts are also increasingly analyzed through qualitative discourse analysis techniques [78,79]. The relative newness of such techniques necessitates further description. Drawing from interpretivist methods commonly used by cultural sociologists, each post, consisting of an original message and subsequent comments and replies, was individually read and coded for thick descriptions that reveal, contextualize, and signify underlying meanings [80]. While laborious and time consuming, such hands-on analysis is critical to the effort to better understand the complexities and nuances of social media interactions and dynamics. Moreover, qualitatively analyzing social media data is particularly valuable when used in conjunction with other compatible and more dynamic and person-centered data sources—e.g., semi-structured interview and live observations [81]. The coding framework and analytical process applied to the social media posts was the same as that used to analyze the interview and observation data, which is described next.

Deductive (a priori) analysis relied on a structured coding framework [74] composed of the previously described theoretical constructs specific to community entrepreneurship [38–40], cultural entrepreneurship [45,46], and value co-creation [53,54]. Inductive (posteriori) analysis involving an open coding schedule was also performed to reveal any insights or patterns informative of the research questions but outside of the structured framework [82]. With these two strategies in place, I performed multiple rounds of analysis of all data with each round entailing the narrowing and distilling of insights and patterns until the final set of findings was reached. Each round involved both idiographic and nomothetic analysis [83]. Ideographic analysis entails analyzing data specific to a single source (i.e., single social media post, observation note, interview transcript). Nomethic analysis involves comparing ideographically generated insights and patterns across multiple data sources.

4.4. Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

The researcher is the primary instrument for all qualitative designs [84]. Accordingly, this researcher consistently practiced reflexivity over the course of the study, which included establishing positionality toward the study's focus—local food entrepreneurship

and community development. The researcher is a faculty member in an agriculture college at a large public research university with expertise in entrepreneurship and social innovation. The researcher has conducted previous studies on the entrepreneurial dimensions of the local food movement and associated impacts on community development and transformation. Furthermore, the researcher grew up on a small family farm and thus has previous experience pertaining to the local production and distribution of food. The identification and processing of positionality enhanced the researcher's recognition of their own assumptions and values pertaining to local food entrepreneurship and community development and thereby reduced the effects of personal bias during analysis [77,84,85].

4.5. Standards of Quality and Limitations

The credibility of the study was established in four ways. First, prolonged observations of the baker and his engagement with customers strengthened the overall credibility of the data [86]. Second, member checking with both the baker and the customer interviewees helped limit research bias and bolster the accuracy of participant perspectives and experiences as represented in the data [87]. Third, the data were triangulated across all three sources—an inherent element of nomethic analysis—with the outcome being the illumination, confirmation, and refinement of intersecting patterns and themes [77,83,86]. Fourth, data collection, including customer interviewee sampling, continued until arriving at theoretical saturation [76]. Next, the transferability of the study was enhanced by presenting the findings with thick, rich descriptions and the previously described practice of reflexivity and positionality awareness [77,84,85,88]. The dependability of the study was promoted by the researcher maintaining an audit trail and memoing throughout the analytical process [89].

As with all the qualitative designs, the experiences and perspectives shared by the study participants are theirs alone, and as such, the transferability of the findings to other cases and contexts requires discretion. Furthermore, the findings should be treated as theoretical building blocks upon which to further study how the local food movement value proposition may be advanced through the integration of consumer engagement with firm-level business models and entrepreneurial strategies.

5. Results

5.1. Legitimization of Otherness

The bakery's CSBM is unique within the southern AZ region with customers required to wait in outdoor lines that often stretch nearly a block in length. Customers routinely line up well before the bakery opens with the hope of securing a place in line and increasing the likelihood that their favorite style and flavor will be available when their turn to order arrives. Conversely, the farther one finds themselves in the line, the less likely they are to get their first, second, or even third choice of style and flavor. In some cases, customers opt to pre-order their bread with the payoff being guaranteed quicker pick-up and the certainty of knowing what they will receive. The tradeoff is that pre-order is limited to the several most popular styles and flavors (e.g., traditional baguette, pain epi, whole wheat). Customers who seek the more unique, specialty, and/or experimental styles and flavors must tolerate the time and uncertainty that comes with waiting in line. Not surprisingly, none of the customer interviewees described the value of the bakery or the appeal of its products in terms of convenience.

This two-option distribution system has several benefits to the baker—all which stem from sharing the business risks and uncertainties of the bakery with its customer community.

One benefit is the reduction in excess inventory with customers coming to accept the uncertainties associated with demand outweighing supply. Similarly, the baker can plan and control the bakery production schedule with a high level of precision, which allows for more operational efficiency and less waste throughout the production and distribution cycle. Perhaps most importantly, the baker can maintain an exceptionally high degree of quality with the alleviation of many production uncertainties and market unknowns.

Recall Tucson is a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, and as such, there is no shortage of high-quality bakeries and bread retailers within the local food system. Why then do customers tolerate the inconveniences and uncertainties that come with the CSBM? According to Don, the baker,

My customers know my model is different and sometimes challenging. They also know they will get a great product that is made with love and pride. And, their participation makes them feel part of a special community and that makes their compromises worth it.

The customer interviewees expanded on Don's perspective in several key ways. First, all of the customer interviewees indicated the gustatory and visual aesthetics of the breads, in tandem with comprehensive sustainable sourcing practices, are unmatched across the southern AZ local food system. Second, the 'otherness' of the bakery shopping experience—including waiting in line and the anticipation that comes with the hope that desired styles and flavors remain available—provide customers with a unique experience and sense of community. For example, Lauren states, "The line is an adventure that I can experience with people I might not ever know otherwise. Each time [shopping] is different. That makes the bread and the bakery all the more special!" This perspective reflects a shared appreciation among most customer interviewees for the amplification of community and authenticity of place that is created through the bakery's unconventional CSBM.

The tolerance for, and in many cases, appeal of otherness is further shaped and sustained through the charisma and persona of the baker himself. For instance, Jane described Don as "the pope of the Tucson bread religion. Anybody can make good bread, but nobody can match their [baker] aura". Don's charisma is often on full display at the pick-up window where he consistently greets customers, checks-in on the well-being of regular customers, and learns the stories of those who are first-time shoppers. The latter is especially impactful given southern AZ is a growing community with new residents being drawn to the region by its warm climate, desert scenery, cultural richness, relatively affordable cost of living, and growing entrepreneurial economy. As a self-proclaimed community builder, Don stated, "me and the bread welcome people to our community and help connect and keep them connected to it. This [bakery and its CSBM] is all about the experience of community". Customer interviewees consistently reinforced this image through comments such as "he is so warm and welcoming each and every time," "he knows us and we know him", and "he genuinely cares to get to know us and everyone else, his interest in us as people is unmatched". Like Jane's preceding papal comparison, Christopher, a former human services clinician and administrator, states, "He [Don] is a bread social worker. He brings people together and creates a healthy community through his bread and the culture he has created around it". For those customers who tolerate (as opposed to embrace) the impositions of the CSBM, the baker's charisma incentivizes their continued patronage. Phillip stated,

Do I like waiting in line and not being able to plan what I will actually get? No, I don't. But Don [the baker] is grateful to us for putting up with it and makes sure we always know it. The line aside, he feels like our [customer emphasis] baker!

Don confirmed that while his charismatic expressions are genuine, they are also a strategic element of the bakery's CSBM model. He stated,

My model wouldn't work if I wasn't present and the face of the business. My customers need to know I am right there with them. It is easy though. I love getting know them and the feeling that we are all one big bread community!

In general, Don's entrepreneurial charisma, powerful persona, and customer-centeredness creates a balance between novelty and intimacy that further adds to the bakery's sense of otherness.

The legitimacy of otherness is further strengthened by the community-centered work that Don incorporates in his operations and branding strategies. The primary example is his leadership in the resurgence of local heritage grains and development of a regional

wheat economy. This leadership involves creating and promoting economically viable and environmentally sustainable partnerships with area farmers and millers, resulting in what Don describes as “a local grain ecosystem that is truly unique and true to our [southern AZ community] history, culture, and environment”. This work has evolved to include the 2022 launching of a local grain product line, Barrio Grains, that involves partnerships with several local and regional farms. As a co-branded spin-off, this new venture is set up to increase the community consumption of local heritage grains by leveraging the bakery’s brand identity and Don’s credibility as a community-supported baker. The principal example of such grains is Sonoran wheat, which is a drought-tolerant crop that was first introduced to the region in the 17th century by Franciscan missionary Father Eusebio Francisco Kino [33]. Customer interviewees commonly describe experimenting with the grain products to include baking their own breads and making pizza doughs. Chester stated, “If the [Don] endorses it, I’ll support it. No questions asked. His reputation speaks for itself with everything he does is from the heart and for the community. Plus, he is the best baker in the country!” This comment reflects similar rationales shared by other customer interviewees regarding their willingness to purchase the heritage grains despite having little to no baking experience.

In summary, participant data reveal several tangible and intangible elements that combine to make the bakery’s otherness appealing and enduring to customers and thereby impactful from a community and environmental standpoint and sustainable from a market standpoint. The tangible elements are gustatory and visual aesthetics and local sourcing, while the intangibles include Don’s entrepreneurial charisma and credibility as both a “bread artisan extraordinaire” and “community champion.” These same elements identify him as a community entrepreneur who leverages his reputation and the brand identity of his bakery to mobilize and scale community- and market-based support for local food system transformation. Furthermore, Don’s success with a CSBM that requires customers to accept, if not embrace, otherness in exchange for aesthetically appealing, community-centered, and environmentally sustainable products works to legitimize alternative production and consumption routines within the southern AZ local food system. This legitimizing function extends Don’s functional role to include cultural entrepreneurship.

5.2. Collective Storytelling

Don engages in very little conventional marketing practices—e.g., paid advertising, formal promotion campaigns, etc. Instead, he relies on a self-described “community marketing strategy” that entails a carefully curated social media presence and viral approach that positions and encourages customers to act as co-marketers. Don described the foundation of the strategy as follows:

Customers out in the community are my best spokespeople. Their word is so powerful and they want to share their excitement and connect others with the bread and grain community. It is their community and they feel like they own it and are responsible for it.

As a core element of the bakery’s CSBM, the marketing strategy centers on value-driven plot lines that Don routinely introduces through carefully designed social media posts. His design approach entails a branded form that relies on visually appealing images that are heavily framed by community values, and they include few, if any, market-driven elements that openly push sales. The images are typically accompanied by concise, community-oriented phrasing and a series of social media hashtags that tie the posts into broader, yet locally focused community-, food-, and agriculture-based conversations. An 27 April 2022 post of Don standing in a lush field holding heritage grains helps illustrate this branded form. The caption accompanying the picture reads “I’ve built my company from the seed up . . . seed to eat. Visiting the crops and seeding loaves of bread. I’m so grateful for my community support.” Among the series of nine hashtags linked to the post are #communitysupportedbaker, #localgrain, and #breadforthepeople. The series also includes a hashtag for and URL weblink to a locally owned farm at which the baker is standing and from which he sources much of the heritage grains he uses at the bakery. Together,

the social media posts sustain an open narrative structure that is curated to evolve into collective storylines via customer participation.

The bakery's social media environment is lively with its curation involving a series of recurrent themes that alternate between product promotion, community celebration and education, community-wide collaborations, and episodic posts of the baker spending time with his family, recreating, and attending community events. In describing his rationale for including such personal posts in his social media strategy, Don stated,

For them to buy into what I am asking them to do with my business, they have to be connected to me in ways that are just about paying me for good bread. I want to a certain degree for them to be involved in my life and the me and the bread to be part of theirs. I want them to get a look into who I am as both their baker and neighbor.

Promotion posts typically include carefully crafted photos of the Don making or holding a loaf of one of the nearly 30 breads he offers, such as the image of him holding a "Locavore" loaf that includes an iconic desert image of a saguaro cactus stenciled in flour (see Figure 1). The bakery website describes the Locavore bread as "100% naturally leavened whole grain bread showcasing three organic, local [farm supplier] flours . . . A true taste of the farm." Community celebration and education posts laud the history, cultural significance, and environmental importance of local and regional heritage grains, as well as promote community connectedness and sense of place via local food production and consumption. For example, an 20 October 2022 post features a "Day of the Bread" event that celebrates the Mexican holiday Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), exalts Tucson's recognition as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, and publicizes a community organization that provides children who have lost a parent with grief counseling and recovery support. Collaboration posts are carefully designed to highlight Don's role in building and sustaining the southern AZ local food system and especially its local grain economy. (Recall the previous example of an 27 April 2022 post that links to a local supplier of heritage grains.) Together, the social media posts form a carefully curated platform from which Don's (and his bakery's) commercial and community identities are co-created and sustained by the telling and re-telling of growth stories.



Figure 1. Promotion photo of stenciled Locavore bread.

The Barrio Bread social media environment enables the development and distribution of growth stories. Customers actively share and comment on posts that create vibrant

community dialogue that promotes the bakery, sometimes compliment and other times heroize Don, and underscore connections between the bakery, its bread, and the southern AZ community and environment. For example, a customer posed the following question in response to a promotion post related to the bakery being highly ranked among the nation's top bakeries: "How do you keep from having it [recognition] go to your head?" The baker responded, "I do it for my community, not myself." Another customer closed this brief dialogue thread by stating, "This is why everyone loves you. You are the real deal . . . We are so lucky Tucson is your home!" Table 1 provides additional examples of customer responsiveness to Don's social media posts.

Table 1. Customer comments to bakery social media posts.

Customer Comment to Post	Post-Type	Date of Post
"Please don't ever leave our neighborhood! Your bakery is part of the heart of Tucson."	Bakery promotion	21 October 2022
"The community really benefits from your dream . . . I know I have, and I appreciate it."	Bakery promotion	23 November 2021
"[Don] got me started making heritage sourdough bread 4 years ago. It's the community spirit and gift from [baker] when we share our bread with friends and family."	Community celebration and education	4 August 2022
"Synergy, peace, & happiness for all!!! You are the bountiful cornucopia of our community [baker]."	Community Celebration and education	13 May 2019
"What a dream! Thank you for all your hard work. I'm so proud of you and I'm so proud of all the chefs of Tucson for making a culinary scene what it is. I love where I live!"	Collaboration	19 May 2022
"Your commitment to sourcing locally when possible and encouraging more local resources with the collaboration with [local farm] is a beautiful move toward and support for future sustainability. Thank you for this localizing work—and thank you for amazing bread."	Collaboration	16 December 2016

Customers also create their own posts that are then linked to the bakery's social media sites. Customer-led posts typically express appreciation for the baker's bread and his role as a community innovator. The following post from Phillip on 20 September 2022 illustrates this pattern:

The range of breads Barrio produces is impressive but even more so are owner [baker's full name] efforts to support the cultivation of rare heirloom varieties of wheat that are uniquely suited to our Sonoran desert environment. When I shopped today the woman in front of me bought a half-dozen bags of Don's proprietary flours and no loaves of bread. He thanked her for supporting the local grain economy—without taking the slightest credit for having pretty much single-handedly created it! We're very lucky to live here.

In some cases, comments turn to public exchange between customers and the baker.

As customer-driven growth stories, posts such as this, in addition to customer responses to Don's own posts, reinforce the values, practices, and vision underlying the bakery's

CSBM and work to sustain and scale a local consumption space in which others can observe and further engage in community dialogue and collective storytelling.

While uncommon, customers do occasionally post critical comments. The baker reacts to these relatively rare instances openly, treating them as opportunities for learning and engagement. For instance, a customer posted the following comment on 25 September 2022: “Your bread is delicious, but you have very bad customer service. I hope you can improve in that aspect.” The baker’s responded with “Write me an email and explain so I can understand.” Don described his approach to critical comments is intended to “diffuse their [customer] frustrations, make sure they feel heard, and be open to whatever suggestions they may have. Community requires openness from me and everyone else.” In general, Don purposefully empowers his customers as collective storytellers and in doing so further mobilizes community engagement and support for the bakery and the local food system (including the burgeoning local grain economy)—hallmark activities of both community and cultural entrepreneurship.

5.3. Experiential Connectedness

Collective storytelling within the virtual environment of social media translates to experiential connectedness at the bakery itself. Recall the daily customer queue, which Fredrick and others in the sample joyfully refer to as the “Tucson breadline.” While not all participants are enamored with the line, most are. The appeal originates with the sense of belonging that is created while waiting. Fredrick says,

It is interesting to see how the line is a great equalizer and brings people who don’t always know each other together. There’s always storytelling going on with information being shared that and builds community. The urgency you feel when you first get in line goes away very quickly!

Similarly, Henry says,

I was at first reluctant to brave the line, but all the word-of-mouth and internet praise pushed me to give it a shot. I now look forward to it [the line] and the stories I hear. People do not just talk about the bread and also how long they’ve been a customer, but also about other local food places, things to do around town, their travels, community issues, and on and on. It is now a form of entertainment and way to make new relationships!

Fredrick’s and Henry’s experiences illustrate the influence gathering and waiting for bread has on the co-creation and blending of growth stories and the connectedness between the bakery and its consumption community.

The creation, blending, and transmission of customer-led growth stories opens a sense of community to not only those living and working in southern AZ but also those who are visiting or are new to the region. Wanda says,

The conversations that stand out for me are talking to people who are visiting from out of town who were told they had to stand in line to experience this part of Tucson and its diversity. I remember a conversation with a woman who was from Eastern Europe who was super excited that he [baker] baked rye and that the community vibe of the bakery reminded her of home. How special is that?!

Wanda’s description points to participatory elements of the CSBM that empower customers as value co-creators who catalyze and sustain elements of community and individual belonging. While community is sparked and sustained through collective experiences and live storytelling, belongingness is often more intimate and far reaching. For instance, Julien fondly relates the Barrio Bread experience to his time bartering for bread with street vendors in Vietnam during the 1960s, Katalin links her bakery experiences to the vibrant bread culture in the Ukrainian community where she was raised, and Aimee is reminded of the village bakeries in her home region in western France. The mixing of community and individual belongingness in support of a sustainable local consumption space is dependent on in-person shopping experiences that actualize the product aesthetics

and internalize the core values conveyed and shared through the bakery's social media presence.

Connectedness between bakery customers and the resulting sense of community begins with the acceptance and in many cases celebration of otherness, is reinforced and extended through collective storytelling, and is actualized and internalized through in-person consumption routines. As value co-creators, the customers come to believe that their consumption experiences with the bakery are not replicable outside of the southern AZ region. For example, Hannah says, "I find it [bakery] unique to Tucson . . . it's just different and a lot of people are beginning to realize it. I think the world is beginning to realize it and know they have to come here to experience it." Most of the study participants consider the bakery an attraction for family and friends from outside the region to experience when they visit. Subsequently, the bread becomes a traditional gift that is frozen and shipped to friends and family or brought along during out-of-region travel. Naomi says, "I love giving bread to those I love who live elsewhere. It's a way to share the special flavor of Tucson with those who can't be here to fully taste and experience it." Likewise, Nate says,

When we go from AZ to Illinois, we always stop [at the bakery] . . . we fill up the car with bread and bring it back to neighbors and friends. Barrio Bread is exclusive to here [southern AZ] but known and loved across the country!

Like the role customers play in marketing the bakery as collective storytellers, so too do they contribute to the brand recognition and product reach of the bakery extending beyond the geographic boundaries of the southern AZ region. On the whole, the normalization turned celebration of the so-called breadline and the unique experiences it creates further motivates and empowers customers to act as community builders who signal, reinforce, and perpetuate the bakery's consumer culture and the power of its otherness.

Customers are embedded in the bakery marketing model in one final experientially based way. Specifically, Don periodically offers classes on making breads with live cultures. Customers learn the science and craft behind the process, receive a live culture of their own, and are shown how to bake with flour made from local heritage grains (and sold through the Barrio Grain spin-off). Nearly half of the study participants had at the time of data collection completed at least one "breaducation" course, most of whom now bake bread in their homes. They often give their loaves away to friends, families, and neighbors and when doing so give credit to the bakery and its products—especially the heritage grain flour sold through the Barrio Grain spin-off. For instance, Christopher says,

I am getting better and better at using his [Don's] flour and now give my breads away to others as a calling card of sorts for the bakery. I always say this is good but you have to go to the bakery for the really great bread. Some of the breads that he bakes down there [bakery], I mean, only he can do that. And, it's a treat to go down there.

Christopher and all the other participants who took a class and now bake their own bread at home continue to go to the bakery, whether to buy bread, heritage flour, or often both. The inclusion of education in the bakery's CSBM provides an additional hands-on element to the consumer experience, builds demand for the baker's heritage flour products, and further empowers customers as community-based marketers.

6. Discussion

6.1. Implications for Theory and Research

Analysis reveals an ascending dynamic that sustains and scales a local consumption space that is firmly rooted in community and a collective sense of place. This dynamic is largely the outcome of a CSBM that is intentionally facilitated by a master artisan baker turned community and cultural entrepreneur. Figure 2 represents the ascending dynamic as a value co-creation model that begins with the baker continually leveraging his reputation and the brand identity of his bakery to legitimize the otherness of his CSBM. This ongoing legitimization upholds and strengthens the foundation of a vibrant local consumption space and facilitates the scaling of its reach and impact. The next progression in the

model layers in empowerment through the strategic curation and maintenance of a social media platform that is designed to vest customers in the value co-creation process. The final progression works to internalize a sense of community and belongingness within customers through the experiential connectedness that (re)occurs throughout in-person consumption routines. Such internalization sustains customer loyalties and participation in the value co-creation process. Note the elements build and recur in a synergistic manner, as indicated by the sets of bi-directional arrows within the empowerment and internalization and sustainment progression boxes in Figure 2. The continual recurrence of these elements works to sustain the Barrio Bread local consumption space and as will be discussed next, scale its community impacts.

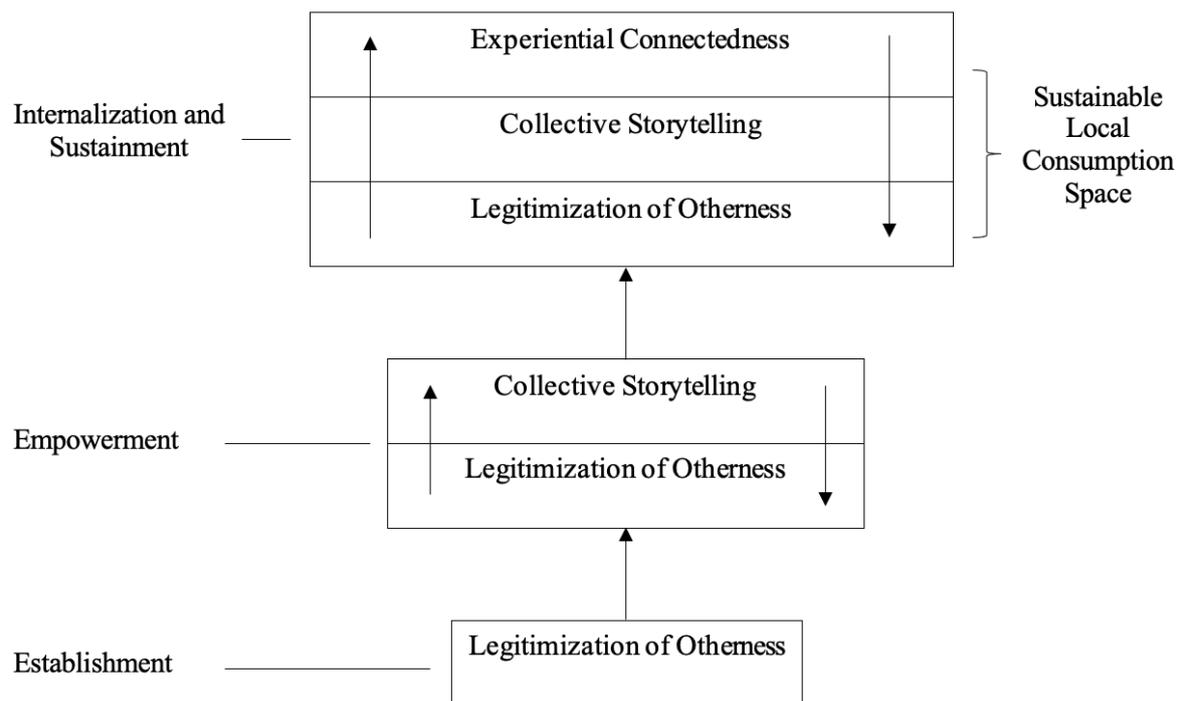


Figure 2. Ascending co-creation model for local consumption space sustainability and scalability.

The scale of impact via local food entrepreneurship is inherently limited by a commitment to confining production and consumption to geographically defined boundaries [16]. Of particular concern is the risk of scaling beyond localized boundaries leading to the dilution or altogether abandonment of the cultural, economic, environmental, and social values that drive the local food movement [1,8]. The ascending dynamic enacted through the Barrio Bread CSBM offers the community development and local food literatures an example of how community and cultural entrepreneurship can enhance capacities to scale operations and increase impacts without compromising the alternative, socially oriented principles of localized food enterprises.

The empowerment of customers as value co-creators, and more specifically co-branders and co-marketers, not only reduces the financial costs of conventional marketing campaigns but more importantly deepens community-wide trust in the bakery's expansion activities. The sense of connection and belonging that customers develop over time leads them to engage in pro-social citizenship behaviors (e.g., gifting bread, creating promotional blog posts) [63] that help offset the risks and resistance local food entrepreneurs such as Don may otherwise assume when experimenting and scaling on the margins. This co-creation effect is best evidenced by customers embracing and promoting the Barrio Bread spin-off project aimed at bolstering the local grain economy and building consumer demand for the heritage flours now sold alongside the breads. The gains resulting from the early success of the spin-off include: (1) elevating public awareness and consumer demand for locally

sourced, heritage grains, (2) strengthening networks that compose the southern AZ local food system through increased partnerships with local and regional farmers and millers, and (3) establishing an additional line of revenue for the bakery without scaling beyond localized boundaries.

Local food entrepreneurship has largely been examined through lenses that emphasize outcomes and impacts as well as critique the efficacies and merits of market-based inventions aimed at food system transformation [13–15]. Here, I add to this literature a theoretical model for sustaining and scaling local consumption spaces through an entrepreneur–customer value co-creation dynamic. Rather than viewing local food entrepreneurs as profit-seeking actors or social change agents who “do” on the behalf of others (i.e., social entrepreneurs) [10], I have instead illuminated a more multifaceted role that blends the legitimizing function of a cultural entrepreneur with the mobilization and empowerment function of a community entrepreneur [35–37,45,46]. This combination provides a strategic process for empowering customers as value co-creators and internalizing their commitments to local food enterprise as both a consumption resource and community asset. Internalized commitments of customer co-creators not only stand to help local food entrepreneurs increase their likelihood of market success but equally importantly, they enhance the capacities to scale their reach and subsequent pro-community impacts.

In this article, I rely on an outlier case that features an established local food enterprise that benefits from the reputation of a James Beard Award-winning baker and the widely recognized brand identity of his bakery. The outlying features of the case enabled theory building specific to *sustaining* and *scaling* local food consumption spaces, which are persistent challenges to long-term economic viability and the sustained impact of local food ventures [8,16]. Specifically, the underlying nuances and strategies of the CSBM featured here reveals how established local food entrepreneurs can wield their brand identity and legitimacy in both community- and market-centric ways. While the case is an outlier, the potential transferability of the findings is nonetheless promising given local food movement advocates and leaders are known for publicly lauding successful local food entrepreneurs as heroes and heroines [27]. Yet, future studies that theorize how legitimacy is gained and used to create (as opposed to sustain) local consumption spaces during venture start-up are encouraged.

Here, the community- and cultural-oriented elements of an entrepreneurial process for sustaining local food firms and scaling the associated pro-community impacts via customer value co-creation have been empirically explored and theorized. To the author’s knowledge, this is the first study to couple the strategic intentions of a local food entrepreneur with the experiences and perspectives of customers who act as their value co-creators. The core contribution to the grand narrative of community development and local food is a novel and otherwise absent theoretical perspective and model specific to how local food entrepreneurs may work alongside customers as co-creators to escape the local trap and overcome the dilemma of scale without neglecting commitments to the generation of pro-community impacts.

6.2. Implications for Practice

Practitioners also stand to benefit from a deeper understanding of the community and cultural entrepreneurship and value co-creation processes. Established local food entrepreneurs are encouraged to use the insights generated here to deploy their brand identities more intentionally in terms of business sustainment and the scaling and maximization of pro-community impacts. Similarly, emergent entrepreneurs are advised to purposefully embed customer co-creation in their startup strategies with customers serving as legitimizing agents and vocal sources of credibility as opposed to coincidental beneficiaries and sideline champions via more pedestrian platforms (e.g., Foursquare, Google Customer Reviews, Yelp). Finally, community developers and local food system managers (e.g., local agriculture and food advocacy groups, local business development agencies and entrepreneurial startup incubators) are urged to serve as system-level value co-creators.

For example, these community leaders are strategically positioned to coordinate and aggregate the legitimacy of the local food entrepreneur community, facilitating system-wide collective storytelling (as opposed to firm-specific collective storytelling), and reinforcing the internalization and sustainability of community-wide local food consumption routines, spaces, and impacts.

7. Conclusions

This study has provided a new theoretical perspective on value co-creation and the enhanced capacities of local food entrepreneurs to sustain their firms and scale their pro-community impacts within the confinements of localized marketspaces. Specifically, consumers are shown to be viable partners (as opposed to passive participants and/or recipients) in the entrepreneurial persistence and sustained impact of local food firms. The entrepreneurial dimensions of the local food movement are further revealed through new insights on the complex dynamic between community- and market-based strategies. These new insights have informed the development of a value co-creation model specific to local consumption space sustainability and scalability. The insights and resulting model further complicate ongoing debates over the community, environmental, and social ideals that inform the local food movement agenda and the market realities that shape the practices and performance of local food entrepreneurs. While the author does not assert a market fundamentalist view, the need for more holistic, nuanced views of the entrepreneurial processes that help sustain and scale the pro-community impacts of the local food movement such as what has been revealed is argued for.

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