Can it be both? Local Food Initiatives for Social and Environmental Change in Communities

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Introduction

Peak oil, global climate change, increasing social exclusion, rising inequality – the list of crises from local to global continues to grow. It is becoming increasingly clear that the root of these crises is based on our failure to adequately integrate social and environmental concerns into decision-making at a variety of scales. Sustainable development offers one approach that has proven to be successful at integrating environmental and economic concerns (i.e. green jobs, eco-efficiency) and has spurred action for creating the conditions for the 'green' economy to thrive, yet has largely failed to address social concerns.

Sustainable community development (SCD) initiatives can be characterized as existing along a spectrum from weak to strong. The tendency is to focus on weaker approaches to SCD (e.g. focus on efficiency, environmental protection / conservation). It is an incremental approach that does not challenge existing power structures and is able to accommodate market based mechanisms to spur more environmentally conscious behaviour. However, it has very little to say in the area of social justice. The weaker approach to sustainability is where Canadian communities have had the most success (i.e. single sector green issues such as improved water quality, air quality, green building, waste management, land use planning and growth management, etc.). Strong sustainability approaches on the other hand place greater emphasis on social of development rather than growth and on the transformative potential for SCD to shift the way that we value people - environment interactions. This is an area that receives much verbal commitment in planning policies, yet very little in terms of action. Sustainable community development (SCD) has potential to provide a framework for transformative change for communities, but in order to avoid being labelled greenwashing or trickling-down of economic opportunities, it need to focus on the potential for social and environmental linkages that challenge the status quo.

Government re-structuring and the erosion of the welfare-state has placed increasing demands on the social economy (i.e. household economy, voluntary economy, non-profit sector and social enterprises) to provide goods and services in our communities. The social economy has been effective at filling gaps by providing support to marginalized individuals and communities through job training enterprises and affordable housing, yet has struggled to scale up, transform and provide alternative versions of the economy and rarely incorporates environmental considerations into initiatives.

Social economy initiatives have also been described as existing along a spectrum; from weak to strong, shallow to deep, or from high road to low road (see Lewis and Sweeney, 2007)[1]. Weak social economy approaches are

[1] Lewis, M., & Swinney, D. (2007). Social Economy and Solidarity Economy. *Making Waves, 18*(4), 9-15.

criticized for not addressing transformation, minimal attention to environmental concerns and often work to maintain existence on the margins of the larger capitalist system, and in fact embrace that system in its approach. Strong social economy approaches are based on explicit commitment to creating a different sort of economy – "one with a different approach to the organisation of work and production and the distribution of surplus" (Lloyd, 2007, p. 68)[2] in order to meet social, environmental and community objectives.

As Soots and Gismondi (2009) demonstrate, there exists considerable potential for bridging these two approaches, bringing more environmental considerations into the social economy and expanding the impact of sustainability initiatives by drawing from the social economy. But how do we explore this potential? What types of initiatives have potential to merge the transformative potential of sustainable community development and the social economy?

This research uses local food initiatives focused on creating just and sustainable local food systems from two Canadian cities as a lens to address the above questions. In Edmonton, a good food box initiative has served as the focal point for addressing local food security at the city level, while in Vancouver, local food organizations have mobilized around the creation of a local food hub to establish the infrastructure required for transformation of the food system. These case studies provide opportunities to explore the potential, challenges and barriers of local food initiatives to serve as catalysts for creating communities that are more socially just and environmentally friendly. Hopefully, these initiatives can offer conceptual insights and pragmatic policy-relevant information concerning the broader question of how to bridge and mutually inform SCD and social economy processes. The research has important implications for understanding the catalysts for change, the social infrastructure require and the role and opportunities for collaboration across the social economy and sustainable community development that can contribute to community transformation.

Local Food Initiatives

Much has been written recently that exposes some of the problems associated with our existing food system (see for example films such as Food Inc. and popular books such as In Defence of Food). Local food initiatives have blossomed as a sector of activity with a specific focus on expanding alternative approaches and transforming the conventional approach to the way we produce and consume food. The explosion of public interest in food system initiatives is multi-faceted (ranging from interest in the 100-mile diet, peak oil and climate change, re-localization of economic activity, preservation of farm land and farm employment, organic food, health and equity). However, the fundamental characteristics that link local food movements to strong sustainability and strong social economy approaches are the concepts of localness, embeddedness and values-based transformation.

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[2] Lloyd, P. (2007). The social economy in the new political context. In *Social Economy: Building Inclusive Economies*. OECD pp. 61-90.

A key similarity between strong sustainability and strong social economy approaches to social, environmental and economic problems is the "turn to the local", with emphasis on place-based and community-based responses to local and global problems. Attempts to embed food systems in particular places are a key strategy behind the movement to create shorter value chains between consumers and producers (Goodman, 2003[3]; Winter, 2003[4]). The notion of embeddedness is a key driving force behind the success of alternative food systems based on aspects of reciprocity, trust, transparency and accountability that are critical components to the notion of local food being more natural and healthier.

However, as Born and Purcell (2006) demonstrate, "localness" of a food system should not be seen as having any inherent qualities –it is merely a strategy that can be applied by any group of actors to advance particular agendas. For this reason, local food initiatives benefit from explicit linkages to the value-based commitments of strong approaches to social economy and sustainable community development.

Despite the increasing growth and attention to farmers markets, CSAs, local food box programmes, etc., alternative food systems geared towards local production and consumption still remain small-scale when contrasted with conventional food systems. The key challenge facing local food initiatives is how to scale-up alternative food systems so that they have a transformational impact on the much larger conventional food system. For example, while the rapid growth of organic food production highlights a shift in the way food is produced (sales estimated to be $1.1-1.3 billion in 2006)[5], it still only accounts for less than 1% of total food sales in Canada. Of this total, only 7% of organic food sales ($70 million) are sold directly through farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) projects or food box programs.

The issue of scaling up provides the rationale for two case studies from Canadian cities that seek to expand access to local food beyond direct sales at farmers markets by addressing the missing infrastructure that links local food production to consumption. By providing local food system infrastructure (such as distribution, warehousing, cold storage, small-scale processing opportunities), these initiatives hope to scale-up local food production in a way that is more environmentally responsible and more socially just. The following section provides a description of the Good Food Box in Edmonton and of Local Food First in Vancouver initiatives and the challenges and barriers that they face in re-

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[3] Goodman, D. (2003). The quality `turn' and alternative food practices: reflections and agenda. Journal of Rural Studies, 19(1), 1-7.

[4] Winter, M. (2003). Embeddedness, the new food economy and defensive localism. *Journal of Rural Studies,* 19(1), 23-32.

[5] Christianson, R., E. A. Clark, R. MacRae, M. L. Morgan and J. Sumner. 2010. *Ontario's Local Organic Food Cooperatives: Baseline Market Research*.

building the local food infrastructure. It is based on interviews with key stakeholders and reviews of project documents conducted in early 2010.

The Good Food Box, Edmonton

The Good Food Box, in Edmonton Alberta, was set up as a social enterprise in 2009. It was designed to increase the availability of locally produced food for all families in the Edmonton area beyond the availability of weekly farmer's markets. The objectives of the project were to provide convenient access to affordable fresh produce to Edmonton residents, provide fair market value to producers, to expand marketing and distribution for producers beyond the farmers markets, be accessible to all and to create jobs for low income residents. The pilot project ran for 6 continuous weeks of delivery in 2009, and was expanded to the entire growing season for 2010. The idea at proposal stage was to evolve into a fully independent cooperative.

The GFB emerged at a time when there was considerable local level organizing in opposition to redevelopment of agricultural land in the North-East part of the City. A broad-based citizen's movement was successful at using opposition to North-East redevelopment to raise awareness of problems with the existing food system and to link food and land use policy for city planners, politicians and the broader public. The GFB was able to build on the emerging enthusiasm for local food and to effectively link concerns over redevelopment with the local food system more generally.

The project was originally designed for 110 participants, but when they put out a call for interest, over 1000 people signed up. The project delivered a selection of fresh produce to 236 people per week, 31 of which were subsidized for low-income clients of the Edmonton Food bank. Customer surveys at the end of the year indicated that 88% of participants were extremely or very satisfied with the quality of the produce and the price. When asked why they participated, the number primary response was to support local farmers (63%) and the secondary response was to support local food security (53%).

The GFB has since been expanded for the 2010 season to include a pre-order purchasing site that connects consumers to all of the products that are available at the farmer's market. It is no longer being run explicitly as a social enterprise (a local non-profit organization dedicated to supporting independent and local businesses in the Edmonton area is currently managing the program). It is still committed to organic and sustainable production, but is no longer limited to locally sourced products, rather businesses that operate locally. The program has also expanded to cater towards more towards niche foodie and middle-class markets with prices that reflect those demographics. For example, consumers are able to purchase prepared meals, seafood, meats, seasonings, chocolates, breads and vegetables – all of which improves the convenience for local food consumers.

Moving to on-line pre-order sales provides opportunities to scale-up connections between local producers and consumers and provides a critical mass that makes further investments in the local food infrastructure viable. For example, securing warehousing space with cold storage, additional delivery trucks and additional labour would not be feasible based on the numbers involved with the GFB project alone and without that critical infrastructure, it was impossible to expand the GFB to more participants and neighbourhoods.

Key Challenges and Barriers:

Collaboration across the food Chain:

- The existing food system provides little opportunity for collaboration. Growers, consumers, institutional buyers, processors and restaurant owners have limited opportunities to interact and as a result personal relationships and connections have been removed in favour of pursuing efficiencies and economies of scale. However, it is the qualities of trust, reciprocity and collaboration that are critical for re-building the food system. Producers need to work together to create a sense of interdependency rather than competition so that the significant costs, risks and benefits of investing in local food infrastructure can be shared.

Consumer access and awareness of local food:

- There are few venues to conveniently access local food beyond the weekly farmers markets. As a result, consumers committed to supporting local food systems find themselves shopping at Safeway in the middle of the week because it is convenient.
- The trade-offs, costs and benefits between standardized global food systems and flexible localized food system need to be more apparent to consumers. If consumers really want a more resilient food system, they need to be willing to accept that food is not a standardized product such as toilet paper. It will come in different shapes, sizes and tastes.

Distribution of local food

- Local farmers and producers have limited options through which they can market their goods to local customers and those that exist are labour intensive. For example, selling at the farmers market provides direct access to consumers, but also takes the farmer off the farm at critical points of the growing season. The lack of local food wholesalers make it difficult to access the restaurant industry because restaurants need to buy from multiple producers, yet need general parameters around similar quality, size, shape, flavour, etc.
- There's a complete lack for distribution for local food outside FM and FG sales. Some have managed to get around and sell directly to restaurants, but it takes them away from their general task which should be farming. No other career do they expect you to be a bookkeeper, salesman, etc. No other career do you have to do all of that, we just hire people for that. There's a real lack of a distribution system within Edmonton, and this is

seen as the way to build the connection between the farmers and the consumers that want to buy the product, an alternative distribution system to Safeway and such.

Range of local food products

- The Edmonton climate and the lack of small-scale processing facilities results in seasonal limitations of local products. Farmers markets are focused on produce, with limited opportunities for value added products (such as sauces, soups, canned goods) or protein items that could provide higher margins to producers and increase the range of local products available to consumers.

Institutional buying / Public sector purchasing

- Institutional buyers such as local government, health authorities, schools, etc. are concerned about guaranteed supply. In order to shift institutional buying to local food, there has to be an increase in production. Right now, the focus has to be on smaller scale institutional buyers to slowly build up supply, infrastructure and confidence in the production of local food. Farmers can not respond immediately to large changes in demand or shifts in products. The costs associated with shifting or expanding production are significant (land, facilities, equipment, labour, etc.) require a longer time frame and can not be paid back over short time frames.

Access to Land

- Most of the farmers market producers are on rented land that is land banked by developers. As a result, their location is precarious from year to year and there is no incentive to invest in physical infrastructure to scale-up production. Unless you have secure access to land, you can not establish distribution systems, value-added processing, infrastructure like greenhouses, storage and packing facilities, etc. The Good Food box served as a critical catalyst in opening a public discussion about the threat of agricultural land re-zoning and through partnerships with the Greater Edmonton Alliance was successful on placing it on the local political agenda. As a result, the City of Edmonton is including discussion of local food as part of drafting a new municipal development plan.

Perceived costs of local food

- The customer base for the GFB are committed to local food and recognize the additional costs and limited choices initially are a price to be paid to invest in long term resiliency. However, local food is still viewed as an elite undertaking. Those that shop at the farmers market can afford to pay the costs in terms of price and time to access local food, however, the bulk of the charity food system relies on overly processed and food waste from large-scale grocery stores, where the focus is securing the largest quantity of food at the lowest possible price.

Risk management

- There is a need and movement to develop strategic collaborations among producers to share and address those risks. For example, the movement to shared distribution system requires producers to think of the bigger picture in terms of advancing a more resilient food system. It is not a question of seeing each other as competition and conflicts between producers, but rather an opportunity to increase options and connections to consumers.
- Farmers are no more individualistic than any other small business owner. The reality is that they have their livelihood tied up in their venture and it is not something that they are willing to put on the line for speculative ventures that might work down the road, regardless of the long-term value, it is simply to risky. They want proven solutions that work. Values are important, they are not something that will take over the reality that they need to make their business work.

Vancouver Local Food Hub / New City Market

In 2005, the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority released the Vancouver Food System Assessment (2005) that set out to assess food security in Vancouver by examining the availability, accessibility and acceptability of food provided by charitable, community and retail sectors and to suggest local policies that would make the food system more sustainable. The report identified two related challenges to creating a local food system that was more just and more sustainable. First, it found that food security issues are unevenly distributed throughout Vancouver and that community initiatives to address food security (community kitchens, good food boxes, community gardens, etc.) tend not to be located in the most food insecure neighbourhoods. Secondly, the report identified the need for re-investment in local food infrastructure as a key barrier to improving the development of a more sustainable local food system and found that the experience from other jurisdictions indicated that social enterprises and supportive policies could drive this re-investment on a system-wide basis.

Specifically, the report recommended the need for City of Vancouver policy development and reform to support local food systems and encourage the expansion of retail food offerings of local food through coops, good neighbour programs, farmers markets and mobile stores to address the uneven access to local food throughout all neighbourhoods. The report also called for the development of new community-based initiatives to build capacity, strengthen partnerships, coordinate research, organize training, promote opportunities and build infrastructure through a Food Enterprise Development Centre.

Local Initiative for Food Enterprise (LIFE), an alliance of individuals, organizations and businesses committed to generating opportunities for increased local food production and consumption through a community-owned food value chain emerged to take these recommendations forward and was particularly active in exploring the potential of social enterprises in catalyzing

change across the local food system. The organizations involved in LIFE included Farm Folk City Folk, Canadian Centre for Community Resilience, Fraser Harvest Box, United Community Services Cooperative, Coast Mental Health, Fresh Ideas and Solutions, BC - CHEFS, SPUD and Green Table Network.

Some of the individuals from LIFE were also involved in a separate discussion about re-localizing the economy. They questioned why a big-box store could provide one-stop shopping for products from all over the globe, yet if you were committed to supporting your local economy, you had to search all over the city to find local products. They imagined what it would be like if there was a single site where multiple retailers, producers and organizations committed to local economies could co-locate "to buy, sell and be local."

This was the basis of the Buy-Local Store project that received funding from Vancity Community Foundation to conduct a scoping and feasibility study to i) assess the potential of various new market actor types and existing business models, ii) mobilize and engage community stakeholders, and iii) assess the key criteria for moving forward (i.e. location, financing, partnerships etc.). The project was a partnership between the SFU Centre for Sustainable Community Development, Farm Folk / City Folk and BALLE BC.

Stakeholder meetings were held with 35 individuals representing 30 local organizations in early 2007. One of the stakeholder groups involved in those meetings was Local Initiatives for Food Enterprise (LIFE), an alliance of individuals and organizations committed to increasing opportunities which increase food production and consumption of local food by developing a community owned food value chain organized around social entrepreneurship. The focus shifted to local food issues, local food barriers and potential market actors. Five new market actors were identified that were crucial for improving access to local food:

- Broker and Marketing Network
- Warehousing and Distribution System
- Processing Kitchen and Training Centre
- Buy Local Retail Store
- Sustainable Food Systems Cluster Hub

These early meetings confirmed that action was needed in all of these areas and that work was being done to varying degrees by a number of different organizations. The Sustainable Food Systems Cluster Hub was identified as a mechanism that could catalyze further partnerships and scale up across the food system. Funding was obtained from Coast Capital and Vancity to assess the regional economic landscape and market transformation needs for a local food system cluster hub that could serve business, organizations and associations in expanding their partnerships and collectively addressing gaps in the current local food system.

This provided the catalyst to create Local Food First (LFF), a multi-stakeholder, collaborative initiative whose mission is to build and strengthen a just and sustainable local food system. Throughout 2007, LFF hosted and engaged in a range of interviews, workshops and community consultations with farmers, food-based businesses, development organizations, funders and government to identify the key leverage points for re-orienting our local food system along sustainability principles.

These various research, partnership development, engagement and outreach activities confirmed the need to re-build the local food system and re-develop local food value chains that provide farmers with more direct access to the growing local food market.

Key Challenges and Barriers

Knowledge and awareness of local food system:

- Overall knowledge and awareness of the local food system for consumers is limited. The reality is that the supply of local food does not meet demand and much of the supply is seasonal and limited in protein. These are severe limitations in the context of consumers that have become accustomed to "food on demand" at a price that does not reflect the true cost of the product. However, given the increasing attention to local food and the value attached to local food, an opportunity exists to provide for local value-added products and processed products.
- Despite this opportunity to brand local food, there is confusion around the multitude of brands in the local market and the meaning of "local". The opportunities and challenges of collaboration with multiple stakeholders with diverse interests can be addressed by developing a a shared / collaborative marketing and branding strategy that could provide increase opportunities for all.

Wholesale buying / food service industry engagement:

- The food service industry was identified as a key component for shifting consumption towards local food and providing a stable source of sales for producers. However, concerns from food service actors were raised about reliability of supply and the lack of local food distribution system that would improve efficiency and access to local food for the food service industry. From a producer perspective, coordination and collaboration amongst farmers for what to grow and facilities for processing and prepping food were key barriers to increasing supply for the food service industry.
- Meet Your Maker was designed to stimulate the market for locally-produced food by connecting food producers/suppliers with regional food buying businesses; an on-the-spot local food business networking and contract-catalyzing event for BC's food producers, processors, distributors and commercial buyers. The events helped to develop and solidify relationships between food producers and retail buyers / chefs, resulting in

new business contacts, immediate sale contracts and education for both producers and buyers on the challenges that they both face in advancing local food.

Access to resources

- Existing range of grants and sources of capital does not meet the realities of small-scale businesses that are the heart of local food production. Local food has to make economic sense, and government grants and investment funds that are geared more toward export-oriented agriculture does not help to address the imbalance of funding for local food systems (i.e. large public subsidies for transport, guaranteed pricing, etc.).
- There is a need for funders and financiers to increase collaboration and develop a more comprehensive strategy on how all of the various actors (funders, non-profits, industry associations, etc.) can work together in support of a more sustainable local food system.

Local food infrastructure:

- Without the local food infrastructure in place, such as wholesale and retail marketing, office space, cold storage, small-scale processing facilities, small-scale distribution systems, etc., the start-up costs for new food enterprises committed to local food are prohibitive. The capital costs of local food infrastructure are cost prohibitive for any one enterprise to undertake on its own.

Capacity building and coordination

- The key issue from an economic development perspective is how to address the issue of scale - imported food enjoys economies of scale that simply can not be replicated locally by individual producers. The challenge is how do you get producers working together to justify the dedicated food system elements that can support local food along the value chain? Key lesson is the need for collaboration and to build capacity, which should be a central function of the local food hub, building the social capital for local food, which can result in capacity building for the development of physical capital to support it.
- In terms of institutional purchasing there is a definite interest in buying local however it requires huge amounts of time and resources to track all of the multiple small scale local suppliers compared to going to existing large brokers such as Sysco etc.

Local food supply limitations

- Challenges with increasing supply of local food include training and skill development for new farmers, access to land (particularly for small and medium farms), access to labour and access to storage and distribution systems. The high cost of land and infrastructure make it very difficult for farmers to address these issues. There needs to be greater government support at all levels to allow ALR land to be used productively. Farmland

succession needs to be addressed. How can we maintain the productivity of existing farmland, provide opportunities for the next generation of farmers to access land and also ensure retirement opportunities for aging farmers?

Outcomes and Future Directions

Each of these barriers and challenges highlight the need for changes to local food systems across the value chain and highlighted critical gaps in terms of physical and social infrastructure to support increased food security across the region. A critical component is the need to identify a new, permanent home for the Winter Farmer's Market. As a result, in 2009 LFF has begun focusing it's energies on re-building the local food infrastructure based on the Local Food Hub.

The Local Food Hub is envisioned as a physical space that can strengthen connections between consumers and producers and provide functions that model all aspects of a local food system and provide the missing infrastructure that can make local food more accessible for consumers and improve the viability of local farming in terms of fair wages and working conditions. In early 2010, a visioning session was held with over 100 stakeholders to define the key functions and performance areas of the local food hub. The results of the visioning session suggest that the local food hub needs to support small and medium-sized food business, improve coordination in supply, increase efficiency and improve the bottom-line for producers and consumers. The importance of creating a sense of place was also important - model food system in one location, opportunities for food focused citizen engagement and serve as an asset and resource for neighourhood level food projects. The key function of the local food hub will be to provide infrastructure for wholesale / retail purchasing (bypassing supermarkets and international wholesalers that dominate the market), provide opportunities for small-scale food processing and food preparation, storage, distribution and office space. The project is still in the pre-development phase, but negotiations are underway to identify potential sites, exploration of different business and governance models and laying the groundwork for the capital campaign.

Local Food as a Catalyst for Transformative Community Change?

Scaling up – Providing Infrastructure for Change

The case studies described above offer two approaches to re-building the local food system based on principles of sustainability and social justice. First, they are both initiatives that are not simply focused on expanding market access to existing locally-oriented producers, but seek to provide the local food system infrastructure (such as distribution, warehousing, cold storage, small-scale processing opportunities) that can enable the transition of those producers

engaged in export-oriented agriculture towards a more local and sustainable basis. However, the case studies also illustrate some particular challenges associated with moving from visionary ideals to on-the-ground projects in competition and in cooperation with existing food systems.

The literature suggests that the focus of local food initiatives tends to be to de-globalize, de-industrialize and de-scale (Dupuis et al., 2006), and there are certainly numerous small-scale examples in both Edmonton and Vancouver (and elsewhere) where this is the case. However, both the Edmonton and Vancouver cases are explicitly focused on scaling up small-scale initiatives based on principles and values that are quite different from large scale, global and industrial food systems. However, the commitment to the market, entrepreneurship and competition with the existing system pose significant challenges.

As one farmer from Edmonton described, without significant investment in local food infrastructure, scaling-up local production and consumption is crucial but difficult.

> ”There are considerable risks and challenges associated with investing in scaling up local production, and I don’t think those risks can be placed entirely on the back of producers. I’m not willing to put my business on the line for speculative ventures that might work down the road, regardless of their value. It is simply too risky. We want proven solutions that work. Values are important, but they are not something that will take over the business.”

Securing investments (in terms of time, resources, commitment and trust) to scale up local production and consumption results in efforts that are, due to risk management concerns, less transformative. The challenges, costs and risks of scaling-up reduce the big picture transformation potential.

Similarly in Vancouver, Local Food First members are told there is no need to “sell” the idea of the Local Food Hub to the planning department with the City. City planners are supportive of the idea because it addresses core city objectives (for example, Vancouver’s Greenest City initiative). However, when discussing opportunities to work with city-owned land, there is a need to develop a business plan to demonstrate how the initiative is financially viable. On one hand, that is understandable and a reasonable request from the City. Yet if we agree that we need to transform the local food system, we can not be limited to doing it within the constraints of the existing food system that sees food purely as a commodity and where the industrial food system is supported through subsidies from local to global scales. Unless the unequal playing field for local vs. export oriented agriculture is addressed, the business case for local food will always be more difficult. For example, preliminary business case planning for the Local Food Hub suggests that office space makes the most sense economically. Office

space, while important for local food organizations, does not represent the most critical need in scaling up local food system transformation. Resolving the tension between what activities make the most sense from an economic standpoint and those activities that are required for system transformation are difficult.

Shifting Values – Enabling Action for Change

Second, the food systems described above address the behavioural dimensions of creating change. Understanding the long-range objectives of local food initiatives is critical for pragmatic and incremental responses to local food system transformation. Issues of food security, food sovereignty, justice and sustainability are necessary components, yet are also extremely complex social and political issues that are dependent on underlying community values (Feagan, 2008). In both Edmonton and Vancouver, local food initiatives emerged out of a firm commitment to values-based transformation that recognized that existing food systems were not environmentally sustainable, were socially un-just and were not economically viable in a full-cost sense. However, in both cases, moving from conceptual planning to actual implementation resulted in shifting priorities as a pragmatic response to get projects on the ground through funding proposals and engagement with a broader cross-section of the population.

> "I think most of the people I know that have joined up with the GFB did it as much for the good food as for the political reasons because they didn't want it to fail. Right now we are hoping to try and reach out to people who maybe aren't that, who just want the convenience and I think you still have to be a little bit convinced that it's good because you don't get to choose your vegetables and choices are made for you." (GFB participant)

The GFB has since shifted to a model that merges the GFB with the ability to pick and choose, increasing convenience for consumers and increasing sales of food products outside the mainstream food system, primarily to suburban residents. However, competition has emerged because they did not feel that the GFB was paying enough attention to the politics of local food.

In Vancouver, the organizers for the Local Food Hub have been approached by real estate developers interested in exploring the potential of the local food hub to serve as the focal point for their developments. A partnership with developers is appealing, as it would likely involve significant contributions towards the purchase of land and construction of the building. However, there are inevitable concerns and tensions that would emerge if this approach were formalized regarding the ultimate purpose of the building, its location in relation to existing food system infrastructure, public transit access, etc. While not necessarily problematic, it could result in shifting power dynamics and changes to the values and objectives of the local food hub.

Conclusion

The two local food initiatives profiled above are striving to create a synthesis of social and environmental objectives to achieve community transformation. They are pursuing organizational dynamics that are reflective of a strong sustainability and social economy approach. They are 1) seeking structural change via the establishment of community infrastructure that will facilitate both sustainable and socially just food options; 2) they are structured with an intention to generate their own revenue; 3) each initiative offers an alternative to the traditional food system (and its social and environmental impacts); 4) the projects are dependent upon a behavioural shift from consumers; and 5) they are achieving a decentralization of the food system that will foster increased local self-reliance.

The interplay of social, environmental, and economic objectives inherent in the food systems makes them prime examples of SCD. However, while the social economy dynamic is clearly under pressure (via financial viability concerns, the challenge of engaging the mainstream, and keeping social justice services), the social economy approach clearly provides an important vehicle for facilitating and nurturing nascent transformative initiatives.

Local food systems, given their appeal to community, health, and quality of life provide a compelling gateway to realizing community transformation. As the cases illustrate, their true potential is realized through a synthesis of sustainability and social economy approaches and objectives. Such synthesis is dependent on effective linkages to other sectoral initiatives focused on community and societal change. Local food initiatives are not a panacea for creating more environmentally sustainable or socially just communities; however, they do provide the space for dialogue among broad-based citizen movements that are engaged in local food politics beyond simply questioning consumption practices, food miles or organic production. Systemic social changes are possible with investments in physical and social infrastructure that contribute to coalition building and partnership development that enable scaling up.

There is no shortage of small-scale sustainability, social economy or local food initiatives across Canada. The challenge is scaling up. Once you start to talk about scaling up, local food initiatives are faced with challenges associated with being too radical, too transformative, and too risky. Therefore, as a risk management strategy, an incremental approach to change is adopted, that often focuses on the “low-hanging fruit”.

Both the Edmonton and Vancouver examples illustrate the challenge and need for investments in local food infrastructure and recognize that these investments can not be made unless the local food movement is scaled up. Lessons from elsewhere (e.g. Seikatsu Consumer Coop in Japan, Equiterre in Quebec) provide innovative examples of how to link small-scale producers and local food groups to larger customer bases and provide access to missing local food infrastructure

while maintaining commitment to values-based food system transformation that prioritizes the social capital that results from local food consumption and production. The key is to recognize and search out those incremental changes that can be used as levers and catalysts for more transformative change. Food has that potential because both the social and environmental aspects of it are so tangible.

Policy makers and practitioners must work, however, to ensure that initiatives are provided with the appropriate operational, funding and regulatory settings to realize their transformative influence. Measures for success of local food initiatives that incorporate multiple-bottom line outcomes need to incorporate the fact that these initiatives are competing with mainstream economic activities that are heavily subsidized and do not account for negative social, economic and environmental externalities. Allen (2010)[6] highlights examples of well intentioned local food initiatives that placed decreasing emphasis on social justice and sustainability values when forced to adopt revenue-generating enterprises due to market pressures. Local food initiatives benefit from constant reflection about their values and practice and recognition that their activities are embedded in particular places and particular social and economic structures. Local food initiatives can provide a focus for catalyzing action and mobilizing citizens, however, given the scope of transformation required, they are better thought of as contributing to a larger social movement rather than as a goal in and of themselves.

[6] Allen, P. (2010). Realizing justice in local food systems. *Regions, Economy and Society, 3*(2), 295-308.