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“A FEW AMBITIOUS RESTAURANTS”:

THE DYNAMICS OF FOOD TRUCKS, CULTURE AND REGULATION IN OKLAHOMA CITY

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“A FEW AMBITIOUS RESTAURANTS”:
THE DYNAMICS OF FOOD TRUCKS, CULTURE AND REGULATION IN OKLAHOMA CITY

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE

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Chapter I: Introduction

A Few Ambitious Street Festivals

It's right before 6:00 pm on the last Friday of June, 2014, and I pass through the road closed barriers on Hudson and 10th Street. The day is still high and hot, and I make my way south. People are still leaving work, and there is a row of dozens of food trucks, hatches drawn over a roar of generators. The food trucks are prepping for an event called H&8th , a monthly food truck festival which has ballooned in size in recent years and will host an a crowd this evening which will be later pegged at estimates of up to 20,000 people.

I walk past the street festival's name sake, the intersection of Hudson and 8th streets. I lean up against a wall in the shade, and watch the street draped in a frantic stillness. I see the event organizer running in and out of a door next to me. Several people from one food truck in front of me file out to pose for a group picture. I see another person leave a food truck and knock on the door of another a block away. One person leaves a food truck with a plate of food. I see two health inspectors, blue shirts and clipboards, go down the line of food trucks. Routine, anticipation.

People start to fill up the street. The hatches raise, and the sun relents behind the western storefronts. The lines start to form for food. People continue to arrive in a steady stream, parking lots fill up on all sides of the festival. This is the first time the festival has expanded to cover four, linear blocks along

Hudson Avenue, from Northwest 10th street down to Northwest 6th, a change from the three blocks in the previous year, and a huge expansion from the single block when the festival started in 2011.

As the festival gets underway, I see families and couples. Roving groups of teenagers move between the lines of people waiting for food. Dogs walk by on leashes. People make use of the empty and abandoned lots covered in grass along the festival. Couples sit and eat. Families amble by and through the grass. Children play. People sit down on ledges and furniture on the lawn in front of the new Federal Center.

I walk up and down the street and feel the energy. I see people "shopping" between trucks, attempting to decide on which truck they will try. Some people employ strategic actions to buying from the trucks. A family splits to stand in two lines. Another group moves down the line, picking the trucks they have selected in a sequence. People shopping and passing through the festival struggle for a place to walk, competing for a share of the street and sidewalk with those waiting in line to order food. I count over 50 trucks, most with lines over 25 feet, and a few with lines over 50 feet. The trucks are swamped and the kitchens churn out food. All of the trucks have lines snaking out to cover the width of the street. When the lines get too long, people bend to the side and overlap behind the line for the next truck over. People moving along the street find openings in the line and squeeze between the glares of those waiting to order.

Music begins from a stage located on a side street. The music is loud, blending into the noise of the crowd. I see limbs everywhere, from a wall of sunglasses and paper plates. By 7:45 pm, four city blocks have been transformed into a continuous sea of people, numbering in the thousands, bound by a constant storefront of food truck windows. It feels crazy. I make my way by Hudson Avenue and Northwest 9th street and see Sam Bradford, the homegrown NFL quarterback, standing in the middle of the street. He is shaking his head in disbelief. I feel the same way and keep floating along.

Night falls after 9:00 and the crowds begin to thin out. The strollers make way for groups of young people, laughter cackles above the hands clutching plastic cups of beer. I enter a tent covering a series of tables on a parking lot which is sponsored by a local food truck smartphone application. The music continues to reverberate off the bricks walls framing the street, and the lines for food persist. I see most people wait over half an hour to receive food, even this late. Some trucks have closed for the night, likely selling out of food. In a few hours, the trucks will pull away, the trash will be swept of the street, and this area will return, cool and quiet, to the night.

This busy evening in the Summer of 2014 turned out to be one of the largest street festivals in Oklahoma City, and it helped bolster the claim by H&8th organizers that this festival is the "Nation's Largest Food Truck Festival." So how did this happen? How did Oklahoma City of all places become a center for food truck activity? Were regulatory pitfalls and conflicts present in this

situation, or did the city's food trucks manage a way to enjoy success within a regulatory framework? What lessons does this rise of food trucks in a city like Oklahoma City have for planners?

This research grew from these questions. The growth of food trucks, particularly "gourmet" food trucks presents a number of challenges and opportunities for cities. It touches on issues which have long remained dormant in American cities since the middle of the 20th century. After decades of restrictions on street vending, maintained by a conviction that street vendors "clog" up the street and street food operations are dirty and unsanitary, several factors appeared to shift these perceptions and present challenges to these standing street vending restrictions. Interest appears to grow towards redeveloping and reinvesting in urban cores throughout the U.S. as places to live, places for retail, and places for business. These efforts can be seen as a kind of response to the heavy handed tactics of urban renewal in the United States, which often sought to address disinvestment, depopulation and poverty in inner city neighborhoods through large, population displacing development and infrastructure projects. Urban commercial corridors and districts, which may have abandoned store fronts and lack in services for the nearby areas, are receiving attention and investment, sometimes with complicated concerns about gentrification and how the character of an area will change.

American cuisine has also changed in the past several decades. Eating food away from home has grown more casual, and boundaries between

American and "ethnic" food ways and restaurants have blurred. "Slow" foods—local, organic, and sustainable—have seemingly grown in interest in many American cities. These changes have de-emphasized the importance of gourmet and European influenced restaurants in American culture, and have opened up space for food trucks to become popular in many cities. Food trucks are innovative in developing gourmet cuisine in these cities, and this attachment to "gourmet" is something I will examine later on in this thesis.

Several experiences helped shape my approach. I first became interested in studying food trucks after spending time with friends who worked on food trucks in Austin and New Orleans. I was familiar with street food vendors in New York City, and I had growing interest in food systems planning and food geography. Before starting this research, I worked as the director of a commercial district association in Oklahoma City, a young organization of business owners and community members who were interested in creating a Business Improvement District. I had also spent the previous ten years working on and off in food service, both in kitchens as well as the front of the house. All of this helped shape my interest in food trucks.

Oklahoma City also presents a unique case for the study of food trucks and local regulations. I started this research expecting to find some degree of conflict or difficulty between food truck owners and local regulating authorities—the City of Oklahoma City and the Oklahoma City-County Health Department. However, my conversations with food truck owners countered that

notion. Many food trucks described experiencing relatively little difficulty in interpreting and managing health and city regulations. This did not seem to match the stories of food trucks and regulation from around the country. New questions emerged from these interactions and responses: why is there a perception of regulatory "success" among Oklahoma City's food truck owners, especially after reports of regulatory difficulties in 2011? What is driving this change?

What I came to understand from the responses and from my observations is that there is a strong sense of community among food truck owners, and that this sense of community is likely formed and reinforced through shared experiences of working similar street festivals and events together. I argue that these festivals, organized by commercial district associations and business improvement districts, also function to mitigate potential conflict over selling food in the public spaces of these areas by building and enforcing consensus among property and brick-and-mortar business owners internally within the organization.

The body of academic research of food trucks is growing. Research tends to focus on the regulatory environment from legal perspectives or in terms of public space and urban design considerations. There is also a body of work which considers American food trucks as a possible example of informal economic activities. Though a few studies have considered the informal relationships and formal organization of food trucks, little is known about how

the relationships between food trucks influence the success of local regulations. Furthermore, I have found no specific study of how food trucks interact with commercial districts and business improvement districts in terms of shaping street vendor policies and regulatory control over public space.

I am informed by my experience in Cultural Anthropology and ethnographic methods in my approach to this research. Given the relatively small size of the number of food trucks in Oklahoma City—approximately 15 to 20 when I prepared a proposal to begin this research—I was interested to understand the perceptions of food truck owners as it pertained to how local regulations play out in terms of compliance and conflict. I wanted to know the stories of how food trucks started, how they described their operations. I wanted to know what they identified with and how these identities were formed. I also wanted to know how they associated and related to one and other, where they perceived the limits to their identification to identities and where power was used, exerted and challenged at different social levels.

This approach shaped my observations and interview questions. Though my time studying food trucks in the "field" was short for a comprehensive ethnographic project, these methods and questions of social association and identify were important in being able to better understand *why* Oklahoma City's food truck owners tended to view existing regulations as manageable issues rather than as significant barriers.

Research questions

Research questions were proposed at the outset of this research project to help shape and narrow the focus of a qualitative inquiry. I asked three questions limited to perceptions of food truck owners or operators:

1. What regulatory barriers exist for the operation of food trucks in Oklahoma City?
2. How do food truck operators manage, compensate for, and overcome these barriers?
3. How could local regulations be changed to better accommodate food trucks in Oklahoma City as a force used for economic development and urban design?

Outline of Thesis

I begin to answer these questions by establishing a background and context to this study in Chapter II. I provide context and a focused history for the site of Oklahoma City, for the food truck owners as participants, and for my involvement as a researcher. I also describe the current regulations regarding food trucks in Oklahoma City and how they have changed since I began this research project. Finally, I provide a review of literature on food trucks and street vending.

Chapter III describes the methodology of this study. I describe the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach, and my experience with

conducting research. I also describe the limitations of how this study was designed and what implications these limitations place on the results and analysis of this study.

Chapter IV presents the results of this study. I decided to present three different experiences of food truck owners and operators described to be and that I observed. The first section describes experiences starting the truck, their motivations which lead them to start a food truck business, how food truck owners came to understand what they needed to know in terms of regulations for permits and building out the truck, and how they were able to finance start-up costs for the food truck. The second section describes experiences in operating the food truck, and how different events require different kinds of preparation, labor considerations, and produce different challenges compared to a brick-and-mortar restaurant. The third section describes how food truck owners perceive existing regulations, how they have managed new regulations, and what they would like to see changed or improved with current regulations.

Chapter V analyzes the results of this study. The preliminary research questions are re-assessed, where I argue that there is a strong sense of community among Oklahoma City's food truck owners, and this has helped new and existing food trucks manage and overcome potential regulatory barriers. I describe how commercial and business improvement districts are key in both reducing conflict with brick and mortar restaurants and gatekeepers to the local regulation of public space. In this role, I argue that the significant economic

potential for food trucks tends to symbolic, and that their identity as “gourmet” food trucks has cultural, spatial, and economic implications, and should raise concern about gentrification processes and the ultimate control of public, urban spaces. Chapter VI offers a conclusion of this study as well as a series of recommendations for how to address some of the issues raised by Chapter V.

Chapter II: Background

Review of Literature

The Context for Food Truck Research

Food truck focused research is a relatively recent phenomenon and has coincided with the rise of gourmet food trucks. However, food truck studies appear to be situated in several larger research contexts, including global studies of urban street vending going back to the 1960's, urban sociology of American cities, and contemporary Urban and City Planning studies focused on helping planners and improving the practice of planning.

Early studies of street food vendors are based in public health related research, analyzing sanitation and the presence of food-borne illnesses. Starting around the time of Hart's work on economic informality in studies of post-colonial cities (1967), street food studies, such as the work by Tinker (1997), have become more critical of power relationships affecting street vendors, both at the local level and on a macro-economic level. Current discussions of food trucks still deal with these issues, but apply them to an American urban context.

In this section, I will summarize existing food truck research. I will group existing studies along major themes and summarize their connections. Overall, I argue there has been relatively little research done on the relationships among food truck owners and how these relationships can influence regulatory policies. While most studies focus on food truck owners or workers as

individuals, and many place food truck owners in a context of regulatory change, there is little investigation to a city-wide, food truck "culture." This omission is all the more glaring as food truck community is a central focus of the depiction of food trucks in popular media.

I will begin by summarizing the studies which deal with legal and regulatory aspects of gourmet food trucks. I then summarize existing policy documents and municipal government sponsored studies on food truck regulations. I then describe another body of food truck research which focuses on issues of public space and economic development. Finally, I summarize the studies which deal with food truck community, culture, and social relationships.

Regulating the Street: Legal Perspectives of Food Trucks in Public Space

Several articles study food trucks within a regulatory context. Whereas some studies examine conflict over vendor regulations, several other studies highlight examples where food trucks have found a degree of success operating within regulatory restrictions. The primary difference between these two approaches to studying food trucks comes down to a critical versus laissez-faire approach to the role of food trucks in a city, both in terms of public space and economics. In this section, I will highlight the main scholarship on food truck related policies and examine the implications of these different policy approaches.

An article by Hernandez-Lopez (2012) is one of several which takes a critical approach to studying the conflict over mobile food vending regulations in Los Angeles. Hernandez-Lopez studies disputes over L.A. Ordinance 17760 between 2008 to 2009, when food trucks were restricted from operating in the public right of way. Herndandez-Lopez describes how the ordinance was overturned due to a conflict with the State of California's Vehicle Code (251), and he makes the case for the importance of cultural discourse during the debates of this time, where "Mexican" signifiers of traditional food practices could be used means to debate policies which would have extended to a newer generation of "gourmet" and experimental food trucks (258).

This was one of the first mentions of "gourmet" food trucks in an academic article. This study is also significant in that Hernandez-Lopez identifies a potential discrepancy in how regulations are changed to accommodate services for different socio-economic groups in the city, and the concern over identity in local politics is something I see important to food trucks to this day. The ways in which food trucks can establish a singular identity in public space is potentially an important way that cultural signifiers can be manipulated, reinforced, or changed.

In a similar approach, Martin's study of Chicago street vendors (2014) contrasted the regulatory hardship of primarily immigrant street vendors from Mexico and Guatemala with the success of gourmet food trucks. Using interviews conducted in 2005 and 2013, she locates the success of gourmet style

food trucks as closely matching the goals of Chicago's policy makers. She identifies these changes in regulation to suit gourmet trucks as an example of neoliberal policies which are justified though "creative" class theories of attracting a young, affluent workforce through quality of life improvements targeted at this group.

In this model, Martin describes these neoliberal policies in terms of cities "are using culture as a strategic signpost to investors and residents that they are a city open for business" (1871). This view of food trucks applies critical social theory to cultural expression (in this case food) in order to examine the underlying role of class and capitalism in cities. This approach heavily criticizes the role of certain forms of creative institutions—art galleries, theaters, music venues, studios—in being complicit in strategies to gentrify working class, inner city neighborhoods. The creative institutions are used to attract businesses and real estate by attracting those who are interested in *consuming* creative culture and the status that goes along with being knowledgeable of these creative enterprises. The movement of businesses, reinvestment, and people to these gentrifying neighborhoods can be viewed as *revanchist*, a reinterpretation of an older term to describe the "re-taking" of these inner city areas by those with more money and power.

Food trucks play into this model, according to Martin, because they represent the tastes and consumptions of a young and professional-class population moving into an area and displacing businesses and spaces which

primarily serve working class patrons and neighborhood residents. The policies or zoning changes which facilitate this movement of wealthier people into poor and working class urban neighborhoods are often termed *neoliberal* policies, even though the term *neoliberal* may be used out of context to describe a complex set of economic development histories unique to each city. Gentrification can occur without neoliberal policies and the commerce of creative expression in a city does not always signal gentrification and population displacement.

Martin also identifies the motivations of immigrant street food vendors to start selling on the street. She describes how vendors were dissatisfied with low-wage jobs, and the need for greater flexibility, particularly for parents. Martin places these street vending operations within a context of economic informality (1877), yet they are views which are often shared with gourmet food truck owners.

Morales and Kettles (2009) also highlight the history of restrictions targeted at taco trucks and immigrant street vendors. They break down the economic theory of public markets and public streets as public goods. As they trace the history of health related concerns of street food vending in public spaces, they find that the Progressive Era in American history influenced a great number of local governments in increase control over street vending due to concerns about health and "sanitation" (42). In other articles Morales (2000, 2009), uses the case of Chicago's historic Maxwell Market to describe the ways

in which street vendors and markets could provide access to healthy food and entrepreneurial activities. Morales and Kettles argue that food vendors in the street can again provide healthy food access if there are targeted amendments to local codes and selective enforcement (2000: 37).

Other articles are more positive about the potential for food trucks to manage and overcome burdensome local regulations. Linnekin et al. (2011) survey food truck regulations throughout the U.S. in order to contextualize food truck regulations in Los Angeles. The authors also identify several ways in which food truck vendors cope with regulations, including using social media for advocacy, forming trade associations, forming food truck lots, and litigating against undue restrictions (46). Finally, they list several, general recommendations for regulatory policies focused on food trucks. These recommendations include a removal of regulations based on aesthetics and competition with restaurants, a call for equitable use of public space among food truck vendors, and making municipal bodies the primary taxing authority (56).

The approach of the article by Linnekin et al. is similar to the articles by Hernandez-Lopez and Morales and Kettles. They take a legal approach to argue for the change of local regulations on food trucks. However, the article by Linnekin lacks the critical view of race and class found in the other articles focus on the difference between immigrant-focused vendors and "gourmet" food trucks.

Other articles share a lack of a critical view of food trucks in American cities while highlighting the positive benefits they can provide to urban areas. Burnett and Newman's (2014) comparison and contrast of the cases of street food vending in Vancouver and Toronto with Portland, Oregon. The Canadian cities are found hold a much more strict and centralized oversight compared with the "messiness" of Portland. Portland, by comparison, is praised for its "Smithian" aspects, and though the article is superficially concerned with how urban regimes affect different kinds of policies, there is to suggest that the article makes any significant discussion of urban regimes. No major actors are identified, and there seems to be a tacit support of the "entrepreneurial" aspects of Portland's street vending policy as a form of economic liberalism.

Also in the context of Portland, Browne et al. (2014) argue that the success of street food vending management by planners and city officials is not due to regulatory enforcement. Rather than create a rigid set of regulations, they claim Portland's planners and officials have taken an unusual step in being permissive with those vendors out of compliance by creating incentives to become licensed and formally regulated and by reaching out to work with and educate existing vendors (255).

Along this line, a thesis by Kukic (2013) offers an analysis of the food truck related codes in Toronto and Vancouver in place of a direct study of food trucks. This study offers a set of recommendations that make a case for a more

permissive regulation of food trucks in the two cities based upon case studies of Los Angeles, Portland, and Boston's food truck regulations.

Several theses analyze food truck codes, and use this analysis to provide a set of potential recommendations. A thesis by Tannenbaum (2012) does not actually directly research food trucks, he uses several approaches to research how a city such as Greenville, South Carolina, should determine when and how best to change ordinances to accommodate food trucks. He uses GIS and code analyses to argue Greenville should proactively write a unified food truck related ordinance that relaxes some permitting and use restrictions in the CBD, while clarifying trucks serving on private property and measures to mitigate possible nuisances of litter and noise. A similar thesis by Farkas (2013) surveyed planners and city managers throughout North Carolina on what they thought was needed for an effective policy regarding food trucks. The responses focused around balancing interests over the use of public space and parking, while offering a streamlined and transparent regulatory process while complying with state laws.

A potential issue with these non-critical approaches is that they appear to call for a removal of street vending regulations as a way to increase entrepreneurial activity. This is different than calling for a relaxation of *some* policies, as tailored to a specific situation in a specific place at a specific time. The distinction is crucial, and it is one of the ways in which neoliberal-style policies can be introduced or "slipped" into a city. The situation in Los Angeles,

as described by Hernandez-Lopez, is one where power among actors is not equal and the differing social status among gourmet trucks and taco trucks resulted in two very different policies. Removing street vending regulations may help certain taco trucks in the short term, but it does not address the fundamental issue of a political, social, and cultural power discrepancy between two different groups. This is not to say a critical stance is required for every situation, but potential for these "slips" to occur in research is significant because policy research has a real potential to affect decision making at a local level.

Municipal Reports, Policy Documents, and the Experience of Planners

A range of municipality-sponsored studies, reports, and policy documents have also studied food trucks. Though the focus is generally on regulatory policies, several of these reports include empirical research results and touch on issues of positive impacts to public space and economic development. Given the relatively small amount of specific academic research on food trucks, it is worth-while to consider the results of these policy documents as well.

The most substantial report, in terms of scope and research, comes from a study of Portland's food carts, prepared by the Urban Vitality Group (2008). The report sought to answer questions posed about the impact of food carts on street life, neighborhood communities, and economic development for the cart owners and the city as a whole. The report used surveys of vendors, customers,

nearby businesses, and an online survey for the city as a whole. Four specific sites, each representing a different neighborhood were mapped and observed. Based on data gained from these sources, they found that the cart sites tended to have positive impacts on street life and community interaction, but generally needed better public amenities such as street furniture, shelter, and trash cans. The report also found that many of the cart owners were ethnic minorities and immigrants (30), and many cart owners could subsist on income from the cart alone (31). Cart owners tended to emphasize the independence of running their own cart. While the owners desired to open their own storefront restaurants, the report found a perception of difficulty in making the transition and an underutilization of available small business resources (33).

A study by Cameron Hawkins and Associates (2011) reviewed the "Toronto A La Carte Pilot Project." This project, as also noted by Burnett and Newman (2014), was a heavily restricted and standardized take on street food vending from mobile. All carts for the pilot project were required to be made to a uniform design and branding, by a single maker (Hawkins 2011: 12), and menu items were required to be approved for not just for basic health requirements, but nutritional value and contribution to local cuisines (10). The review of the project involved interviewing stakeholders and presenting comparisons of the project with street food vending policies from similar cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, and Cleveland. The study was quick to find the irony in standardizing what is generally a creative and entrepreneurial

endeavor, noting that "the most successful and vibrant street food occurs in jurisdictions with the most laissez faire approach to street food regulation" (i).

A study of Atlanta's street food vendors (Cutno et al. 2010) was conducted by a team of three graduate students at Georgia Tech University. The study was split into three parts: a set of urban design recommendations, an economic impact study, and a general study of Atlanta's food security and access. The urban design recommendations were informed by research which included an assessment of downtown parking lots as potential street food vendor locations, a case study of a food truck, and a site observation, while the economic impact study combined data from an online survey with zip-code based data from ESRI Business Analyst in order to assess the potential costumers for street food as well as the theorized cost of running a food truck or mobile push cart.

The most significant recommendations from these findings include encouraging the clustering of food trucks and working with local commercial district associations to secure locations and promote food vendor's locations (22). The recommendations also included the importance of allowing shared kitchen and/or commissary between trucks (30), encouraging clustering of trucks on sites (22), and locating close to employment sites which would normally be served by fast food options (30). The study also recommended zoning changes to allow urban agriculture, creating "green trucks," and using street food as means of promoting a locally controlled, healthy food system (40).

The City of Boston (Ross and LaMattina 2010) commissioned a report of suggested changes to food truck regulations based on analysis of other American cities. The report seems to miss much of the logic behind the recommendations from the Atlanta study. The Boston report proposes new regulations that would force food trucks be kept "50 to 200 feet" from nearby restaurants (6). The Report also pushes for regulations which prevent clustering along a single block's sidewalk as they would create a negative pedestrian experience (7). The report also recommended a maximum of 25 trucks based on Boston's population size, and that this size could grow as the city is better able to understand food trucks (6).

This report puts forward a set of very cautious recommendations which could likely preempt any concerns from local restaurants or neighborhoods. These cautious recommendations seem to run counter to other established research, should be taken with the consideration that this report does not produce any direct evidence of existing food trucks in Boston. Nor does this study appear to have any defined methodology stated for how the data was gathered to make these recommendations so as to provide additional rationale.

Other reports push for generalized policy reforms in cities throughout the U.S. These reports each use a comparative analysis of street food vending policies in several American cities to assess the current and general state of these policies. A policy document by the Institute for Justice (Norman et al. 2011) uses a comparative policy analysis to bolster an argument against vending

regulations, in favor of laisez-faire policies for street food vendors. A report by the National League of Cities (2013) uses a similar technique to create a set of general policy recommendations for food trucks. Though this report generally recommends the loosening of many regulations, the tone of this report tends to be less ideological and more focused on aiding practitioners and city staff than the report published by the Institute for Justice. Similarly aimed at planning practitioners, an article in the APA publication "Zoning Practice" (Arroyo and Bahm 2013) offers a generalized look at food truck related regulatory issues and recommendations, and document by Rogers and Roy (2010) breaks down Portland's food carts for planners throughout the U.S.

Food Trucks in Public Space

Newman and Burnett (2013) examine the success of food trucks in Portland Oregon, observing that the majority of people using a park near a food truck pod "brought street food from nearby food carts" and it generated a "place where adults could share food while watching their children play" (242). The authors noted that this was a pattern repeated at other times and other spaces throughout the city, and argued that the success for food trucks in Portland's context are related to the relatively lasses faire attitude towards regulation and enforcement of the trucks in the city (246).

A similar study by Wessel (2012) studied the connection between social media and food truck customers as it pertained to the use of public space. This

study surveys users of food trucks parked adjacent to a park in San Francisco, and found that food trucks had strong impact on promoting the use of public space, finding social media users more likely to seek out food trucks via social media and are more likely to select trucks on the criteria of service and visual appeal (524). The study also surveyed food truck vendors and found that pedestrian activity was a primary consideration among vendors when choosing a site to locate sales (525). This study also cites Melvin Webber's "non-space" in order to argue that technologies such as social media can significantly change the use, perception, and social structure of urban, public spaces.

Both of these studies examine how the conditions of a public space can change when food trucks are present. However, they do not critically examine the surrounding areas or contexts. Nor do these articles consider what their methods of attracting customers means for certain areas of the city.

Several theses examine the relationships between food truck policies and public space. These studies cover Los Angeles (Tway 2011), Seattle (Ngo 2012), and Kansas City (Petersen 2014) and find that food trucks are generators of street life and the use of public spaces. Recommendations cover changing local regulations to remove barriers such as parking and the use of private lots, while encouraging clustering and working with coalitions of property owners to find and secure the best sites for food trucks to operate.

Food Trucks and Economic Development

Howell (2011) examines food trucks in Austin, Texas. He observes how health code regulations can influence the design and cost of the trucks (64). He also describes how, based on interviews with various food truck operators, decisions made regarding generator size or power supply source can significantly influence where and how certain trucks operate in the city (66).

A thesis by Hermosillo (2012) mentions the difficulties food truck operators may face in terms of enforcement as a regulatory barrier. According to interviews from his study of vendors in Los Angeles, he found that:

> *"enforcement was inconsistent and often only followed calls to the police from a resident or merchant in the area demanding that a food vehicle be moved or cited for staying past the time limit. Not surprisingly, the situation created a great deal of ambiguity over the legitimacy of loncheras* [traditional, Mexican-style lunch trucks] *and exposed operators to the whims of an unfriendly neighbor or the particular inclinations of a law enforcement officer.*

Given his observations, it is important to note how gaps between policy and implementation can occur, and how uneven enforcement can itself become a barrier to operation. As many location have more than one level of regulations for food trucks, this is an area that warrants further research.

A thesis by Loomis (2013) finds that food truck operators in Chicago operate food trucks as a response to unemployment caused by economic shifts (75). She argues that food truck operators use entrepreneurship as a means of shifting their individual narratives. They are able to use food trucks as a means

to translate powerlessness associated with losing a job to a heroic discourse of taking control and selling food on the streets (76).

Other studies note the potential for food trucks to address access to healthy, local foods in areas which have experienced disinvestment or economic distress. Anenberg and Kung (2014) highlight the ways in which social media strategies used by food trucks can create a surplus in the restaurant industry and lead to greater food access, particularly in areas of cities that the local market considers too difficult to support. A report by Lucan et al. (2014) highlights how a mobile, fresh grocery store in the form of a food truck can increase access to healthy foods in the Bronx.

Culture and Community Among Food Truck Owners

Research on food trucks tends to focus on policies or with individual food truck owners. Relatively little research is dedicated to the relationships between each other or how food truck owners collectively relate to other communities within a city. In this sections, I explore the research which has focused on these relationships between food truck owners. I argue that given this relatively small amount of research, there is a need to study food truck and street vending policy from the basis of how communities among food trucks and business owners are produced and reinforced.

The context for this community research comes from street vending scholarship. Articles on Los Angeles from Bhimji (2010) and Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2010) explore the cultural and community basis for street

vending and both articles make passing references to members of the communities they study owning taco trucks. This community focus is also found in Tinker's study of Asian street food vendors as well as the studies of New York City street vendors by Duneier (1999) and Stoller (1996).

Two Anthropology theses study relationships between food truck owners ethnographically. Hawk (2013) describes how Orlando's food truck owners form a kind of community among one and other. He notes that established members maintain and set community values, especially with regard to assimilating new members (95). Hawk also describes examples of mutual aid rather than "cut-throat" competition among the food truck owners. He saw trucks trading food with each other as a way to reinforce this community sense at festivals and events (96). Finally, Hawk noted that food trucks can help create a communal feeling with customers and reinforce social identities revolving around food and place (111).

Erb (2014) also noted this ability for food trucks to shape the characteristics of a larger, more neighborhood like community. Building on experience from working on a food truck in Boston, she interviewed several other Boston food truck owners. She argued that Boston's food trucks create a kind of 'urban village' as conceptualized by Herbert Gans and his study of Boston's West End in the 1970's (8). She described several instances where Boston's food trucks worked together, such as when employees from one truck dug another out of the snow (80) or when food trucks would promote other food

trucks on social media (81), yet this cooperative sense is placed within a context of competition for a limited number of sites where food trucks were allowed to serve by the City (82). Overall, the image Erb presents of the community of food trucks in Boston is nuanced, complex, and rich with interaction. In the depictions by Hawk and Erb, food truck owners and employees appear to have a degree of agency and social context missing in the above descriptions of food truck policies and economic potential.

This sense of agency is aptly described in a study by Esparza et al. (2014). In this paper, the authors study trade associations formed by food truck businesses as a phenomenon in the U.S. They find these trade associations to be important ways by which food trucks are accepted as legitimate businesses (156S), and these trade associations are important means by which food truck owners in a city lobby for policy changes. These organizations can also help manage "tragedy of the commons issues," such as the limited number of public spaces available in Boston mentioned above. This management can be handled informally and internally to the organization rather than by official or bureaucratic means (154S).

Linnekin et al. (2011) also describe how food truck trade associations, such as the Southern California Mobile Food Vendor's Association, formed in response to a "confusing regulatory framework" (48). This article also notes the difficulty food truck businesses in Northern California have face without a formal trade association, often dealing with what the authors term "illegal"

regulatory schemes (49). Though the authors note that the success of the Southern California Trade Association challenge the "status quo" of how local governments regulate vending in public space (50), this statement implies a conflict between brick-and-mortar businesses, particularly restaurants, and food truck and other mobile based businesses. This conflict is something I initially expected to see in Oklahoma City, yet I have not seen it borne out in any significant way.

Far from challenging the status quo, I observe food truck associations having the possibility to reinforce a status quo. Assuming conflict can be minimized, food truck trade associations can formalize relationships between food truck owners and regulators or brick-and-mortar business associations. They can serve as a single point of contact for many independent businesses to outside organizations or agencies, and they allow food truck owners to have a unified voice for lobbying for policy changes.

From my observations, the Oklahoma Independent Food Truck Association (OIFTA) matches the description by the authors above. The social relationships among Oklahoma City's food trucks appear to be a crucial factor in how policies towards food trucks in Oklahoma City are both carried out and managed by food truck owners. Few articles seem to focus in on these kinds of social relationships, and instead focus on the policy itself, in how food trucks work in public spaces, or how their operation can have an economic impact. Given the existing literature, there is a need to do more research on the

characteristics of these relationships among food truck owners and how these relationships influence the success of local policies.

Overview of Oklahoma City's Food truck Regulation

Regulatory History and Context

The earliest evidence of concern over street food vending regulations in Oklahoma City dates to December of 1910. According to an article in The Oklahoman, there was a push by state health officials to regulate street food, particularly fruit vendors, on the basis of health concerns. The article outlines the problem: "apples and other products are carried in the open street, exposed to dust and filth contaminations floating in the air" (Oklahoman 1910: 5) Though there is mention of a previous street vending regulation, the law was "neglected and has not been enforced" (5).

The significant aspect to this article is that it highlights conflicts between brick-and-mortar businesses and property owners against street food vendors. While it is difficult to fully know if the street food vendors represented a threat to public health or now, the article describes how the regulations were coming in "behalf of local retail merchants" who were " greatly handicapped by street vending merchants" (5). Street vendors were also described as a public nuisance and had greatly increased in number leading up to the winter of 1910. This mirrors many current day discourses concerning food trucks. Like food trucks now, the street food vendors likely faced opposition from brick-and-mortar businesses who considered the street vendors a competitive threat and used public health as a justification to regulate street vendors off of the street.

The next mention of regulations comes from 1955, which restricted mobile food vendors from selling anything other than pre-packaged foods. According to a news article at the time, a child had fallen sick after eating a snow cone which had been contaminated with a "commercial fly spray." This regulation coincided with rapid transformation from being a relatively compact, urban city, to a sprawling suburban city. Street vending tends to be primarily pedestrian focused and seems to appear most often in urban areas with a great deal of density and street lift. Restricting street vendors to selling only prepackaged foods made in an inspected facility may have likely reflected this shift towards automobile focused policies, a definite change from the "hundreds" of Oklahoma City street food sellers in 1910.

The current era of the city's street food policies dates to approximately 1999. Bricktown was one of the first urban areas of the city to revitalize after the economic bust of the 1980's. Bricktown comprised a former brick warehouse district, adjacent to the B.N.S.F. railroad which separated the district from the Central Business District of the city. The advent of interstate highways, along with motorized hydraulic forklifts created a demand for single-story, box style warehouses adjacent to major interstates, usually built on the periphery of the city where land was relatively cheap. The hulking brick warehouses were left to crumble in the 1960's, 70's, and 80's.

The new era of MAPS was already underway, and a new canal was nearing completion in the Bricktown era. The Bricktown district was quickly

growing into an entertainment district, with restaurants and nightclubs, and the Bricktown Merchant's Association had pushed for a restriction on all street vendors in the area. This proposal to restrict all street vending activity was rejected by City Council (Lackmeyer 1999: 6). In a compromise, street vendors were allowed to operate in Bricktown's public right-of-ways which were at least 75 feet from the "MAPS" canal. Vendors would be permitted to pay a fee and operate within 12 locations near the canal, with the approval of the city's parks director. However, enthusiasm from vendors appeared to have been low, and they that the impositions of these restrictions were too high.

The restrictions proved unpopular with Bricktown's merchant association as well. Jim Brewer, then the association's director was quoted as saying: "I'm not going to give super consideration to a concession cart over a guy who is spending $1 million" (Lackmeyer 1999: 6). Again, this incident highlights conflict brought on by the city's brick-and-mortar businesses and property owners against street vendors and sellers.

This conflict also highlights how an area like Bricktown became highly valued at that time. By the late 1990's Bricktown stood as one of the first viable alternatives to suburban shopping malls for commercial activity and entertainment. While other urban commercial districts would generally follow Bricktown's lead, it is significant to note that where this conflict originated, when it originated, reflects changes in the value of the city's places.

The appearance of gourmet food trucks has also presented a challenge to local regulations. The earliest gourmet food trucks appeared in Oklahoma City by 2009. Though monthly "art walk" street festivals had developed in several arts districts in the city, H&8th was the first food truck specific festival for the city. The first H&8th event occurred in August of 2011 and was promptly shut down in a coordinated effort by several state and local regulatory authorities working in tandem.

H&8th was named for the intersection of North Hudson Avenue and Northwest 8th Street, the event was to feature several food trucks, opening in front of a local coffee shop and restaurant. On August 26th, an article in The Oklahoman newspaper profiled the event which would occur that evening (Lackmeyer 2011a). Supposedly tipped off by the article, a sweep of the event occurred involving 27 personnel:

> "16 inspectors with the Oklahoma City/County Health Department, three agents with the ABLE Commission, two Oklahoma City licensing inspectors, two Oklahoma City electrical inspectors, two Oklahoma City code inspectors, an Oklahoma City police officer and an inspector with the Oklahoma City Fire Department" (Lackmeyer 2011c).

To note, the ABLE commission, a state agency regulating the sale of alcohol, appeared at the event armed with guns, provoking festival attendees to compare their appearance to a SWAT team (Lackmeyer 2011c). Another puzzling aspect of this raid is reported presence of City Manager Jim Couch as a festival attendee, despite the presence of city inspectors and police officers in the "sweep" (Lackmeyer 2001c). According to emails cited by The Oklahoman,

city employees were alerted of the event by reading the event preview in that morning's issue of the Oklahoman. City licensing inspectors were notified, and planned to inspect the event with a group of county health inspectors and ABLE enforcement agents (Lackmeyer 2011d 31st).

The organizers for the initial H&8th event later admitted that they did not have the correct outdoor event permit at the time. The food trucks at the event came under fire by health officials who were conducting a sweep. One food truck was forced to close after fire department inspectors notified the food truck owner that he could not use an extension cord for power. Health department officials would not let the food truck owner operate without a constant source of power for refrigeration (Lackmeyer 2011b).

However, Meg Salyer, the city councilperson for the ward in which H&8th was located, called for a better understand of what went wrong with the event so that another H&8th event could be launched in September of 2011. On September 13th, the city's council set a date for a public hearing to streamline the outdoor public event permitting process, where anyone who passes a health inspection may be eligible for an outdoor special event, a change from permitting only non-profits and charitable organizations as being among those eligible for a special food event license (Couch 2011). Another shift in the city's regulations occurred in 2013, where a geographic restriction on street vending around the Oklahoma City bombing memorial was changed to permit the expansion of the H&8th festival further south to Northwest 6th Street.

Most recently, an ordinance was introduced in August of 2014 to streamline outdoor special event fees and licensing while explicitly permitting the presence of food truck "courts." I attended the public hearing for this ordinance on August 12th, and noted that there was no opposition. Two representatives from the Oklahoma Independent Food Truck Association noted that the ordinance would make the licensing process "easier" and the Association was in favor of the event. A representative from Big Truck Tacos voiced support and Hunter Wheat, who was then in the process of building Blu Garten, a food truck court, added his support as well. The ordinance was approved in a unanimous vote by Council. In subsequent research, I found that this ordinance was developed with city planning staff consulting a small group of food trucks, the original annual fee for an unlimited number of special events was reported to have been lowered after consulting with food truck owners.

Overall, this history of Oklahoma City's street food vending regulations appears to be closely tied to greater historic processes in the city at large. The regulations introduced in 1910 appear to be related to both the city's rapid urbanization at the time as well as the relatively new presence of a state government and state-based regulating authorities. The 1955 limit of just prepackaged foods appears to be symptomatic of a large-scale suburbanization and automobile-centered policies at the time. The conflict over street vendors in Bricktown in the late 1990's is related to the initial success of city urban revitalization efforts following the wake of urban renewal and the impact of the

failure of Penn Square Bank and the collapse of the energy economy. Finally, the current push to change regulations to make way for gourmet food trucks and events such as H&8th appear to be related to a desire by city leaders for Oklahoma City to be seen as more legitimate and less "backward." At the Mayor's roundtable event in 2013, Mayor Mick Cornett repeatedly made reference to public transit and quality of life related projects in Portland, Oregon. The push for the legitimization of H&8th, an event itself modeled after food truck culture in cities such as Portland and Austin, Texas, was taken up by several members of council, including Meg Salyer, as well as Mayor Cornett. Clearly, food trucks are tied to a city-focused push for Oklahoma City to compete for investment with other cities around the county, and the recent history of H&8th identifies the changing status of gourmet food trucks in this push. How this identification of gourmet food trucks occurs is something I examine further in Chapter V of this thesis.

Summary of Current Regulations

The regulations concerning food trucks in Oklahoma City are found in the Oklahoma City Code of Ordinances and the Oklahoma State Administrative Code. In these two documents, food trucks are regulated in three, distinct modes; as motor vehicles and subject to general regulations for vehicle dimensions and operations, as food vendors and subject to public health requirements and inspections, and as outdoor event vendors subject to event

fees, inspections, and restrictions. In this section, I offer a brief summary of the relevant regulatory codes for food trucks in order to provide context for food truck owner's experiences with these regulations provided in Chapter IV of this thesis. Other municipalities in the Oklahoma City metro area, such as Edmond and Norman have slightly different municipal codes, mainly differing in event fees schedules, but I only consider Oklahoma City in this section as this was the primary site of my research.

The primary food truck regulation in Oklahoma City's Code of Ordinances comes from Chapter 21, Article VIII (§ 21-391 through § 21-436), "Food Sales from Vehicles." This section cedes health based inspection authority to the City-County Health Department Director and sets specific requirements for the construction of vehicles for health and sanitation purposes. This section also details the requirement of a city license for all mobile food vendors. There are geographic restrictions for the Bricktown Canal and an area around the Murrah Building Bombing Memorial. Finally, this section details the use-standards and requirements of food truck "courts." Other food truck-related section of the Oklahoma City Code include § 21-91, which sets specific requirements for special event licenses and a schedule of fees for these licenses.

State related requirements are primarily detailed in Title 310, Chapter 257 of the Oklahoma Administrative Code. This Chapter details health-related requirements for mobile food establishments. Subchapter 17-3, in particular, notes the requirement for food trucks to be located on a site for no more than 12

hours at a time and return to a commissary daily to dispose of wastewater and refill water tanks with potable water. The exception to this rule is special events, where trucks are allowed to remain stationary. Other requirements include the ensuring that the food truck vehicle complies with all vehicular requirements set by the State Department of Transportation.

In order to obtain a license to operate in Oklahoma City, food trucks are required to obtain a set of permits in a specific order, something that can potentially present a kind of barrier to new food trucks who are starting out. A flyer published by the Oklahoma City County Health Department (Oklahoma City County Health Department 2014) details this process:

1. A sales tax permit must be obtained.
2. A State food Service Operator's Certificate must be obtained.
3. A request must be made for a health inspection of the truck.
4. An health inspection must be passed.
5. After the health inspection, an application must be turned into the State Health Department.
6. Documentation of a successful health inspection must be included in a written application to for a mobile food vendor's license with the City of Oklahoma City.
7. The city permit application must be approved by the city's Police and Fire Departments.
8. Assuming all fees were correctly paid, a city license is issued

Even after city and state health licenses are obtained, food trucks are still subject to random inspections and must meet all vehicle regulations to operate on a public roadway.

In general, these regulatory requirements do not appear to be significant issues in practice. However, there appears to be an opportunity to streamline the process in Oklahoma City by creating a single location for all regulatory needs, permits and inspections between the city and the state requirements. Also, there are several definitions which may be unclear in practice. The definition of a public right of way for food truck operation in the Oklahoma City Code (§ 21-395(c)) includes only those areas dedicated to public use. On the surface, this appears to be logical, however, I observed food trucks routinely operating in private parking lots just outside of the public right-of-way. Generally, these were locations without on-street parking, or sometimes even sidewalks. The parking lots, in practice, functioned as public use areas, much in the way a street-side parking space might function next to a sidewalk. Including these spaces as permitted areas for food trucks to operate may clear up some of the places where the code requirements fall short in practice.

Another ambiguity comes from the definition of a commissary in the State Administrative Code (310:257-17-5(c)). This section of the code requires commissaries to be licensed food establishments. Yet, food trucks, themselves, are already licensed food establishments and are regulated as such. Most food trucks can safely dump and refill water in any location allowed for R.V.

facilities, and most food trucks tend to not use specific food service establishments for preparation, except for some which might use a friend's restaurant in order to prepare for a large event. Asking food trucks to maintain both a truck and a brick-and-mortar location, even a location they may rent or share, presents a theoretical burden for food trucks, as most restaurants will only need to maintain a licensed brick-and-mortar location for food. While I expected this to be a significant issue, I found it to be a non-issue in practice, with most food trucks tending to prepare food on site, and exchanging water where appropriate. A change in the commissary requirement could close the gap between regulation and practice.

Chapter III: Research Methods and Study Design

Introduction

This chapter is designed to provide an overview of how this study was designed and carried out. The purpose of this study is to examine how street vending regulations are perceived and managed by food truck owners. Regulations are expressions of normative practice ultimately based on cultural norms and beliefs. Food trucks represent sites at which cultural meanings and norms are negotiated in public space, and, as such I proposed the use of qualitative methods in order to better understand this normative discourse. This chapter explains the rationale behind this approach as well as my experience using these methods as a researcher.

Rationale

Qualitative methods were chosen for this study for several reasons. First, this study was originally designed to deal with a relatively small group out of a relatively small population of roughly 10 to 20 food truck owners. As such, surveys and quantitative analysis of this group would not have had as much validity.

Second, qualitative methods are well suited to answer the research questions for this study. From the beginning, this study was designed to gain an understanding of the perceptions of food truck owners and how they work

within a community setting. A survey method could have been used, but that method would not have produced as rich of a description needed to understand how food trucks operate within this specific context. The use of semi-structured interviews as a method is one employed by other food truck studies (Hermosillo 2012, Howell 2011, Loomis 2013), and has been used in other qualitative based planning research (Currid 2007). Additionally, I chose semi-structured interviews over surveys because surveys may not be the best way to understand how certain regulations may be limiting or benefitting to a group of vendors and business owners directly affected by these regulations. In a study of informal economic activities, Schneider notes that the sole use of surveys limited his ability to gain a full understanding of information people may not be easily willing to share. He noted that surveys provide snapshots rather than an full understanding of how this method works over time (Schneider 2002: 34).

Finally, it is important to experiment with and demonstrate the use of qualitative methods to address issues relevant to planners. While qualitative methods are quickly gaining acceptance and use in the academic field of planning, they can be difficult to justify by practitioners in applied contexts. A problem that I have seen in past projects is how projects are evaluated after they have been implemented. Particularly when a project is funded by a grant or by public funds, there is a requirement to create a follow up report on the results of a project. The numbers related to a project are easy to generate if the project is set up to track them—cost, number of users, and so on. What is harder to

explain is whether or not a project is working in the eyes of users or the public. Qualitative methods used by this study—observations and interviews—are more in depth than most surveys, and they can generate nuanced views of how a policy or regulation has been implemented. They can also triangulate some responses into the context of other responses, thus able to generate a larger composite picture than a survey might be able to achieve in this context.

Selection of Site and Participants

Oklahoma City was selected as a site for this study due to my ability to easily access it as a researcher. Also, Oklahoma City is a hub for food truck activity for much of the state outside of Tulsa, and many of the food trucks in Oklahoma serve in Oklahoma City with some regularity. However, I did visit food trucks in Stillwater and Tulsa when I was preparing this study, and this helped frame the regional context for food trucks as a phenomenon regional to the Oklahoma City area. Many of the food trucks serve the Oklahoma City area regularly, and it made sense to stick with this area and these food trucks in order to for me to be able to compare results and responses. Even if there are slight variations between municipal regulations in Oklahoma City and the surrounding cities in the metropolitan area, the differences are appear to be slight, in practice, and many food trucks are able to work throughout this metropolitan area after being permitted to serve in Oklahoma City. Along these lines, it was also

necessary to limit this study to food trucks based in Oklahoma due to the difference in health code regulations between different states.

This study was designed to interview approximately ten food trucks. When the proposal for this study was written in 2013, I only knew of fewer than twenty food truck operations which were established at that time. The proposal and start of this study roughly coincided with a rapid growth in the number of food trucks which regularly operated in Oklahoma City. Despite some of the food trucks which were active in 2013 closing in 2014 and 2015, there are now more than 40 food trucks active in serving the Oklahoma City area. The ten food trucks I sought to interview would have likely generated a "saturation" of responses with fewer than twenty active food trucks. Given the number of food trucks active at this point, a survey may have helped supplement the more in-depth information gathered from the interviews.

Participants were contacted via email or by phone, from contact information gathered from food truck websites and social media accounts. I gained knowledge of the number of food trucks which were actively operating in Oklahoma City by attending events and following the social media postings of the trucks I found. In some cases, I approached food trucks directly whenever business appeared to be slow.

In the early part of this study, I faced difficulty in securing many interviews. I later learned that I started contacting food truck businesses during the Summer of 2014, which is the busiest time of the year. I later learned that

food trucks are inundated with requests and messages. They can face difficulty in sorting through the "noise, and can miss even the messages they may be interested in receiving. I generally received a positive responses from the food truck owners I contacted, and many seemed willing to help participate in the study. However, it was not until the slower season in January and February of 2015 that I was able to catch food truck owners and secure a time to conduct an interview.

Towards the end of this study, I secured nine semi-structured interviews. Though I would have liked to secure an additional interview, I needed to conclude this study and start writing up the study. Also, doing more than ten interviews would have likely pushed this work outside of the scope of a Master's thesis, given the time and work needed to conduct, transcribe, code, and analyze different responses. However, in the process of doing observational research, I had informal conversations with an additional ten food truck owners over many of the same topics covered in the semi-structured interviews. These conversations were generally under 10 minutes, and were conducted informally on the street at a food truck event or site. I did not record or quote these conversations, though I did identify myself as a researcher in this study. These conversations helped provide additional background. They also helped provide context for the semi-structured interviews, and helped "triangulate" the responses in the longer interviews.

At the outset of this study, I considered studying all mobile vendors, including more traditional taco trucks and food carts. I quickly decided to limit the scope of this research to "gourmet" food trucks for several reasons. First, the "gourmet" style trucks appeared to be the main drivers of the phenomenon of food trucks and food truck street festivals in Oklahoma City. In comparison, the taco trucks I knew and visited when considering this study were mainly fixed in a single location. Second, the "gourmet" food trucks were easier to contact. They were visible at regular events and would often post their locations on twitter. Almost all of the "gourmet" style food trucks are primarily staffed by the owners of the food truck business. This made contacting an owner of a food truck comparatively easier. Third, there appeared to be a base of research on more traditional street food vendors and taco trucks. This form of vending has been in existence in the current form for decades. In comparison, the "gourmet" style of food truck goes back to roughly 2008 at the earliest and it appears to be a separate phenomenon. As a phenomenon, it is challenging the line between restaurants and street vendors and it offers a challenge to the management and control over public spaces. These factors, as well as constraints on time and scope, lead me to focus solely on studying "gourmet" food trucks in Oklahoma City.

Data Collection

The research for this study is divided into two methods: observational study and semi-structured interviews. The observational study was centered around attending both sites with a single food truck and public food truck events and street festivals. Throughout the observation, I took shorthand notes, and afterwards I typed my impressions and observations in longer-form field notes. The initial observations were designed to help form and iterate questions for the interviews.

Leading up to the proposal of this study, I had been regularly attending most monthly street festivals featuring food trucks, and I frequently sought out individual trucks on a regular basis. Within the first few months of doing formal observational research for this study, I was familiar with the pace and elements of each event. At the time, I felt like I was seeing the same thing, over and over. Looking back, this was a grind to get through, but it helped establish a way of seeing these street festivals as collective whole and how they reliably produced a certain sort of space and interactions.

The nine semi-structured interviews were conducted in semi-public spaces, or in one case on the owner's food truck during a service. Weather concerns repeatedly interrupted plans to interview a tenth participant, and the responses from the owners of that food truck were conducted via email. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes to an hour and 45 minutes in length. The interviews were semi-structured and followed a general set of questions

(outlined in Appendix A). The general order of the questions were followed in most interviews, and every interview covered at least the major topics in this set of questions: How did you start out? What is a typical day of service like for you? What regulator issues have you run into? What things would you change?

All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions were slightly edited to remove identifying statements. Sections of the responses in the transcriptions were then coded according to several conceptual groups. Direct quotes of interviews in this paper were further edited for length and clarity in some cases, and any part of a statement which was removed is marked by "…"

Limitations

This approach does come with some limitations. As I have mentioned, this study works with a relatively small sample size. Although the population of food trucks has continued to grow since I began this study, the population in this study should be viewed as representative rather than a complete look at a certain group.

I am using a qualitative approach, and these methods limit how this study may be compared to other cities in other time periods. Planning studies often bring up comparisons with the cases and practices in other cities. While this study has limited applicability to analyze other cities, it does present a case

study which may be instructive to those working in different contexts at other times.

Finally, I have described the methods in this study as qualitative rather than ethnographic. This study is inspired by ethnographic works and methods, and some of the methods in this study follow this influence. However, I did not spend enough time with this population of food truck owners, nor did my research questions require a specifically ethnographic approach. Qualitative and even ethnographic approaches are common in the study of street vending practices. What seems to come up less in use is a mixed method approach which can combine qualitative research with mapping and economic data. Additional time spent acquiring this quantitative data may have helped bolster some of the conclusions and recommendations of this study, particularly those aspects directed as current policies. That being said, a qualitative approach to research in this study is still crucial to answering questions about the perceptions and social dimensions of a targeted policy affecting street vending and public space.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of this this study. Much of this chapter groups the responses from the interviews along thematic lines. These interview responses are contextualized by observational notes and background research I conducted during the time of the interviews.

I organize the chapter according to two modes of time. The first section deals with the experience of starting a food truck. This experience looks to the future and, based on interviews, requires anywhere from several weeks to several months to complete. It is often the first experience many food truck owners have with understanding and applying food truck-specific regulations to their businesses. This is the time period in which food truck owners apply for permits among multiple regulatory bodies and the time period in which a food truck is constructed, inspected, and certified for use.

The second mode of time focuses on the every day experience of running a food truck business. As several food trucks describe, each day of service presents a new set of challenges and requirements. However, I did observe a regular cycle of events on a weekly and monthly basis, and these events are situations which often require special permits or health department inspections. This is a mode of time which requires strategizing operations, coordinating labor, and working with a limited amount of space and storage.

I found several key themes within the responses. I asked about certain themes in the interview questions, such as utilizing micro-finance in fundraising and feelings of community at street festivals. Other themes emerged later on—interpersonal relationships or how to strategize for a given day of service. These themes are important, and I analyze how they relate later on in the next chapter. In order to understand how regulations are perceived by a population, I argue that it is important to understand how various regulations are perceived at different steps along the way in both starting and running a business. These form two distinct, but related, experiences, and this distinction makes it necessary to explore how Oklahoma City's food truck owners view their experience with existing regulations in both modes of time.

Starting Out

Motivations

All of the food truck owners I spoke with had their own story for what inspired them to start the truck, and the process by which it took them to get it up and running. Many of the food trucks in Oklahoma City started on the basis of a friendship, marriage, or family relationship. Other food truck owners were inspired after seeing someone they knew running a food truck. Several food truck owners also mentioned economic reasons for starting a food truck, moving or moved away from a career track with which they were unsatisfied.

Mike was working as a chef at the time he was approached by a close friend to start a truck:

> *"Well it started, I had a good college friend of mine, who I'd known for nearly 12 years. And she had relocated to Portland, Oregon, for five years and she had saw the boom in the food trucks in the Pacific Northwest and she came back to Oklahoma, her home state, and got into the restaurant business and she managed [a local restaurant]…But she relocated to Oklahoma for a few years, and after a few years you know, she wanted to move back to the Pacific Northwest. And at this time I was working full time as a chef…and I didn't want her to leave. We were great friends, and I wanted to continue that friendship. And I asked her if there was anything I could do to maybe influence her to stay. And she said, "Well I have an idea for a food truck, and if you would help me start that, if you would go with in me on starting the company, I might stick around." So you know she told me about the idea, and I did not like the idea at all…And I slept on it a few nights and it kind of dawned on me that it's kind of genius. And I went to her and told her, I was like "I think maybe it's worth a shot."*

Similarly, Jack and Chris started a truck after meeting each other in college at a nearby restaurant. After graduating, they became more and more interested in the idea of starting a food truck after experimenting with cooking hard to make dishes on their own. Ian, who had started several restaurants in Oklahoma City, describes how he came to start a truck with two friends who had worked as chefs:

> *"Well, two close friends came to me. [One] had just moved back from Austin and missed Austin tacos. [The other] had just left [a local restaurant] and wanted to try something different. At first, it was going to be small, just the truck, and they had come up with this idea together an approached me. So, we sat down…and decided to go with a food truck."*

Other truck owners emphasized family relationships at the core of their motivation to start a truck. Heather described starting a food truck as a family operation, a way to work with her husband and daughters while securing an additional stream of income. Jennifer, who runs a truck with her husband, describes that she was "born into the restaurant business." She described her experience with opening and running several restaurants for the past two decades, including a restaurant with her husband for 14 years. In 2013, they received an offer for the land under their restaurant. As she describes:

> *"And we said OK, and my husband looked at me and says, "What do you want to do next?" And I said, "I want a food truck." And he went, "Really? You want a food truck?" I said, "Yeah, I want a food truck." He says, "OK, I'll buy you a food truck." And so we experimented with different menu items. Went to festivals, saw what people were doing, saw that [what we were doing] was not time effective. You can't go to an event, spend 15 minutes per ticket. So we opted not to do [that], which we'd been known for the last 25 years. So we changed our menu up … and it's worked fabulously."*

I also found economic motivations for starting a food truck among the owners I interviewed. Food trucks represent a relatively low barrier in terms of securing enough financing to buy and open a truck, and some food truck owners told me that starting a truck was a way to legitimize themselves in order to secure funding from a bank or investor group to start a restaurant at a later point.

Though not every food truck owner I spoke with had experience in the food service industry, many had some exposure. In particular, both Alex and Sarah were experienced as chefs and knew Ian through Oklahoma City's restaurant world. When Alex was forced to leave her position as the head chef

at a local restaurant, she decided to open a food truck. Jack and Chris described meeting each other while working at a restaurant in college and decided to start a food truck after graduating.

David, another food truck owner, described how a shift in the economy led him to pursue a long held interest in starting a restaurant translated into starting a food truck:

> *"I had the concept for a while, but it was for a restaurant. And I did music, so I was touring and making some good money. So I always wanted to have a restaurant. And it didn't pan out after five years or so, and then I started a family…And that concept was always in my head, it just never had the chance or the ability to do it. And then one thing leads to another, and the economy kind of forces someone to do some drastic things, so I took a chance. And it took me a while, about 8 months, 9 months from start to finish to put something together. And then I just kind of dove into it. Instead of getting a restaurant, I got a truck."*

Unlike the truck owners mentioned above, David was one of the people I spoke with who started a food truck without any formal experience in restaurant service. He saw starting a food truck as a lower risk than jumping into a brick and mortar restaurant:

> *"The times I did work for hotels I always worked with my chefs, you know. And seeing what they do… seeing banquets, 600 people, you know, 700 people, a thousand, it wasn't fun [laughter]. To a certain extent it was fun, but when you had to do it all the time, I was like, "I don't know about this." So, I think if you start small with a truck and you're investment isn't as much as a restaurant, and if you decide to pursue it, then you know what you're getting into versus going into a restaurant and having second thoughts about it. You've invested a lot of time and money in a brick and mortar versus a truck. So I think it's a good segue, if you decide to progress to a restaurant and you're successful, then you know, that's the next step."*

John, another food truck owner, describes the motivation of opening a food truck as a lower risk:

> *"I had another friend who owned another food truck in town…and he was leaving to open a brick and mortar. And I was talking to him opening a restaurant, and he was like, "you should do a food truck, it's a lot less expensive." So I started doing the research. The original plan was to buy his truck and to set it up and run it. But he had bought his partner out and I thought his partner was asking too much for the truck and we decided not to go that route, but I already had the bug. So I was like 'I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this.'"*

Andrew echoed this sense of smaller risk with starting a truck:

> *"Essentially what we were doing was, it was a side hobby and we both had day jobs. We were just doing this thing because I loved it, we really believed in what we were doing, you know we wanted to try it out. We didn't just want to jump feet first and take on a whole lot of debt, not really know how things are going."*

Both Andrew and Jordan also described opening a food truck as part of larger motivation than just running a business. Andrew and his wife combine their business with social and environmental justice efforts. Jordan described a goal for their business was to "make a more sustainable, conscious diet accessible and affordable to more people." These economic motivations represent people who are managing aspects of Oklahoma City's economy which either fell short or did not offer enough of an opportunity for their career plans. A food truck can be relatively low in risk, as the main asset, the food truck, can be sold and "re-wrapped."

Starting a food truck requires a great deal of work and a somewhat specialized knowledge. Many cooks and chefs may lack the knowledge required to build and plumb a food truck, to secure investments and pass permit

inspections. Even fewer may have experience promoting a business and securing event appearances. Those with a knowledge in business may have no knowledge of food preparation and running a kitchen. However, for those food truck owners who were able to be successful at starting a food truck, they have an occupation that offers what many restaurant and kitchen occupations do not: ownership, flexibility of scheduling, and sense of independence

I find the personal relationship motivations important as well. All but two food trucks started as a partnership based on a personal relationship of some kind—a friendship, family, or marriage. Almost all of the food truck owners I interviewed expressed that they viewed their business as part of a larger community or culture of food trucks in Oklahoma City. The exceptions to this were minor, encompassing food trucks owners which noticed a community but who were not actively working along-side other trucks on a regular basis. This is not to say that these personal relationships in starting food trucks definitely caused a food truck community in Oklahoma City to exist, but I did find a correlation where several people went so far as to refer to the city's food truck community as family.

Start Up Financing

Food truck owners also showed a great deal of diversity and ingenuity in how they were able to secure the capital required to acquire the food truck and make sure that it met the required health code specifications. Most of the food

trucks I spoke with started out with relatively low start up costs, and the truck itself was the largest capital asset of their business. A few were determined to avoid debt all together by saving, buying an inexpensive truck and doing the work themselves. Startup fundraising ranged from approximately $10,000 to as much as $100,000 to get the truck built out and operational.

John described his experience in building his food truck, in his case, an old Fed-Ex truck, up to operational capacity and health codes. He remarked on incidental costs for:

> "*Food trucks.. that's the number, $300, so whenever you're looking for something, it's like 300 bucks if you're getting it used. You know the sinks were $300 dollars. To do the plumbing was 300 dollars."*

John used several funding strategies to secure start up capital, including using a Kickstarter campaign to help with financing his truck:

> *So we just kind of moved forward, and we did a Kickstarter campaign to get started. We raised 7500 dollars with that campaign, and that was enough for most of the equipment in here along with the cash flowing that we did. I sold my motorcycle … So, sold a lot of stuff, you know, did some craigslisting and some things like that to kind of get through."*

Mike and his partner decided to self-finance their truck. As he describes that process:

> *"30 thousand and that's what we had budgeted to purchase the truck, refurbish the truck, licensing, everything. That's what we had for our startup costs, and we were able to do it for less than that. So we were able to do that for less and we still had some cash for operating expenses… And a lot of that is due just to [my business partner] being a master negotiator. I mean, she got a lot of the labor on the food truck, she got of it done for a very, very good price. So we were able to build the truck for way less than I think most people are. Granted, it was kind of DIY. At that time, all of the food trucks were DIY"*

He compared this experience to the difficulty of starting a restaurant. As he described, starting a food truck is a relatively lower risk and lower barrier to entry compared with starting a restaurant:

> *"That's a game changer when you can start a business and be an operator on such a smaller scale, where maybe you can do it with a small loan or maybe have some money set aside to start it on your own. You see, we didn't take out a loan or anything on the food truck, we happened to have some money saved up. Most people can't do that on a restaurant scale. It was just accessible, it was like, we have these skills we both built in the restaurant business, they'll translate really well in a food truck, and we can start it for, very little money.*
>
> ***James [Interviewer]: So it wasn't a huge risk to you guys?***
>
> *Mike: It wasn't, it really wasn't. We felt like if this doesn't work out, we're not going to lose our ass. And we have this one capital asset, which is a food truck, that we could easily sell. So yeah, we felt less pressure than if we opened a half million dollar restaurant, and were answering to people who invested."*

Mike's mention of a food truck as a capital asset is notable. Several food trucks in Oklahoma City have been sold and "re-wrapped." This process allows for new food truck businesses to quickly replace any which have closed or gone out of business. Since 2011, there have been at least four food trucks which have gone out of business, and two of the trucks have been "re-wrapped" and are still in use today.

In contrast to self-financing, Andrew was able to work with an investor for his business, and the food truck was able to be financed through an existing business operation. He describes the difficulty of controlling costs when starting a truck:

> *"Money goes by really fast. And so, I've seen some food trucks that have spend probably $80,000, maybe close to $100,000 on build out. And you kind of have to look at it and think to yourself, in Oklahoma your money can be stretched pretty far compared to other places. You can start a restaurant for $100,000, and it's like, do you want to put it in something with wheels?*

Though real estate is known to be relatively affordable in Oklahoma City compared to the rest of the U.S., very few restaurants own the real estate on which they operate. The scale of knowledge and capital required to open a brick and mortar restaurant is on a different scale.

An important benefit to starting a food truck is the ability to move locations. Compared with a brick and mortar restaurant. Ian describes how a food truck "allows us to test out a location with little penalty. If a place doesn't work out, you know and can adjust for the next time." Of the food trucks I interviewed, three had experience either running or transitioning to a brick and mortar location. A food truck owner who had transitioned to a brick and mortar location noted that there is a steep learning curve to opening a restaurant compared with a food truck, and choosing a location and finding an acceptable lease was a central concern.

This range of start up costs allows food trucks to raise money in more flexible way than traditional business financing, and it potentially frees food truck owners from being required to partner with investors or banks. Though food trucks operate formally, in the sense of inspections, fees, and permits, food trucks are more likely to raise capital in ways that more closely resemble micro-financing. They also can represent a degree of informality through their reliance

on self-finance, family members, and a do-it-yourself ethos where truck owners utilize a social network of friend and other trucks to learn how to build out the trucks themselves.

As Mike mentioned earlier, this lowered scale of cost and start up logistical complexity *is* a game changer as it applies to food. Many food trucks, though not all, specialize in a certain style of food, or even a particular ingredient or dish as a theme—from Chicago style tacos to crepes to gourmet pretzels. Many chefs are required to work with menus that offer a great deal of variety to a range of customers. If a chef has the ability to write a menu, she or he will likely be constrained by restaurant budgets split between the bar, the dining area, and labor costs. Also, a chef may be further restricted in the freedom to write a menu based on the input from investors, owners, and management.

In contrast, food trucks deal with a different set of constraints. The limited amount of storage space and room to cook and keep food warm restricts the size of the menu. The limited amount of space on the truck also reduces the number of people who can be on the truck and work during a service shift. While these factors place limits the size and scale of the menu and the operation, they also provide opportunities to focus on one or two dishes with extreme focus, typically using a variation on a single theme or set of ingredients.

Food truck owners and chefs can also change the menu at will, based on what ingredients are most available or based on a desire to experiment with new ideas. John describes this freedom of setting a daily menu:

> "*It's kind of nice when I can say, "OK, I don't know what our menu's going to be until tomorrow morning when I go grocery shopping. So, I think a lot of the trucks are like that. Sometimes I'll shop the night before...like when I have a big event, I'll usually go and shop the night before, because we're starting up so early in the morning."*

If a menu item does not sell, at most, the food truck operation loses the cost of food and some gas in order to try a new menu experiment. Though, not every food truck operates this way. Ian cautions that food trucks are not necessarily a "great way to test new ideas," and his operation tends to stick to what they already know and can serve quickly.

The lowered scale of start up cost and risk is one of the ways in which food trucks can push the specialization of a niche ingredient or dish. There seemed to be a sense of nostalgia in many of the food trucks who have opened in Oklahoma City. This sense of nostalgia can serve to maintain traditional foodways, such as one truck which serves traditional Puerto Rican dishes and another truck which serves southern-style fried fish and greens. While food trucks force specialization through limitations and incentivize developing a deep, singular focus through lowered economic risk and independence, food trucks still need to stand out to consumers, especially when competing for business with other trucks and restaurants.

Oklahoma City is not traditionally known for being a hub forward thinking and sophisticated cuisine. Food trucks which serve "gourmet" and worked over versions of traditional foods familiar to many in Oklahoma City—such as barbeque, waffles, and ice cream sandwiches—can be approachable while offering something unique and not easily found in other places or restaurants in the area. Other food trucks offer dishes completely absent from any other menu in the area, ramen or vegan comfort food, for example. These specialized and niche foods are important to Oklahoma City's food culture, and the opportunities presented by lowered start up costs for food trucks allow for these opportunities to happen and be developed.

Building out the Truck

After deciding to start a truck, many food truck owners first encounter the details of heath code regulations when starting to build out the truck. As some trucks describe, the process of starting and outfitting the truck as with a mix of experimentation and uncertainty. While some of those who start trucks do research and consult with other trucks, several food truck owners I spoke with still experienced difficulties in both understanding the regulations and passing through the necessary health and bureaucratic requirements of being certified to open and operate. Despite these challenges, most of the food trucks I spoke with described the health department and city officials as being generally helpful and being able to provide sufficient information requested.

Ian helped start one of the earliest "gourmet" food trucks in the Oklahoma City area. In 2010, he partnered with two friends to buy a taco truck located in Los Angeles on ebay, requiring a trip to California to pick the truck up. Once back in Oklahoma City, learning the existing regulations at the time was somewhat of a challenge. Ian describes how, "we, originally, we were a little like explorers. Nobody in one department knew anything, and there was a steep learning curve for us."

Mike, who started another one of the early gourmet food trucks in 2011, buying a food truck from Missouri. Similarly, Jordan describes finding a "gutted box truck on Craigslist pretty easily and thankfully we were able to do most of the construction ourselves." John also found an "old fedex" truck which he outfitted to be a food truck primarily on his own.

These experiences contrast with Jennifer, who describes researching and then buying a truck which was ready built:

> *"Well, my husband did a lot of research online about where to get the truck, what the equipment that came with it. We knew kind of what we wanted to do. We didn't want fryers. We don't do anything fried, simply because I don't want to drive around in a moving vehicle with grease. It just doesn't work for me. I like a nice clean, crisp truck, and grease is just not included in that formula. So we picked the griddle, the hood vent, the sinks, the water tanks and stuff like that. And then we picked out the specific gas oven, the specific make up table…and then freezers and stuff like that."*

Several food truck owners I spoke with learned what they needed to know for building to health code requirements from other food trucks. Jack and Chris noted that one truck in particular had helped several other trucks learn

what they needed to outfit their trucks to code. Heather describes reaching out to other trucks beforehand to gain an idea of what to do: “We bought a used truck and spent about 6 weeks building it out. The major thing we had to add was the oven, but other than that, there wasn’t a lot extra we had to add.” Jordan also described how other trucks came to help with their truck’s build-out:

> *“It was definitely a learning process, but my husband was already very familiar on truck design and what kind of things inspectors would be looking for. The OKC food truck scene is pretty close knit, and another truck owner who was more experienced in building trucks helped us with the major projects like gas and plumbing.”*

However, David described a more difficult experience while learning along the way:

> *“No one told me anything. The only people I knew from hotels, I knew a couple inspectors, but it was more swimming pools, corporate stuff. It wasn't food. So I got my truck out of Texas, and their health inspectors had my truck inspected, but there's a couple of different tweaks that Oklahoma law has. Well so then, I kind of just hit the pavement. And went piece by piece to try and figure this out, and then the health department gave me a link to a 30 day checklist, and I went through every line by line.”*

The difficulty of this experience inspired David to help other trucks going through the start up process. As he describes:

> “*I know where to go so you don't have to spend three weeks finding out where to go next and which processes after the next and next and next. 'Cause, you'd go to one and they'd go, "no you need this first." So, then you have to go get your, you know, study for your tests and then you'd, once you get that done, you have to go and then city license. Nope, you've got to get this first done. So, I did it the old fashioned way. I didn't know anything about the food industry. I just knew I liked to eat.”*

As food trucks have grown more popular in Oklahoma City, more people are interested in opening a food truck. I spoke informally with several people

who were considering starting a gourmet food truck in the Oklahoma City area. Compared with the earlier experiences described by the food trucks who started in 2010 and 2011, the additional experiences of more food trucks, better seasoned health department and city officials, and the relatively new Oklahoma Independent Food Truck Association (OIFTA) have all provided additional resources for potential food truck owners.

The trade association, OIFTA, plays in important role in both providing resources and acting as a normative body among food truck owners. The organization was formed after initial discussions among food truck owners in 2013, and organized regular, monthly meetings starting in 2014. Based on background conversations with food truck owners, those leading OIFTA seek to use the organization as a kind of middle organization between health and municipal regulators on one side, and food truck owners who are seeking resources and regulatory knowledge on the other. Though OIFTA's membership does not compromise all of the food truck businesses in the state, the organization. works to make sure that members of the association meet full health and regulatory compliance

The knowledge and skill of outfitting a food truck is fairly specialized. John described how contracting to build out new trucks could also be an additional revenue source in the winter off-season:

> "*Yeah, every time somebody comes to me, I get approached a lot. Actually I just got a text message while we were talking. He wants me to talk to him about a truck and building a food truck and all that good stuff. My plan was actually to build food trucks over the winter time, like*

when business is really slow. But all the trucks I had lined up took longer to raise their money. So, it's going to be a chore trying to get food trucks built during the summer time when I'm busy, you know. But there's a lot of money in it, so. I don't do everything for money, but I've got to pay the bills."

Andrew described contracting with someone to help with his build out:

"We contracted a person that who is very into it with the knowledge behind the food truck regulations. He's not affiliated, he's his own contractor, but he's done enough food trucks to know the regulations behind it. He's done enough food trucks to know the regulations behind it. So we talked to him. We also talked to other food truck owners …And I had extensive conversations with the health department, and so we also did a lot of internet research on our own to try and figure out what we needed to do."

However, this research and help was not enough to successfully navigate a difficult health inspection. Andrew decided to get inspected in a nearby county which he knew had a reputation for thorough inspections, despite knowing he could go to any county in the state. As he described:

"And you know we were actually encouraged to go to Oklahoma City, just because [it] is showing itself to be more progressive and they're more willing to negotiate on areas. But because our business is in [this county] we felt it would have been just overall better than try and circumvent their system to just streamline everything…I will give them the good behind it is, [this county] is notorious for being very vigilant. They're just very thorough. I appreciate that because if we can be approved in [here] there should be no reason we should not be approved in the entirety of the state."

This still came with difficulties in bringing his food truck up to code. Andrew detailed the difficulties he encountered:

"When we bought this thing, it was a snow cone stand that we bought from Texas, and … they were approved [in Texas]. They had one water heater, which was a 5 gallon water heater. It's a 17 gallon clean water tank, 5 gallon hot water tank. And they had 4 sinks, that were all separate. Essentially 3 sinks were designated for prep and one sink was

designated for their hand washing sink. Their refrigeration was not commercial. It was something you just buy off the store. And they were approved.

And when we went down to Texas to look at this, I was familiar with manufacturing practices, and manufacturing practices are a little different. As far as city was concerned, that was real easy, just talk to the city and they just tell you what was expected and you take care of it. But health code-wise, I thought, surely in Texas if this is approved, of all places. And so without a second thought, we thought, this would be great. I've worked with the health department on the manufacturing side, Texas is approved, a lot of times States have reciprocity. And we got to Oklahoma, and we had to rip out those three sinks and drop in a single three compartment sink, we had to replace our refrigeration with commercial, and we also had to supplement our hot water tank with an instant hot water heater.

Needless to say, we spent an additional 4-5 thousand dollars, due to health code regulations. We found out the hard way, honestly, I admit that we should have done better research before we purchased it. But, the amount of regulations that were brought upon us were a little bit unexpected. I mean if you think about it…I don't feel like the health department is unreasonable by any means, but I feel like they could have been a little more flexible. There's always a level of grey area in interpretation, and the feeling I get is Oklahoma likes to take as literal of an interpretation without any room for negotiation. So, I personally don't feel that diplomacy is a very desired approach that the health department takes."

In addition to meeting health-code requirements, many trucks also stand out in their individual appearance and customizations. Though many food trucks share a general form as a box vehicle with a window, the food trucks I observed were all individual and contained a great deal of specific details. Several food truck owners I interviewed described working on the exterior of the appearance as a way to stand out. John's do-it-yourself approach to building the truck extended to painting the exterior himself. After his truck had success operating for some time, he describes, "having a professional street artist here in

Oklahoma City do it this way. So the original paint was…ugly, it was hideous, but it stood out though."

Andrew took pride when describing the exterior of his food truck. As he describes:

> *"I believe our truck is really beautiful. I really feel like … we've really shown it in a way that is highly presentable. It's very picturesque. I don't say that to make myself feel better because I know the level of work that [my business partner] took to brainstorming the outside. … you know we had an artist actually paint, by hand, the stuff on here, our logo, the mural, and all that, the branding. …I really feel like… if you put in effort and really make you food truck presentable, people will respond to it in a very good fashion…Definitely, in terms of brand recognition, in terms like allowing ourselves to interact with the customer."*

Individual details and pride extends to the interiors of Oklahoma City's food trucks. I was able to visit the interiors of several trucks, and I was struck by the variation between how different trucks were. Some of the trucks were packed full and tight, and one, in particular, was incredibly open and spacious. Several trucks never started out as food trucks, rather they were adapted from box delivery trucks. After my sensation of being on a food truck wore away, each truck started to feel more and more like a standard commercial kitchen. There was a stove, hood, and refrigerator. There were prep areas and stations to "expedite" or assemble the final orders before handing them out of the window to customers. Some elements appeared to be added or adapted over time, but the entire set up felt very functional.

What stood out the most to me most after seeing these interiors was the individual adaptations each truck made. I saw a great deal of care owners made

to the set up of their trucks. One local truck features a wood burning oven for pizza. Other trucks were modified for additional refrigeration or more prep stations. One truck in particular was packed with storage, overhead and below. The Do It Yourself nature of starting a food truck is significant in this case because the owners of food trucks are primarily the ones cooking inside, and the modifications suit their needs and abilities. This is in contrast to a brick and mortar setting where the people cooking have little or no control over how the kitchen is set up and made to work. This reinforces the notion of the "freedom" many food trucks express. Despite the size limitations, they are adaptable to the person doing the majority of the cooking, and can be rebuilt or modified after the chef gains experience or decides to incorporate a different menu.

Daily Operations

It's already the start of the lunch shift and John opens the door of his food truck. He chastises me for running late: "What did you do, walk here?" I step through the cab and into the main part of the truck. It's wide open and Spartan. To my right is a sink sitting on top of a plastic water tank. Extending further down the truck is a set of three gas burners and a hood slung low and flanked farther back by a table holding food in warming trays. On the opposite side of the truck there is the customer window set between a stainless steel table and a cash register.

John has a friendly energy. He's wearing a t shirt and baseball cap. He has one hand perched inside of the pocket of his jeans. We start talking about starting out and he gives me a tour of the truck. He explains that:

> "*It was an old Fedex truck, and we paid a 1,000 bucks for it. It had a seized engine, and we just went to town on it. I had my brother-in-law come, we got it running, but it just had a lot more issues than we thought. We ended up blowing the engine out about three weeks after we opened, and we ended up putting a new engine in."*

We start talking about how John learned how build different parts of the truck himself when he sees a man crossing the street. He calls out the man and asks if he's hungry. It's the first customer I see that day. John washes his hands and begins to work. He fills the to go container and carefully closes the lid. The generator outside the truck has been humming the entire time but it starts to become a kind of canvas to the work of selling food, like a symphony tuning in cacophony before a performance. It is the undertone over which John focuses

his attention. He hands the food off and chats with the man and then returns to the conversation.

Lunch continues on like this. Customers punctuate our conversation in a steady flow. People come for their lunch break and then head back to their cars. John talks to a regular at length. This is a time of year far off from the busy season of summer, and there's an ease to this slow pace. When the festivals start again in the spring, things will change, but for now, John explains that he's willing to risk coming out on a slow day like today in the "off" season in order to keep himself visible to the public at large and be there for his loyal customers.

This day-to-day experience of running a food truck is an important way to understand how regulations effect a food truck operation and how they are understood and managed by a food truck owner. This mode of time is where regulations shape practice. Most policies, plans, and efforts to shape cities and public space are concerned with daily life, and this understanding of daily life from the perspective of a food truck owner can offer another view to the long term efforts of city planners, officials, and policy makers.

In this section, I describe daily life in three modes. I begin with views on how food truck owners view a "typical" service shift. I then expand to describe how they view festivals and special events. Finally, I cover the newer phenomenon of food truck parks and why these private property sites present unique requirements for regulation and enforcement.

'Typical Days, There's No Such Thing'

Many of the trucks noted that there is no one typical "service." However, all of the truck owners I interviewed described a kind of rhythm associated with each service or serving at a large event. The active season for most food truck stretches from March through October, roughly coinciding with St. Patrick's Day to Halloween, and most trucks operate at least 4 times a week during this season. A service can vary from a private lunch in a corporate parking lot to an all day event. It is even possible for a food truck operation to serve several events in a day.

Jack and Chris describe this process:

> *"So before we go somewhere, we always have prep. It could be just me starting in the morning, … we always make a lot in advance, maybe twice a week, but more if we need to. We usually run with a crew between the size of 4 to 7 [for regular events], usually we have a cashier up front, a front cook … a grill cook, and a back of the house, dish cook, and maybe an expo on busy nights. Our cashier can do that most nights, and we can handle it if it's slow. I've gone out with just the two of us, but it has to be slow."*

Other trucks make food on the site. Jordan describes how:

> *"A typical day for us really starts at the beginning of our work week. We only serve fresh food and we make all of our sauces from scratch usually the day before we go out. The morning of a service day, we build our meals and bake bread and let the food cook on the way to an event. Fresh produce is cut once we've parked. Because of the nature of our menu, we are usually doing dishes before and after service. For bigger events, it's a lot of the same just on a bigger scale. And we continue to cook throughout our serve time to keep food fresh."*

John also tends to cook on site. He describes the pace of a "typical" service:

"Typical days, there's no such thing. Like today, which is a really simple event, I'll wake up at 7:30, I go shopping. My truck's parked at a storage unit, so I'll go to the grocery store in the morning, shop for whatever I'm going to cook that day. Then I go pick up my truck, I load it up, and then I head over to the site. I usually get to the site about 2 hours before and start cooking… Occasionally, I'll pull into my driveway, for some of the nighttime events and things, so I can pull up, ready to serve. And then after service, we clean it up, we batten it down. I go dump my water. I fill up at night before I park the truck, so that way the next morning I've got new gas, I've got water."

Andrew notes the cost of running a truck for each service puts pressure to sell as much as possible in a limited amount of time:

"You don't consider the fact that a four hour service, of serving food, equates to actually six to eight hours total, because of prep and clean up time...When you're out, you've got to go all out, and not counting the time for prep, driving, cleaning, that sort of thing. So it puts a lot of pressure on you to make your sales."

Ian describes how the pressure to sell food quickly can put pressure on serving dishes which are quick and easier to serve:

"*It's really not a great way to test out new ideas. We always stick to the basic recipes, just because it's so busy. The trucks are so small and limited and space. Anything we bring to the truck already has to work out well at the restaurant. It's not a time where we get creative."*

One of the major aspects of each day's service is scheduling and deciding where to go. Many trucks, especially trucks with established business, receive more than enough offers to keep a full schedule from week to week, and most trucks rely on regular, monthly street festival events for business. Heather describes having "so many calls for events, that we have to turn some down." And Jordan notes that "most of the events we go to are established events or private catering events."

On some days, it may not be possible or even worth going out to serve. All of the food truck owners I spoke with described how weather could impact a service, from preventing customers from coming out to causing issues with the food truck. I asked Jack and Chris about issues they had serving in the winter, and they described frozen water lines as being the main issue that prevented them from serving. They also noted that even when they could serve, so few customers came out that it was difficult to justify serving. Severe weather in the Spring and Fall could also prevent food truck businesses from serving. Jordan also noted how weather was one of the big barriers to being able to serve. John also described how there was a minimum cost to operate the truck each service: "It costs $125 to open, so if you don't open, you don't have to pay a 125. So, zero's sometimes better than negative 125." Despite this cost, John also described how sometimes it was important to take a possible loss on some of the winter days in order to stay visible and be available for his loyal customers.

Despite the consensus that services can vary and circumstances can change throughout a day, there are appear to be a few general aspects of a food truck business which form a kind of daily rhythm, from prep to serving at a site to tearing down and putting everything away for the night. Food truck businesses also require using social media for advertising and promotion and answering questions and requests for events. While the location may shift, the sequential aspect of serving food for customers allows a kind of regularity and an entry point for regulation. These elements are not far off from food

preparation in general and they allow health inspectors to find and inspect food truck kitchens. These modes of "daily" business are distinctive because they are primarily driven by an individual food truck owner. This stands in contrast to street festival and special events, which are often driven by an organizer, and this difference shifts the burden of securing permission to use public spaces from the food truck owners and on to the event organizing body.

Street Festivals and Special Events

Special events form an important part of operations for the city's food trucks. They create an opportunity to be exposed to a large mass of customers. The events bring a certain kind of energy as well, as they usually feature multiple food trucks and closed off streets. They have the feel of an open air market or carnival. They often feature activities inside of neighboring businesses as well as boutique vendors and buskers on the street. Often times, there is music or a special performance in a designated area. These events are significant for food trucks because they are a site where food trucks can interact and share stories and experiences. They can gain a familiarity with each other and be exposed to newer food truck businesses.

Events require a different kind of preparation, particularly the monthly H&8th which is focused primarily on food trucks. John uses a friend's restaurant as a commissary in order to prepare for large events:

> *"If we do big events, like H&8th, I have a friend that owns a restaurant, so I use his restaurant as a commercial kitchen, and uh, you get a*

commercial kitchen to do all your prep and stuff. If you get a commercial kitchen you get more people working, it's cooler, it's more comfortable. For H&8th, we start at 9 in the morning with our prep, and then we're serving until 11:00 that night. So it's a long day when we do H&8th."

David describes the challenge of making sure everything is prepped on schedule for a large event:

"[They] are massive, so it's storage, it's keeping everything at temperature. Timing is everything. You know, prepping for an event. It starts early. So that day, I try not to stress out, because before, when I first started, it was learning all these things, not being in the food industry like some of my partners was a learning curve, and until recently, I think I've got it down to where it's like a science. You know it's like, now I'm not stressed as much because now I know I have to do this, this, this. So, the mornings before an event, I'm relaxed. I turn my warmers on, you know it's just a process, and not rushing around doing this, that, and the other."

The regular street festivals and events can offer a kind of excitement or energy. One truck described festivals as:

"*It's good, I mean it's where the crowds go. We definitely get into it and feed off the energy. Right now, the street festivals are what keep us going. We have fun when we serve alone, but it's always good to go out and see the other trucks. We mostly know everyone and we see a lot of the same people at each event. Even when it's crazy, it's fun to see the customers, although we really don't notice anything during a busy shift."*

Mike also describes the importance of events to his business:

"Short answer, very important. We need to have more street events. If there's one thing I see about Midtown, we don't have anything like H&8th. H&8th is almost encompassing Midtown now it's so big."

Many of the trucks noted that the festivals provided an opportunity to get to know the other food trucks. Jordan describes this sense of community at festivals:

> *"There's definitely a great community among food truck owners. For the most part, the people who own these trucks are the ones working on them. So we can all relate in that way. And we work a lot of the same events together, so we see each other often… I don't think we'd have the same kind of community connection if we were tied down to one location."*

Jon similarly describes the feeling at street festivals and events:

> *"It's festive, you know. And that's one of the things, a lot of trucks don't like to park with other trucks, because they think they're not going to get all of the business. But you do better when there's 2 or 3 food trucks somewhere. If you're driving down [arterial street] and you see 3 food trucks in here? You're going to be like, "something's going on." And so it brings in a lot more customers."*

I asked John if there is a feeling for community among food truck owners at events. He described how truck owners are willing to help out at large events:

> *The best anecdote is [an event organizer], he was telling us about New York contacting us and trying to figure out why we're so successful at [a street festival in Oklahoma City]. And they kept sending everything that they were doing [that OKC was doing], and New York was like, "we're doing that, and we're doing that, and we're doing that, and we're not getting the big draw of people." And then finally they were down here talking, and there was a food truck that shut down because they had sold out. And, the girl that ran that food truck, got on the food truck next to her and started serving and helping serve. And [the event organizer is] like, "Hey, how long have you guys known each other?" And they were like, "we met today."*
>
> *And that's kind of the whole atmosphere. I've jumped on other people's trucks and taken orders and vice versa, you know. And it's really fun to see how everybody has their own style of [dealing with] customers. It's almost all the same in a food truck, but it's just so serious, you know? I got on a truck over at Bleu Garten one day, because I had packed up, and I was ready to go. And there was a truck that was staying for the night service. I just got on here truck and started taking orders and she's like, "how come I can't hire somebody to do that?" You can't train that, but every food truck owner can do that, you know?*

This story was also retold by Jennifer and David, and it demonstrates something significant about how the city's food truck owners view themselves and the food truck community. It's a narrative which symbolizes a removal of distance and a feeling that everyone is working together, particularly in the context of a festival, but beyond a street festival as well.

However, Andrew notes the downside of the focus on regular events and street festivals:

> "*It's not so much the immediate food trucks now, but it's the, where does Oklahoma want to go, where does the community want to go? And food trucks are going to continue growing. I think things like H&8th is great, but Oklahoma is very centered around events and destination. And while that is a good thing, it's silly for businesses to thrive off of the business based off of one great event once a month. It just doesn't seem, I don't know, very sustainable to me."*

It is important to note that while food trucks appear to be crucial to the customer appeal of street festivals, food truck owners are not the primary drivers or organizers of these events. As I will describe later, this comes down to the control of public space. Business and property owners have a great deal of control over how the public space around them is used and regulated. As important as festivals are for food trucks, Andrew's comment describes a major shortcoming of these festivals for food trucks. An option for more control, one even described in an article by Linnekin et al. (2011), is for food truck owners to utilize or create food truck parks on private property, and a recent ordinance in Oklahoma City has already cleared the regulatory path for these spaces.

Food Truck Parks

Food truck "parks," where food trucks can cluster on an empty lot are found in cities known for food trucks, such as Austin, Texas, and Portland, Oregon. A change in Oklahoma City ordinances passed in the Summer of 2014 permits food trucks to operate in a designated food truck park off the street without a need for an outdoor special event permit. Bleu Garten, the first food truck park in Oklahoma City opened in the latter part of 2014, and two more food truck parks are being planned at the time of writing.

Food truck parks can complement other forms of food truck vending. They can be places where food trucks operate on private property, but create the feel of a service on the street or in a public area. Depending on a location falling within certain zoning overlays, such as the downtown zoning district, food truck parks may also be able to serve alcohol without a special permit which could allow the park to be sustainable as a business, especially given the seasonal nature of serving food outside.

Food truck parks can also be a tool for urban infill. They are well suited to empty, lots, many of which pockmark blocks in the inner part of Oklahoma City. They can also make use of oddly sized and shaped pieces of land, areas and slivers of property left over from other developments or infrastructure projects. The physical facilities, such as many of those in Bleu Garten, can be designed as modular or transportable structures and are possible to be moved if needed. This allows food truck parks to occupy land which may be held

undeveloped in order for developers to speculate and wait for a large development. These uses can transform an empty, "dead" space on a block and open it up into something which ties into nearby public spaces.

The response to food truck parks from food truck owners I interviewed, when asked, was generally positive. David describes how:

> *"Blue Garten is a different concept…[it is] an avenue, where somebody wants to come in and do that twice a month, they can. So it's a good thing. There's new ones popping up…and I look for those things to kind of even grow, I think, east and west."*

Ian, however, offered a more cautious view based on his experience. He thought the concrete drive for food truck parking was too small and not shaped well enough to allow food trucks to easily arrive and leave around each other. Ian also noted that in the early days of Bleu Garten the food trucks were required to use the food truck park's point of sale system, rather than their own systems.

This form of food truck park is different from some examples in cities such as Portland and Austin where stationary food trucks remain parked in the same location. The use of food truck parks could, however, open up the possibility of small-scale food businesses or food courts with rotating businesses of stationary customers. In talking about this different use of a food truck park or court, the food truck owners were quick to differentiate what they did compared to the form of stationary vending. I gathered that many of the most successful food trucks were too busy with events and private requests to make use of the food truck park very often, if at all.

One crucial improvement when compared to street festivals is that food truck parks are generally able to offer electrical hookups which reduces the nuisance of generator noise. Most food trucks described the challenge of dealing with generator noise at events and places where they serve. The difference between an expensive generator versus a "cheaper" example is the difference in noise between being able to conduct a normal conversation while in line versus having to shout. It is also the difference of several thousand dollars which may exceed the start up costs for many working on a tight budget.

Some food truck owners I spoke with had an interest in starting a brick-and-mortar location at some point in the future, and a few (approximately three) have transitioned their business from being exclusively run out of a food truck to being based in a brick-and-mortar location. One food truck owner I interviewed came to into the food truck business out of a career of owning a brick-and-mortar restaurant.

There appears to be a significant jump in the level of skills, knowledge, and financing between running a food truck versus a restaurant on private property. While some food trucks appear to be actively using food trucks as a means to start a brick-and-mortar location, many appreciated the freedom and flexibility as well as the smaller scale of a food truck. Jordan describes how she and her partners have considered starting a brick-and-mortar location for their businesses:

> *"We've considered it, but for now we like the freedom of owning a truck. We don't have investors overseeing our decisions. We don't have a full staff to coordinate. And we get to work with a lot of awesome businesses and organizations on events and such. I don't think we'd have the same kind of community connection if we were tied down to one location."*

This response may explain why food truck businesses are not necessarily avenues for creating businesses tied to a private property locations. It may also help describe the limited scope of food truck parks for food truck owners.

Chapter V: Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter described food trucks in Oklahoma City. I combined my observations with the words of several food truck owners in order to better explain the state of food trucks in Oklahoma City. In this section, I return to the research questions posed at the beginning of this essay: What are the regulatory barriers for food truck owners in Oklahoma City? How do these owners manage and overcome these barriers? And how can regulations generally be streamlined to better account for food trucks based on what I have observed?

In the process of doing research, I found these research questions to fall short. In all of the interviews, observations, and background work, I did not find anything to suggest current food truck regulations are particularly burdensome or present significant barriers to operating a food truck in the Oklahoma City metro area. That is not to say that certain regulations do not cause hardship for certain food truck owners, or that this regulatory process has worked as well as it should. Rather, the perceived negative effects current regulations by food truck owners appear to be minimal.

In this chapter, I explain several reasons why these potential barriers to operating a food truck may be mitigated or lessened and provide a broader context for how food trucks and food truck regulations play a role in Oklahoma

City's revitalization schemes. I start with the argument that there is a sense of community among food truck owners which has worked to lessen the negative impact of various food truck regulations. I then turn attention towards the role of street festivals sponsored by business improvement districts and commercial district associations in mitigating potential conflict with property owners and brick-and-mortar businesses. I also challenge the ways in which the identity of "gourmet" food trucks are formed and why the use of this classification has spatial and class-based implications in the use of this term. Finally, I examine the role of Oklahoma City's food trucks within these various process of community building and revitalization schemes, and I argue that food trucks play an active role in the city's economic development, even as this role raises difficult questions about the nature of this place-focused revitalization and who it is designed to benefit.

The Formation of a Food Truck Community

In the previous chapter, food truck owners described starting on the basis of a friendship and family connection. As food trucks work various events and festivals, they described meeting other trucks and being able to use these events as an opportunity to socialize and catch up with each other. In this section, I argue that the social relationships between food trucks have created a feeling or sense of community among food truck owners and workers, and this sense of

community has mitigated many difficulties imposed by local food truck regulations in Oklahoma City.

I found a strong sense of cooperation and help among all of the food trucks I spoke with and observed. This differs from most industries and even from restaurants, where business establishments compete for a limited share of customers and spending. Food trucks seem to work somewhat differently. Many food trucks in Oklahoma City faced the difficulty of starting out in a niche industry without a firm establishment to draw from. Food trucks, particularly "gourmet" food trucks, are different enough that even those truck owners with a solid background in the restaurant trade and business management face an uphill climb in order to acquire and set up a truck which matches local health regulations. Trucks also must understand what permits and inspections are needed, and which bureaucratic steps are prerequisites to other steps.

Many of the truck owners who started in 2009 and 2010 faced an additional difficulty of working with regulators, inspectors, and policy makers who were not yet accustomed to working with "gourmet" trucks as opposed to more standard taco trucks or food vendors for fairs and special outdoor events. Based on this initial difficulty, these "early" trucks were willing to help share their experience with other trucks and provide a valuable road map for future trucks who would undergo the same process. Many of these early trucks likely realized that a greater number of "legitimate" and fully permitted trucks with up

to-date compliance of the health code would help all food trucks be seen as legitimate and could secure more bookings and event appearances.

While there may have been a business-sense motivation to helping other trucks go through a process which continues to be somewhat confusing to arcane, the food truck owners I spoke with knew many of the other truck owners and seemed genuinely willing to help others just so the process for future trucks would not be as difficult. This process is a kind of social knowledge and indoctrinating new trucks to the regulatory environment is a form of social learning among food truck owners.

These kinds of social processes, initiations and collectively held knowledge, are all elements of a community. Though food trucks are not likely to be a strong subculture, per se, local food truck communities have elements such as these which are hallmarks of sub-cultural formation and definition (Hebdige 1979: 132). In this way, a community of food truck owners can help mitigate some regulations which might prove to be difficult or barriers to starting and running a food truck business.

So how is this community formed? How does it develop and change over time? Speaking with food truck owners on how they started their businesses, I found that many food truck owners started out more or less on their own. Many current food truck owners had seen food trucks in action, either in Oklahoma City or somewhere else, but they tended to describe narratives centered on friendships or family relationships. Several food trucks started as a

partnership between long-time friends. A few others started as couples. Though some food trucks started out without a focus on these kinds of relationships, the narrative focus on these relationships internal to the truck came up in almost all of my interviews to the extent that I argue it is representative of a trend among Oklahoma City's food truck establishments. Even among trucks started by a single owner, support from extended family and friend networks were often cited as crucial to the early success of a food truck business.

I bring up these sorts of relationships internal to food truck businesses to suggest they play a role in the way Oklahoma City's food truck community has taken shape. Several trucks described to me how Oklahoma's food trucks were "mom and pop" operations. Other food truck owners described Oklahoma City's food trucks collectively as a "family" and it was their goal to sponsor this sense of "family." This sense seems to distinguish the food trucks which often serve Oklahoma City.

Street festivals are the physical and metaphorical place where this sense of community is formed. In my observations, I noted that there were times at the start and at the end of festivals where the truck owners were most likely to interact. After parking their food trucks and getting everything set up, there was a lull, before people started to arrive in masse, usually between 5:00 and 6:00 pm. In this time, I noticed people going from one truck to knock on the doors of another truck to say hello or catch up. This time is also when I would see trucks trading food. After the festival was over, I noticed the same thing. People from

one food truck would knock on the door of another truck and return with a plate of food. Other food truck owners described their teenage children filling in to help work on another food truck if needed. Outside of the events, several food truck owners described socializing together, usually during the afternoons and evenings they were likely to be slow, such as a Tuesday or Wednesday night. The Oklahoma Independent Food Truck Association, the trade association, is another important place where this shared interaction occurs as well.

These interactions allow for the trucks to catch up and gain a general sense of what is happening among other food trucks. It is analogous to a type of community interaction one might have in a neighborhood, where daily visits to a corner store, coffee shop, or park allows for regular interactions with neighbors and shop owners. It is also one way several trucks describe meeting each other for the first time, and it is a primary way for new or starting trucks to meet more established trucks.

While there are interactions outside of the festivals, the festivals were foundational to interactions among food trucks. Before the trade association and the socializing, the street festivals came first. The interactions from the public street festivals lead to requests for private events and serving business office parks, which, in turn, also reinforced these shared interactions.

These interactions are important to the building of a community. Starting and running a food truck shares similarities to working at a brick and mortar restaurant, but it is different and challenging enough that food truck

owners would want to relate to each other. It would be difficult to describe the challenge of a broken generator during service, dealing with daily visits from a health inspector, or worrying about frozen water lines every service in the winter. Most brick-and-mortar kitchens never face these challenges. The shared experience of working through these issues is a starting point for how food truck owners can relate to each other, and the shared space where these interactions occur originate from the street festivals sponsored by Business Improvement Districts and commercial merchant's associations.

The Role of Business Improvement Districts

In the previous section, I argue street festivals play a large role in the creation of a sense of local community among food truck owners. In this section, I analyze the role of commercial district and merchant's associations. Business Improvement Districts (BID) are the most prominent form of this organization, but I purposefully broaden this designation to include any association of brick-and-mortar businesses or property owners. I argue these associations mitigate potential regulatory barriers by reducing conflict over public spaces between brick-and-mortar business owners and food trucks. I start by describing the process through which these associations create a private space for consensus, and I describe how food trucks are used by these associations of private property-based businesses to meet goals of investment and "revitalization."

BIDs and commercial districts are organizations geographically bound groups of business and property owners. Individual members contribute money, time, and other resources to improve and maintain an area and make it attractive to potential customers and businesses. In forming this organization, the group can work to avoid a tragedy of the commons in regard to the maintenance of public spaces and infrastructure, where common areas, such as sidewalks and medians, are not adequately maintained. The responsibility and cost for maintenance would likely be too much for one business or property alone, and without a formal organization or administration, there would be no maintenance or improvement to public areas of a district. In addition to these improvements, BIDs can also create a geographic identity for a place and produce marketing for the businesses and the district as a whole. In these ways, BIDs can increase existing agglomeration effects of geographically close businesses by making the area a better place to conduct business and help collectively make real properties more attractive and valuable.

Harvey Molotch describes how this process of collective organization can form a local regime focused on economic growth. He describes cities through a form of urban governance composed of loose coalitions of individual land owners form to "extract neighborhood gains from the city government" (1976: 312). That city governments only have a finite amount of public resources "means that the government becomes the arena in which land-use interest groups compete for public money and attempt to mold those decisions

which will determine the land-use outcomes" (312). Molotch essentially argues that this is the driving political force behind city-based economic and land-use decisions and that this produces a constant pressure to increase growth of the economic base of a city (317).

Commercial district associations and BIDs can work in this way to increase the revitalization efforts of a city, especially when the organizations form in older, more neighborhood commercial areas with a history of disinvestment. As these associations form, they compete with other commercial areas within a city to gain a share of public resources, including capital improvement projects, planning efforts, and regular services. In order to effectively lobby, district associations tend to present a unified front to local policy makers when requesting support, regulatory change, or public resources. Various members of these organizations can be split on issues for the area, and the district associations provide a figurative and physical common space for these differences to be worked out in private in order to effectively make requests of public entities.

This establishes a need for consensus among the group. This consensus exerts a kind of social control over a group because open conflict can threaten public investment and lead to a kid of tragedy of the commons in the area. The social control is normative, and businesses such as restaurants who may oppose food trucks operating at a street festival do not do so in public if the street

festival is important to “revitalization” and economic development goals of the collective district group.

The role of both food trucks and street festivals are important to revitalization efforts in an area, and the context in which this works is important. BIDs and district associations have become gatekeepers of the access and regulation of public space. Though these public and common spaces in a commercial focused area are nominally under the regulatory authority of the municipal body (as enabled by the state), property and business owners within a commercial area act can act through district associations to physically and socially manage public space. Physical changes can include street furniture, public art, plazas, parks, trees, trash cans, and other improvements to an area’s urban design and street infrastructure. Social changes can include security patrols, way-finding and information staff, parking enforcement, and identity creation through branding, maps, and physical markers. These changes allow property owners and brick-and-mortar businesses to exert control over the use and practice of public space. Lippert’s study of Canadian BIDs (2012) describes how these controls of public space can limit street life activity through surveillance and security staff, and many BIDs and districts use this shaping and control over public spaces to attract desired customers, businesses, and developers.

Food trucks are one means by which BIDs and districts can temporarily shape the use of an area’s public space, and this shift in use can modify the

narratives and symbols of a space. Revitalization efforts hinge on this form of narrative and symbolic shift. Class divisions can lead to an area gaining pejorative connotations if it is most visibly symbolized by working class shops and businesses or if an area has been the site of prolonged economic distress. In the case of many urban areas of Oklahoma City, the dominant narrative was one of abandonment and a kind of stark unknown left in the emptiness of formerly active and bustling commercial hubs and neighborhoods. The combined effects of suburbanization, school bussing, urban renewal, and the Penn Square Bank economic "bust" caused many of Oklahoma City's commercial areas to change. In some cases such as the Capitol Hill/Calle Dos Cinco area, the movement of people away from the area in the 1970's and 80's opened up affordable spaces for businesses serving a growing Mexican-American population. Other areas came to be dominated by boarded up storefronts, liquor stores, pawn shops, and fast food.

Changing the narrative of these places has been part of the revitalization goals of the district association and BIDs. Food trucks, primarily in the form of street festival are part of this narrative shift. On the surface, food trucks attract people to an event. More crucially, food trucks temporarily change the form, use, and meaning of public space in an area, and this temporary change is what allows an area to modify and even subvert the symbols crucial in the formation of a narrative of place.

Bakhtin radically reconsidered the medieval fair or carnival in Europe, and argued that these events created spaces and opportunities for social hierarchies to be temporarily reduced or upended (1984: 197). The symbol of a king could be inverted, even for a short period of time, and come to mean that of a "fool." I bring up this passage to argue how public street festivals can be subversive and can be sites where the symbols of spatial narratives can be modified or negotiated. A commercial area in Oklahoma City might normally lack pedestrians and street life. Automobile traffic, empty, open lots, and broken concrete can create a harsh environment for pedestrians. These experiences and images can connote detached, separate spaces for businesses which must be driven to or areas which must be driven through.

A street festivals with food trucks can create a sense of a public market space that drastically transforms how these spaces are used and seen. Roads can become plazas. Sidewalks can become market places. Empty lots covered in grass and gravel became parks and water slides. Even if the street festivals are temporary, this kind of shift in the meaning of what these spaces are and what they can be persists. At very least, these events raise the possibility that these spaces can be something different and something capable of being transformed.

Food trucks are also capable of subverting the meanings of a space in public settings. Food trucks are nominally private businesses entirely contained by a public space. There is a logic to cities in Anglo-Western culture to assign sharp delineations between public and private spaces, between private property

and public. These delineations are drawn and regulated by surveys, maintained by public office and reinforced by court ruling when necessary. This conception of public and private space produces a one-to-one relationship between a property and an absolute geographic location, and this relationship is necessary for and reinforced by a system of property tax.

These drawings of private property within a grid of public space and infrastructure came to mean something more absolute than negotiable as American cities began to favor automobiles a primary means of transportation. The pedestrian use of cities can soften and blur the delineations of public and private, particularly in commercial areas with semi-public spaces where people interact regularly such as cafes, bars, and bodegas. Automobiles can sharpen these distinctions by inserting small, private spaces onto public roads which render the use of streets to a monolithic activity of transportation.

Food trucks are like cars in that they are small, private spaces which drive on public streets. However, food trucks make use of public spaces by sponsoring an activity other than driving. Similar to other street vendors, food trucks can transform a parking lot, sidewalk, or empty lot into a restaurant. People wait for food in the open, and they tend to use street furniture when present in order to eat outside. They create spaces of interaction which undermine a singular use of a space. Most importantly, they help create spaces where people can see other people and be seen. This is an important component

concepts of public spaces being political spaces such as Arendt's "Space of Appearance" (1998: 199) or Mitchell's "Spaces for Representation" (1995: 115).

In attracting customers, food trucks also create a temporary sense of density. Oklahoma City is a sprawling, automobile focused cities. Even urban areas of the city are relatively low in density compared to urban areas in cities with a larger population. Street festivals featuring food trucks bring in a feeling of a public market place. People tend to stroll up and down the boundaries of an event, and most of the festival attendees arrive from other parts of the city. This allows a place with almost no adjacent residential density to gain a feeling of street life normally reserved for large, dense areas of cities. The street festivals also provide a temporary, central point of interest and activity in an area.

Most of these street festivals and monthly events during the warmer months of the year. While each festival occurs roughly once a month, the staggering of different street festivals and special events throughout the city from March to October can allow for this feeling of density and centrality to occur every weekend. The transportable nature of the street festivals creates a particular mode of space. The festival can be seen as a singular, contiguous space, which is internally consistent but adapted to changing locations at different times. This is similar to how a taxi or bus, for instance, can exist a singular space even as it moves in absolute location throughout a city. Thus, the sum result of the monthly street festival circuit is the conceptual creation of a

single, central, dense, public market space for a city which lacks the population and the density to support such a space.

The spaces for these street festivals are also important because they tend to form areas which sit on boundaries and borders in a city. In an essay about cities as a site of borderlands, Saskia Sassen argues that cities "are one of the key sites where new norms and new identities are made," and they are strategic sites where borders are contested (Sassen 2013: 69). The temporary nature of how these border spaces are used seems to be key in to how norms and identities are contested and remade.

Many of the spaces featuring food truck festivals are in older commercial areas located on the borders of neighborhoods or parts of the city. They tend to be the common space between areas while also serving as boundaries and dividing lines. BIDs and commercial districts effectively control what these spaces mean by being able to direct the programming, use, and marketing of these spaces. These mechanisms shape perception of a place, and food trucks shape this perception in two ways. They are sites of activity and performance, where people stand in line, interact, order food, observe, and eat.

Food trucks are also sites where identity is stated, negotiated, and reinforced. The visual appearance of the truck is part of this identity statement, along with the smells, sounds, and the personality of the people working on the truck. This sense of individual identity is further stated through the use of social media and through selling t-shirts or giving away stickers.

Identity is negotiated where people may be eating new or different foods in a shared, public space where new ideas and interactions are permitted and even encouraged. Particularly in this carnival and festival context, identity can be accepted as something more fluid than in traditional settings where identity through food is established, such as a family gathering or a restaurant. This fluid sense of identity is what can allow people to enthusiastically accept cultural remixing, such as Korean tacos, vegan comfort food, or barbeque waffles.

Finally, the presence of food trucks can reinforce cultural norms. Even though a street may be closed and people are using a public space, the street festivals have an order. There is generally a festival organizer directing the trucks on where to go. Even when a single truck is serving an office or working in front of a retail store, food trucks follow spatial relationships that reference a sidewalk being a place for pedestrians, and food trucks generally respect the role of property-based businesses as informal regulators of the street. Street festivals, carnivals, and markets go far back in Western culture and human history. They reveal a kind of cultural logic within the bric-a-brac rhythm, where vendors occupy regularly spaced stalls or spaces, and people pass by and shop in a common walkway between them. Far from being transgressive uses of space, or radical reclamations of use, food trucks and food truck festivals do not work in opposition to a larger group in Oklahoma City. Instead, food truck owners and groups of private property-based businesses appear to work together

to reach common goals of attracting customers. The food trucks can reach a greater number of people, and the commercial district can work to change the narrative around a place. This reinforces larger cultural norms and beliefs about the use and control over public space, all while removing the potential of political opposition of property owners and property based businesses.

A Critical Look at "Gourmet"

> "Ultimately what ramen is about here is GPF, which is the Glamorization of Plebeian Foodstuffs. It's a phenomenon mainly caused by the real estate industry—real estate makes everything go around in this town [New York]. And it demands GPF, whereby you have to take these things that could have been enjoyed on sort of a peasant level and turn them into gourmet items that you can charge a lot of money for. The tiny, supposedly Neapolitan pizza, the hamburger—those are examples of things that have been glamorized, and we have bought the more expensive versions of them lock, stock and barrel" (Sietsema 2014).

The above quote references an essay by Robert Sietsema on the current fad of ramen throughout cities in the U.S. It is a good way to introduce something that factors critically into how food truck policies and regulations are formed. Throughout this thesis, I have made a distinction between Food Trucks in general and "Gourmet" Food trucks. This distinction is meant to separate traditional mobile food vendors such as taco trucks and hot dog carts from the relatively recent phenomenon of "gourmet" trucks.

However, this distinction is problematic. It is a term which is not well defined and often used to mark any member of a "new" generation of food

trucks, whether these trucks are anywhere close to the definition of "gourmet" or not. As I will explain this section, "gourmet" is a term which is loaded with a specific history of class and spatial connotations, and it is important to untangle the relationship between the phenomena of current day food trucks, such as those in Oklahoma City, and how gourmet connotations can be used to build or reinforce urban reinvestment schemes.

There is a specific historic and cultural context for gourmet cuisine. Food is both an object as well as a cultural practice and performance. The preparation and consumption of food is ritualized by every culture. Consuming food can be seen as a performance where individual's hunger and desire to eat is culturally mediated by certain modes of eating, either alone or in a social setting.

Until recently, the consumption of food was closely tied to local geographies and seasonal considerations. Before industrialized refrigeration, transportation, and agricultural practices, what people were able to eat was limited by what could be sourced near where they were living. As groups of humans transitioned from hunter-gatherer societies to agricultural practices, preserved and non-perishable foods, such as stored grain, could be accumulated and traded, and cities were the sites at which trade and food markets could be conducted. The term "food ways" denotes the cultural link between food production, preservation, preparation and consumption. Foods such as tamales in Mexico might be termed a traditional food way, as it comes from a specific

context of production and consumption, a context tied to geography and cultural tradition.

This urban-agricultural model was the state of food in Europe leading up the French Revolution. As Clark (1975) describes, before the revolution, food could be purchased from inns or taverns, from catering style shops, but for the royal and landed classes, *cuisine,* was something prepared by a group of artisan cooks, preparing food for a private audience inside of private homes (37). The revolution completely changed this situation. Chefs were no longer artisans serving patrons, and could serve complex meals to any paying customers, especially those of the emergent bourgeois class. In this way, chefs were entrepreneurs and no longer limited to the restrictions and limits of cooking for a court (Clark 1975:36),

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (2009) describes how the advent of trains allowed people to travel faster and to more locations. Business travelers throughout Europe and the Eastern United States demanded better food than would be found in hotels and bars (160). Through the first part of the 20th century, the United States was rapidly industrializing around urban, regional centers. With this rapid industrialization came a change in labor and the development of what the U.S. today knows as weekday lunch. Laborers could eat at cafeterias and lunch carts. Office workers could eat at lunch counters, diners and cafes.

In the wake of this shift in the spaces in which food was consumed, French cuisine remained dominant. To this day, culinary schools throughout the world still contain many elements of the French method of cuisine. Chefs are taught to organize "brigades" of cooks who man stations, a terminology still rooted in the history of cooking high cuisine for the royal court. Chefs are taught to render any vegetable into standard size cubes, how to prepare stock and the mother sauces.

In the current post-industrial era, food is changing again. Local food is a status symbol, and people have more freedom over where they work and when. This allows people to choose food consumption around image and status. Food can become, again, an end in and of itself. This is what we are seeing with food trucks. And this is how they can tap into a sense of nostalgia from both the chefs and the customers. There is something "artisanal" to be able to have the time and flexibility to focus only on one thing: Japanese pizza, pretzels, cupcakes, etc. Within this focus, that's where the culture is being modified. It's post agricultural, really, because it takes these symbols of agriculture and traditional foodways, and riffs on them, plays with them.

For each step along the way, there is a spatial component. Changes in food consumption are related to changes in urban space. When chefs could open restaurants, that was the change in land ownership from royalty to a bourgeois class. When western cities began to industrialize, food became more temporary and mechanical, something still seen in African and Asian cities undergoing

intense urbanization. In a post-industrial city, food is less tied to geography and can exist within these kinds of “temporary” spaces.

The reason why “gourmet” is problematic is because it relates to a specific production of class status and distinction. It was the transition of the royal food consumption to the bourgeois. It has always been an apex of Western cooking, and therefore the world. Top chefs always acknowledge time spent learning the ropes in Paris, even if they return to their origins to make intensely local food. It still dominates as a food paradigm, and it still differs from traditional foodways, such as a tacos, by taking on an artistic air with formal technique and training. We are seeing gourmet become more and more casual today, but it still carries an association with wealth, status, and cultural capital. And these associations can be used by a commercial district or property owner association to “sell” a district based on the presence of a gourmet food truck generally seen as innovative, new, or “hip” to a desired crowd of potential retail customers. The gourmet associations with certain food trucks can be used, strategically, by property owners to shape the feel and sense of an area by filling public spaces with a desired form of consumption.

Not every food truck fits the definition of "gourmet." Some trucks serve much more basic food, but are still tagged the label of "gourmet." It's not a designation, I would think, many trucks would come up with for themselves. And, it's a term that's loaded with a very specific history. Food trucks are

diverse, and they are taken to be monolithic, especially when they are contrasted with taco trucks or more basic street food vendors.

What I have seen so far in this research, is that many food truck owners have undergone a similar process to the chefs in post-revolutionary France. In the act of opening a food truck, they can become entrepreneurs and freed of top-down direction and control over what they serve and prepare. In this way, they can meet both customer demands as well as serve foods they feel are important to develop and save.

Many of the food trucks I have seen in Oklahoma City appear to be culturally diverse, and the food served reflects this diversity. One other way to view the ways in which "modern" food trucks serve food is that they take traditional foods and food ways—tacos, biscuits, and ramen—and continue to develop these foods. As food is a culturally-bound practice, both in preparation and consumption, food trucks might be a way in which endangered or moribund dishes, foods which would be difficult to justify on a restaurant menu, and preserve and develop these foods into something new. Food trucks allow for the culture of a certain food or food way to be adapted, negotiated, and updated.

In this sense, maybe it would be more appropriate to term "gourmet" food trucks as "new" food trucks. Instead of referring to a shift in French food production with a rigid set of rules, gourmet might, instead, be used to refer to a process. Just like the chefs opening early restaurants in the wake of the French revolution, "gourmet" food trucks may stand out for the way in which they have

the space and freedom to have a dialogue with a traditional food, and to offer new takes and interpretations for something generally relegated to nostalgia or memory. Not all food trucks do this, but some do have this approach. For these trucks, the term "gourmet" is problematic and should continue to be critically examined.

Sticky Issues for Economic Development

This section establishes the role of food trucks as a factor in a city's economic development and development schemes. I argue that food trucks present a relatively small economic impact on their own and in an isolated context. Looking more broadly, however, food trucks can be seen as symbolic drivers of place-based narratives used to secure outside investment in a particular area. This narrative view presents raises troubling issues about the role of food truck owners and the public at large in the control and regulation of public spaces.

Food truck businesses do not appear to be major drivers in Oklahoma City's economy. According to the Census County Business Patterns from 2012 for the Oklahoma City MSA, food services (NAICS Code 722) comprise 2,415 business establishments out of a total of 33,734 establishments in the Oklahoma City MSA. Oklahoma City's food service establishments employ 50,209 employees out of a total of 478,577 paid employees in the MSA. There are

roughly 40 to 50 food truck businesses active in the Oklahoma City area, a number which likely includes some food truck businesses based in Stillwater or cities outside of the MSA. These food truck businesses typically employ a small number of people, generally from one to four people including the owner. At the most, Oklahoma City's food trucks employ fewer than 250 total people. This is less than half of 1% of the number of Oklahoma City area food service employees in 2012, and a fraction of that percentage represents the ratio of food truck workers to total employment for the MSA. Adding food trucks, even doubling or tripling the number of food truck businesses, would likely have an insignificant impact on Oklahoma City's food economy, which itself is not a major driver of the city's economy.

Given the relatively small impact of food trucks, what is to be made of their economic impact? Is a laissez-faire policy change, as advocated by some of the scholarship on food trucks, really even appropriate or worthwhile? Food trucks should not be viewed in isolation, and I argue that they can influence the economic development of a city or a specific place. While they may have a small to modest impact on a city's economy, they can powerfully impact the place-based narratives of an area through visual and symbolic means.

Food trucks are visual entities in a space. When people visit a place or an area, they primarily see storefronts and streets. People visiting an area are likely to interact with restaurants, and if present, food trucks. Food trucks help create a kind of street theater mentioned by Jane Jacobs and urban design

theorists. They are a performance in public space, where people can observe the "acts" of selling food, cooking, and consumption in a social setting. They exist within public spaces of appearance and representation. People can see food trucks. They can see people ordering and eating. This is a slightly more public display than what would occur inside of a restaurant. These public and semi-public spaces of commerce and consumption in a city are sites of interaction. This can lead to a kind of over representation of food-based businesses being the drivers of economic development or economic revitalization efforts because they are the places people are most likely to see, visit, and remember (Krase 2012: 40).

Speaking with food truck owners, I found that food trucks, as a business, represent a relatively small barrier for entry. They require less startup capital when compared to a restaurant, and the food truck can serve as the main asset of the business which can be sold if the business does not work out or the owner does not wish to continue operation. There are bigger questions about Oklahoma City and the region's economy left unsaid about this entry into food trucks. Many people I spoke with started food trucks due to a need to find a new job. Many people desired independence and flexibility offered by running a food truck. For some people, a food truck represented a way to learn about food service and provide something substantial to take to restaurant investors.

In all of these cases, why are people needing to change professions? Why are they looking for additional income or more flexible work

environments? Starting a food truck is not easy, even with the lowered barriers to entry compared to a restaurant. There are still regulatory hurdles to jump through, and food trucks may represent the "negative space" of economic development policies in a city. Entrepreneurship, in this case, may define the shortcomings of the larger economy as much as it represents the work, risk, and creativity of the entrepreneur.

As I mentioned in previous sections of this analysis, food trucks have a unique potential to help generate street life in a place. They can create a kind of market or a feeling of central activity in a city which has become sprawling, suburban, and decentralized. They can help make commercial spaces more flexible and help an area be associated with "new" meanings of traditional or gourmet food. The shared desire to attract customers generally aligns the interests of food truck owners with those of brick-and-mortar businesses and property owner associations, and food-truck related street festivals help mitigate potential conflicts between food trucks and brick-and-mortar restaurants.

In working in these commercial areas, food truck businesses can bring customers and represent something new or innovative in an area. The street life feeling created by a cluster of food trucks can make an area feel bigger and denser than typical nights without food trucks. The practice of participating in a street festival might allow a space where symbolic meanings to be modified or negotiated. In this way, food trucks can possibly shift the meanings and stories attached to a certain place. In an area which may have been known for empty

storefronts and illicit activity, a regular series of food-truck focused street festivals, combined with a social media strategy, may change the perception of that space among participants, who can retell the story of visiting that place to others in a positive light.

This shift in narrative is what may ultimately help drive investment decisions in an area. Publically, the success of street festivals and estimated attendance numbers can help commercial associations representing a district or place compete with other areas of the city for a fixed share of public resources, services and capital improvements. Real estate investors may decide an area is a worthwhile place for development, and businesses may choose to locate in an area which is seen as vibrant and on the rise.

The push for cities as sites seeking secure economic investment is articulated by David Harvey's concept of the "Entrepreneurial City." Harvey describes how urban regions increasingly make investments to attract consumers, primarily based on quality of life improvements (1989: 9). Harvey goes on to state that "the city has to appear as an innovative, exciting, creative, and safe place to live or visit, to play and consume in" (9). He argues festivals and cultural events are important in creating "spectacle and display" as symbols of a "dynamic community" and as a "locus of community solidarity" (9).

Harvey's approach to power in cities is critical, but his language is similar to that of Oklahoma City's Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) program. MAPS is presented to the voting public of Oklahoma City as a series

of quality of life improvements. The inspiration for MAPS has been mentioned in speeches by current Mayor, Mick Cornet. Cornet mentions a major airline considered Oklahoma City as a site for an operations hub in the city in the early 1990's. The rejection of this airline, combined with the declining state of the appearance and services in the inner city lead to then Mayor, Ron Norrick spearheading the creation of a task force which lead to MAPS. After several rounds of popular and successful MAPS projects being built, the program is sold as Oklahoma City *needing* public improvement projects in order to continue sustaining recent economic success. The causation between MAPS and other quality of life improvements leading to economic development is stated but not well proven. The other outcome, whether Oklahoma City had been similarly economically successful if MAPS had not implemented, is next to impossible to prove.

Despite this tenuous causality, cities throughout the world have increasingly increased the regulation of streets and public spaces in the name of "quality of life" improvements. The scholarship on these practices outside of the U.S. is generally framed in criticisms of neoliberal policies aimed at reclaiming central areas of cities. Neoliberal is used in this sense to identify the removal or streamlining of government regulations, taxes, and incentives in order to attract international investment in hopes that it will create a better environment for a local or homegrown economy. Articles by Kim (2012), Walsh (2010), and Harms (2009), describe this process in different cities in

Vietnam, where a rapidly modernizing economy has created urban regimes which target and seek to remove street vendors.

Gourmet food truck businesses have been criticized for symbolizing gentrification and the presence of "neoliberal" urban policies. In this model, gourmet food trucks are used to attract young professional people to an area, and working class street vendors, such as taco trucks, are excluded. While gentrification is occurring in parts of Oklahoma City, I am not sure that the city's food trucks exacerbate these kinds of class tensions, even if food truck festivals are located in areas which are undergoing gentrification and major private investment.

The gentrification which has occurred in Oklahoma City over the previous decade or two is 'silent.' Older neighborhoods have changed in urban areas of the city. Wealthier residents and developers have changed the character of the housing, population, and commercial services of areas such as the "Deep Duce" area. This is an area which originally contained the "main street" for the city's African American population. Urban renewal efforts in the 1970's displaced nearly all of the residential population and businesses in this area, and a new interstate extension isolated the area by the early 1980's. The city's economic downturn in the 1980's allowed for much of the area to sit vacant and unused. After the early success of MAPS in the late 90's in the adjacent downtown and "Bricktown" entertainment district, developers and city officials

began plans to develop the area as a affluent, pedestrian-friendly, mixed use neighborhood.

This process is an example of how gentrification in Oklahoma City can occur with little protest. Those moving into an area are separated by those who have been displaced by several decades. Where food trucks play a role in street festivals and legitimizing the transformation of how people view neighborhood commercial areas, they do not appear to be actively planning or leading these revitalization schemes in formerly working class neighborhoods.

A study of a country music festival in a rural part of Australia is instructive. Gibson and Davidson (2004) study the Tamworth Music Festival as a cultural and place-based phenomenon. They argue that the music festival is "an important counter-point to case studies that emphasise a simple story of the disempowering class politics enacted through place marketing" (401). They argue that while the local culture has been co-opted and commodified by major corporations, this place-based marketing of the music festival has occurred where the local population feels "included in its transformation to [Australia's] 'country music capital'" (401).

Similar to this example, Oklahoma City's transformation into a "Big League City" is one which is generally embraced by the majority of Oklahoma City's residents. It is a transformation tied to the city's recent economic success and to the revitalization of areas in the urban core. Food trucks are associated with this transformation, and the street festivals featuring food truck appear in

my observations to have broad support. They feel inclusive and like they have a large cross-section of the city's residents. They do not seem especially exclusive to one group or class of people.

Harvey and others have provided an important way to critically view how urban policy regimes gain control and regulate public spaces. Yet, I am not sure it is the best theoretical fit for what I observed in the case of Oklahoma City. To say that the city's food truck owners are subject to the whims of powerful economic interests over public space is to deny the food truck owners a sense of agency. The food truck owners are capable of negotiating when are where they choose to operate, and they have been able to successfully organize and lobby for regulatory changes.

From my background observations, local food truck trade organizations lobby for state and municipal regulations which are more favorable to food truck owners doing business. Descriptions of these activities were often framed in terms of the trade association serving as the "middle man" and being a "point of contact" with regulators and policy makers, and the tone of how these activities were described was one of collaboration with policy makers than one of conflict. Though this area was not a focus in this research, further work could be done to explore the link between these trade organizations and changes in the local policy and regulatory environment

There does remain one major concern in the case of Oklahoma City which relates to the critical views of policy regimes above. Oklahoma City's food truck owners do not have the same ability to regulate and control public space and property owners and property-based businesses. Right now, food trucks appear to be helping areas with revitalization efforts, but that could change in the future. And if a tide turns against food trucks, then they may be restricted to working within private, rather than public spaces, such as food truck parks. While food trucks are key parts of economic revitalization strategies, the ultimate benefit of property value and investment dollars benefits property owners over the long term rather than the food trucks which help shape and change the perception of an area within a revitalization context.

This presents an image of Oklahoma City which is inclusive but not completely inclusive, and model where food trucks play a central role but may lack control. What is notable about the case of Oklahoma City is that conflict appears to have been sidestepped, and sometimes open conflict over the control of public space is necessary to spark a broader conversation. In some ways, this form of economic development may avoid criticisms of gentrification because many of the city's residents are happy just to have something happen, and this is better than it was before, a specter of disinvestment and abandonment hanging over the dark store-fronts and overgrown lots.

Chapter VI: Conclusion and Recommendations

In 2008, Bruce Shoenfeld wrote an article for the New York Times Magazine about the Oklahoma City Thunder basketball team. The Thunder had yet to play a regular season game when the article was published, and Shoenfeld's article attempted to sort out reasons why a major professional sports team would leave Seattle. He summarized that professional basketball teams may actually do better in:

> *"a smaller city on the rise, with maybe a million to a million and a half people, plenty of money, local and regional art museums and a few ambitious restaurants but not too much else for its population to do" (Shoenfeld 2008)*

A place, he says, "exactly like Oklahoma City" (2008).

A "few ambitious restaurants" and "not much else to do" sets the stage perfectly for the rise of food trucks in Oklahoma City. The city was virtually created overnight, and there is a sense among residents throughout the history the city that anything is possible. What I found in this study was a community of food truck owners who seemed able to mitigate and manage existing regulations. I expected significant regulatory barriers and an entrenched battle between food truck owners and local officials. Instead, I found these tensions to have been mitigated over time. I found food truck owners more than willing to work with each other and city and health officials who learned to work with food truck owners over time. Food truck owners expressed a desire to be in

compliance and worked with local policy makers to streamline existing regulations.

Two things appear to be crucial to this success: the community sense among food truck owners and the shared goals and interests between food truck owners and coalitions of property owners. Food truck owners work to help keep each other in compliance with regulations and help new food truck owners with a knowledge of the current regulatory environment. This sense of community is reinforced by the presence of food trucks at regular street festivals. These festivals are put on by commercial district associations to bring people into areas which experienced past economic distress in order to show a new "face" and image of an area. These festivals provide customers and a festival feeling for food truck businesses, and the success of these street festivals can help the commercial district associations secure additional investment for the area. These shared goals appear to reduce potential conflict between brick-and-mortar businesses and food trucks over the use of public spaces, sidewalks, and parking in these areas.

This model of overlapping organizations of business owners raises several significant issues. Food truck owners do not appear to have any significant control over public space, and their success in bringing people to an area appears to primarily benefit property owners in the long term. Also, the "gourmet" designation of many food trucks can divide the perception of and policies towards food trucks versus other forms of street food vending, taco

trucks, and smaller scale restaurants. At issue is the control over public spaces in a city, and property owners as whole still dominate the use of adjacent public spaces.

It is possible to view food trucks as complicit in economic development schemes which produce gentrification. However, I am not sure that this conceptual model fits what I observed. Food truck events and customers appeared to be diverse. Speaking with food truck owners, I did not see a sharp divide between trucks that view themselves as "gourmet" versus trucks which served more traditional foods such as tacos or barbeque. The food truck owners understood, first hand, the challenges and benefits of starting a food-based business. They seemed interested in not just working events due to the presence of customers, but also working events with groups and causes they were willing to support. The food truck owners were active in shaping their business and by virtue of being independent, they could seek out their own arrangements with private events and public festivals.

This stands in contrast to the circumstances of many street vendors who lack this kind of control over their circumstances. It also demonstrates the need to understand what is happening with food trucks in Oklahoma City as a unique phenomenon. The same theory of neoliberal regimes applied to street vendors in a global context may not fit here. On the other hand, laissez-faire and free market arguments may not be any better of a fit. Food truck ownership may not be the path to financial success, independence, and significant economic

development. I view food trucks in a larger economic and political context. They are active as agents in this context, but they are still subject to greater economic and political forces.

Originally, I sought to create a set of recommendations based on the results of this study, recommendations on how to improve or streamline a policy. Instead, I ask emergent questions about role of food trucks in a city: What role should narrative elements play in an economic development strategy? Is adjacent property ownership akin to tenancy in a public space? How are the lines of public and private culturally bound? How are they reproduced? Finally, what value should coalitions of business owners be assigned in local political processes?

Future research could help expand the original research questions of this thesis. More research could be done in studying the relationship between food truck owners and property owner associations such as BIDs. BID staff and brick-and-mortar business owners could be interviewed as to their perceptions and economic development strategies. Economic data could also be gathered to look at short and longer-term impacts of food trucks on the economic development and "re-investment" of a specific area. Overall, this research could help better explain the role of creative enterprises in local economic development strategies.

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Appendix A: List of Sample Interview Questions

- How did you decide to start this truck?
- What was it like starting out?
- What was your experience with the permitting process? Was anything difficult along the way?
- Where did you find your truck?
- What was your experience with outfitting the truck? Was it difficult to bring it up to standards?
- How long did it take from the moment you wanted to open a truck to when you knew you were ready for business?
- Could you walk me through a typical day of service?
- How do you select a location? What do you look for at a site?
- How do you manage operating outdoors with the weather in Oklahoma City?
- What causes you to call it an early day?
- Is it an issue to find staff to work? How do you deal with no call/no shows?
- What do you use for a commissary?
- How do you buy food and supplies? Do you go to a distributor or do they deliver?
- Do you specifically seek out locally produced ingredients?

- What would you do differently if you were starting out again?
- What do you consider the major issues with operating a truck?
- Do nearby businesses or neighbors ever complain about your truck during service?
- Do you feel a sense of community with other trucks?
- Do you ever trade food with other trucks at events?
- How do you feel your truck fits other communities in the city?
- Did you have any prior experience working in a restaurant or in food service?
- Do you see yourself opening a brick and mortar restaurant at some point in the future?
- Is there anything operating a food truck allows you to do that would be difficult or impossible in a brick and mortar restaurant?
- Are there advantages that you see to brick and mortar restaurants?
- What regulations do you feel need to be changed for food trucks? Are there any that you feel should be added?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?