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Framing cooperative development: The bridging role of cultural and symbolic value between human and material resources

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ABSTRACT

The Community Capitals Framework has been used by scholars and practitioners to both evaluate community projects and help leverage community resources. However, less work has examined the role of symbolic values in these processes. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, this research examines the relationship between value and identity frames and resource access in three food and agriculture cooperatives that aim for community improvement. We find that as cultural and symbolic power become concentrated, diverse cultural values, and the potential resources they represent, can become more difficult to enact. While sustained dialog during a frame process can help bridge diverse resources, additional resources are often needed to support such activities. Our work suggests that frames are related to resource access, that they can be in tension with each other, do not always reflect practice, and may help reorganize capitals access.

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Introduction

When a group gets together to work to improve their communities, they often find that resources vary among those within the group and that this can be helpful—everyone can bring something different to the table. These resources might include a backyard, a meeting space, skills, social networks, volunteer labor, and financial commitments. What is committed to the group depends on whether people have it to offer in the first place and how much they believe in the work of the group. Yet, another piece of this is whether the resource and the potential in sharing it is recognized in the first place. In other words, cultural and symbolic values have an active role in community development practice (Emery & Flora, 2006; Singer, Hoang, & Ochiai, 2015). This article examines the role of these values in food and agriculture cooperative development by using social frame analysis¹ to determine how cultural and symbolic values create boundaries and openings to community capitals.

It is important to recognize how some capitals become valorized over others and how such values change over time and space (Carolan & Hale, 2016). The way that communities value capitals is related to particular cultural performances that become

sedimented in networks through routine (Gibson-Graham, 2008). In such ways, cultural and symbolic values work together to make community capitals more or less valued. Furthermore, those who have access to more capitals are more likely able to shape what gets valued.

Rather than aiming to make people value capitals in a particular way, the most successful initiatives support community-specific strategies that encourage community members to revisit their assumptions about what is important. This is especially relevant in those instances where financial capital becomes privileged to the exclusion of all other capitals. To be able to do this, we need to understand how the cultural and symbolic values of a particular effort relate to resource access. We can then take a first step in identifying what cultural and symbolic values need to be capitalized² and how that might happen.

We use the concept of frames to examine the cultural and symbolic boundaries and openings to capitals access faced by three food and agriculture cooperatives. As we elaborate in the coming pages, frames are the result of both individual and group processes of characterizing the world and relations to it (Goffman, 1997; Snow et al., 2012). They are informed by the roles, values, beliefs, meanings, and norms found in the varying and dynamic realities people enact as they move through the world (Norris-Raynbird, 2008). The frames used to guide community development activities are representative of commonly experienced worlds which constitute cultures through routines and adhering to conventions (Gonos, 1977). With the inclusion of frames in community capitals analysis, we are able to more clearly study the role of power, particularly power that is more dispersed and relational (i.e. see Foucault, 1982).

This article examines how food and agriculture cooperative frames relate to resource access and what alternative frames might allow groups to diversify their capitals. To avoid redundancy, we use the terms “capitals” and “resources” interchangeably. We begin by describing the community capitals approach to community development. We then summarize frame analysis and how it connects to community development. The remainder of the article focuses on the community development activities of three food and agriculture cooperatives and how these relate to cooperative frames. We present each case separately in an effort to create points of comparison to drive the final sections that are concerned with the role of cultural and symbolic value in community development as understood through cooperative value and identity frames. The following emergent themes arose, which we explore in greater detail: frames both enable and constrain capital access, tension often exists between frames, and changing frames can help reorganize capital access.

The community capitals approach

The community capitals framework has formed through the work of Cornelia and Jan Flora on rural community development (i.e. see Flora, Flora, & Gasteyer, 2015). The approach was established over many years of striving for holistic analysis and action. It has been applied in a variety of analyses including political economy and power perspectives as well as asset-based and technical assistance approaches. Drawing on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, it uses seven forms of capital—natural, human, cultural, social, political, financial, and built—to evaluate community efforts. The community capitals approach argues that effective development must value all of these capitals.

A primary focus of this perspective is identifying regional resources and the ways these can be leveraged toward change. For example, the Floras describe one project as implementing a comprehensive cultural plan that reflects the community's diversity—showcasing cultural, natural, and built histories—and uses this to draw in resources (Flora et al., 2015). While aspects of such planning efforts focus on the financial benefits of tourism, for instance, the potential of tourism is based on a range of capitals (e.g. cultural, natural, built) that coalesce through social capital, a necessary component for collective action and more inclusive governance networks.

The importance of social capital is a primary theme of the community capitals literature. It is argued that focusing only on financial and built capitals, for example, creates challenges if social capital, and its close ties to political, cultural, and human capitals, is not also active in community development efforts. Social capital facilitates the stock (assets of each capital) and flows (type of capital invested) of other capitals (Emery & Flora, 2006). It has two forms—bridging (heterogeneous connections) and bonding (homogenous connections). Studies have found that both bridging and bonding help increase community action when developed together (Agnitsch, Flora, & Ryan, 2006). Furthermore, social capital can prevent decline of all the capitals by “spiraling-up” through increasing the flow to other community assets (Emery & Flora, 2006). Leadership, financial investment, and an entrepreneurial spirit are found to modify cultural capital. However, one of the challenges with increasing bridging social capital are cultural boundaries such as those determined by identity, performance, and knowledge (Stryker, 2008) which play into certain capitals being more valued than others (Hale & Carolan, 2018).

Other research has examined how the capitals are related to each other and accessed to achieve change (Pigg, Gasteyer, Martin, Keating, & Apaliyah, 2013). Pigg et al. (2013) found that the relationships between capitals are not always as straightforward as the “spiraling-up” metaphor implies. A particular organization or community leader's interest, for example, often determines which capitals have the most potential for change. Such knowledge and priorities are reflective of contextual relationships (Pigg et al., 2013). The deployment of capitals and their intended effects are found to cluster in two: The “material”—financial, built, and natural—and the “human”—social, political, and human. Cultural capital has primary ties with the human cluster, particularly social capital, but it is also related to the material cluster. The connecting role of cultural capital is supported by others who have recognized that the way that communities symbolically value capitals relates to community practice, which in turn relates to capital access (Carolan & Hale, 2016). While social capital is vital for the flow of resources, how resources are symbolically valued by the network can also encourage or impede development.

Bourdieu (1989) describes the important role of symbolic capital in the way that other capitals are recognized and valued, or not, within a field. Within the present project, we use the term “symbolic value” in place of “symbolic capital” to emphasize a more active and relational process of capital valuation rather than a possessive quantity that “capital” implies. Put another way, “symbolic value” refers to the frames that shape, and are shaped by, collective action (expanded upon below). Some within networks have more access to capitals, obtained during previous struggles, and this grants them power to make group boundaries. In doing so, the power relations between groups is not only the result of varying access to social and cultural capitals, for instance, but also how groups are imbued with varying levels of symbolic power that constitute how those capitals are

accessed in the first place. When applied to the community capitals framework, symbolic power also relates to how additional conditions are recognized and valued. For example, how built infrastructure and cultural diversity are symbolically valued, or not, has implications on boundaries and openings to incorporating them into community development work.

Community development and frames

This research uses frame analysis as a way to study the impact of cultural and symbolic values on accessing community capitals. Frame analysis is concerned with how “definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events and our subjective involvement in them” (Goffman, 1997, p. 155). Frames inform multiple shifting realities held by individuals from situation to situation. Individuals fit their actions into understandings of what is going on in a particular “strip” of activity (Goffman, 1997, p. 155). For example, the way that community members or development practitioners recognize losing volunteers as a problem is based upon a frame that volunteerism is a necessary part of community development.

This example also highlights the role of group interactions on the frame formation, or alignment, process (Snow et al., 2012). Some frames are determined more or less real for perceiving the circumstances depending on the encounter and the particular roles it requires (Goffman, 1997). Furthermore, frames are filtered through previous experience to determine which meanings are more salient. Frames are the result of an ongoing process of past and present experience, and the meaning imparted on individuals communicated in groups, thereby collectively constructing how we define what is occurring in a particular situation. They organize experience and guide action at the individual and collective level (Snow et al., 2012).

In our analysis, two primary frames are used to examine resource access: those concerning the values related to problems a cooperative is working to address, and those concerning identity. As we will see, the frames that cooperative participants use to understand the purpose of the cooperative can both enable and disable resource access. Much of this depends on the conditions under which the cooperatives are organizing. For instance, work framed in terms of economic development can sometimes limit the generation of other values such as social and environmental. Or, valuing a justice frame may help gain access to the human capitals cluster, but also may also require that more resources to be sustained compared to work without a justice frame.

Identity refers to the self-images related to roles and positions in social organization (Stryker, 2008). Identity includes the structures that precede and shape interaction, such as race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, religion, and political affiliation, to which value hierarchies are applied. People have multiple identities that are hierarchically organized, with some being more likely invoked depending on the encounter (Stryker, 2008). Identities can create boundaries and openings to capitals, particularly direct connections to those in the human capital cluster (i.e. social, human, cultural, political). For instance, whether cooperative members identify with a new potential cooperative board member relates to how supportive they may be of adding them or not. Identity also influences how communities value capitals. For example, a farmer may not perceive it as his responsibility to value diverse cultures as part of his efforts as a farmer.

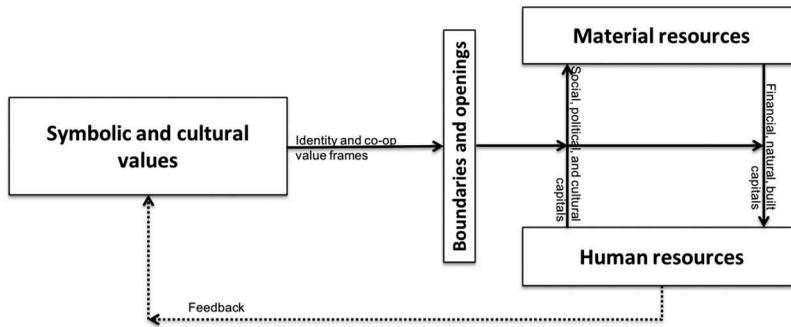


Figure 1. Analytical framework.

The role of cultural capital in the community capitals framework is in need of improvement, particularly concerning how communities assess their resources and development efforts (Carolan & Hale, 2016; Pigg et al., 2013). The addition of symbolic power, or the ability to make other capitals recognized and valued, provides us with a way to help bridge this gap. By examining the frames that organize the experience of food and agriculture cooperatives, we can learn about the relationships enacted (i.e. between the capitals) through particular cultural and symbolic meanings. Cultural value is more of the long-term, institutionalization of particular conventions. Symbolic value includes such conventions, with symbolic power referring to the ability to transfer symbolic value into cultural. By identifying the symbolic and cultural boundaries and openings within community development networks, in this case food and agriculture cooperatives, we can help determine how efforts can better mobilize resources toward change. Figure 1 provides a visual of our analytical approach. The dotted line represents feedback that contributes to habitualization of symbolic representations (culture).

Methods

This research is part of a five-year study examining food system resilience in a region of the western US. Through initial fieldwork aiming to identify and explore innovative practices, we learned about the swell in interest in food and agriculture cooperatives as drivers of community improvement. Four cooperative grocery stores are forming in the region's magnet city. At least seven producer cooperatives have begun in the past 10 years. Due to the lead author's involvement in the region as a researcher and practitioner in food and agriculture development projects over the past decade, this research takes an extended case approach (Burawoy, 1998; Ragin & Becker, 1992). An extended case position emphasizes time spent participating in and observing social life with an *a priori* theoretical lens. For our research, we used the community capitals and relational theorizing (i.e. frames)³ as guides as we entered and tried to make sense of our time spent in the field.

Three cases were selected purposively to create variation within our sample (Creswell, 2013), including variation in urban and rural, SES of members (or target demographic), length of time in operation, and whether they were producer or consumer led cooperatives. Within each cooperative network, interviews and focus group participants were also selected purposively and in a way that aims to provide

variation and critical information (Maxwell, 2012). This included beginning with key informants such as board presidents, founders, and leaders of subgroups. Information obtained from this initial sample helped inform the selection of focus group participants. Follow-up interview participants were chosen based upon the information they had to confirm or falsify the coalescing research findings.

We conducted interviews ($n = 59$) and focus groups ($n = 6$) and spent more than 200 h as participant observers over an 18-month period. The interviews and focus groups aimed to understand salient motivations and values for participating in the cooperative as well as characterizing barriers and opportunities to resource access for the cooperative. To help facilitate this latter conversation, participants are shown [Table 1](#) that summarizes the community capitals.

For the interviews, we sought to develop conversational partnerships (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) that value reflexivity and developing trust between the interviewer and interviewee. Focus groups occurred with each cooperative. To encourage participation, we were sure to redirect conversation if some voices were becoming overpowering (Morgan, 2007). A note taker was present to help provide another point of view about the focus group. Note takers took notes about salient themes that emerged during the focus groups. Interviews and focus groups were recorded with the participants' consent.

Participant observation primarily occurred at cooperative board meetings and events and through volunteered labor (i.e. at distribution). A primary focus was on group dynamics, especially how identities shaped interactions. We took notes, often beginning with grand-tour questions about the general place, dress, topics, gestures, and interactions followed by mini-tour questions focusing on specifics of individuals and interactions and our feelings and perceptions as researchers (Spradley, 1980). We also took notes about possible connections or topics on which to follow up during interviews, focus groups, and secondary data sources. These secondary data sources included cooperative reports, websites, newsletters, etc. These were selected based on their ability to further confirm or disconfirm what we learned in the field.

Interviews, focus groups, and notes were analyzed through categorizing (i.e. codes) and connecting strategies (i.e. contextualizing in narrative) (Maxwell, 2012). This helped us retain contextual characteristics of each specific case (i.e. language of participants), while also aiming to develop categories to compare across cases (i.e. memos). It allowed us to begin with some sensitizing concepts (i.e. community capitals, environmental frame) and work toward producing knowledge that is situated in the language of the participants.

Findings: Frames of cooperative development

In this section, we characterize each cooperative's community capitals access and how some are valued over others. Characteristics and associated frames are presented separately for each cooperative. We do this to keep each case analytically distinct to help create points of comparison for the next section that is concerned more generally with the role of cultural and symbolic value in community development as understood through frames. For each cooperative, we begin by describing the human capitals and then we summarize the material capitals. Following this, we characterize each cooperative's primary value and identity frames. The summary of each cooperative and their associated frames is given in [Table 2](#).

Table 1. Summary of community capitals for research participants.

Natural	Cultural	Human	Social	Political	Financial	Built
-Location -Weather -Geographic isolation -Natural resources -Amenities -Natural beauty Shapes the cultural capital connected to place	-Knowledge -Traditions -Who and what we feel comfortable with. -Language influences what voices are heard or not	-Skills and abilities that help develop and access resources and knowledge. -Leadership across differences, participatory, proactive.	-Connections among people and organizations, that makes things happen. -Could be close, more personal connections or more distant that create bridges among organizations and groups.	-Access to power, organizations, and resources, to change standards, rules, and regulations. -Ability of actors to engage in action that affects their community.	-Available financial resources to invest in community capacity building, underwrite entrepreneurship, support community development, and save for future community development.	Infrastructure supporting community activities

Table 2. Three cooperative cases.

Name	Type of cooperative	Location and service area	Date founded	Frames
Fair Horizons food cooperative	Grocery store	Low-income, community of color, in fast growing regional city	2014 (no store yet)	Values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Affordable foods ● Community economic development and ownership ● Growing attention to inequality and justice Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community developers ● Community members ● Hispanic/Latino women ● White, educated men and women
Green Planet food cooperative	Grocery store	Mid to high income, mostly white, educated college town	Late 1970s	Values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Environmentally sustainable and local foods ● Local economy ● Community building Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Environmentalist ● Progressive ● Community member ● Staff member
Prairie Farms producer cooperative	Distribution	Low to mid-income rural towns, customers in fast growing regional city	2009	Values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rural economic development ● Healthy food access ● Growing future farmers Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilitarian producer ● Rural ● Healthy food consumer

Prairie farms producer cooperative

In 2008, a group of small-scale producers came together with the goal of improving rural communities through a regional small-scale multi-stakeholder agriculture cooperative that connects producers with consumers. Anyone can be on the board but at least 50% of the board must be producer members. While consumers are the largest member class, the cooperative is mostly governed by aging farmers who have access to large pieces of family land and generations of farming and related business knowledge. The board of directors also includes some local leaders and professionals who also farm. There are retired and working professionals, but many participants rely directly on the farms as a source of income. They have witnessed the decline in rural towns where younger populations are leaving for towns and cities where there are more jobs available. As Sam, a producer member of the cooperative put it,

There is a move-away-from the home mentality that caused all this youth out migration away from these rural communities.—Sam

All of the producers and consumers observed appeared to be white, with a fairly even gender split, although more men are in leadership positions, something that some women respondents described as a “strategic” decision to gain support within rural communities. This orientation toward traditional gender roles enables the cooperative

to build trust, while also allowing internal bonds that develop leadership efficacy across genders.

Producer members are more immediately trusting of other producers. For instance, some producers described feeling less comfortable with and skeptical of consumer knowledge, implying that they connect with producers more readily. Some participants also described the producers as having an adversarial relationship with consumers. Field notes suggest that producers more readily talk to one another rather than consumers when both are present.

The homogeneity and enduring relationships of the governing body (mostly producers) contributes to heightened levels of bonding social capital. The board of directors socialize together sometimes and all communicate regularly, even though improving communication regularly comes up in board meetings. Prairie Farms can sometimes be willing to share resources with other groups such as non-profits or other cooperatives. However, there are instances of being suspicious of other groups. For instance, when considering partnering to distribute food, a local distributor was viewed as untrustworthy and self-interested. The group is also cautious of who they share their business plan with.

The cooperative specializes in meats and eggs but also distributes fruits and vegetables and value-added products. The income and expenses for the cooperative in 2015 were both around \$269k (it broke even). The average monthly purchase amount is around \$100. At this point, the cooperative typically plays a small role in the income of the producer members. These producers often describe themselves as “land rich, cash poor.” Though spread out across many counties, much of the leadership of Prairie Farms is located in a county with a median household income of \$44,500 per year, 22% with a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 90% non-Hispanic or Latino White (US Census). Many of these households have additional sources of income whether through off-farm jobs or retirement funds. Through grants and partnerships, Prairie Farms has been able to improve facets of its built infrastructure including a mobile poultry processing unit, trailers, a warehouse space for distribution sorts, and event spaces for yearly meetings. These help Prairie Farms process and distribute food and build connections more effectively. Many of the producers have adopted organic and agro-ecological practices either by direct negative health or environmental experiences with conventional agriculture.

Prairie Farms often struggles with bridging and sustaining relationships with non-producers and those who are not white. The board of directors has no consumer members and there is little to no involvement of Hispanic and Latino rural populations, which make up 7% of one of the participating counties. The target market for the cooperative is a city with a median household income of \$54,000 per year, 45% with a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 53% non-Hispanic or Latino White (US Census). Though events and distribution are held in urban low-income and communities of color, there is also little membership involvement from these populations in the cooperative. Some do receive cooperative food through partner non-profits. However, there is tension with prioritizing urban food affordability when many rural populations cannot afford the cooperative’s food either.

At least partially due to the lack of consumer and urban members, the cooperative has less direct and sustained political connections to regional leaders, foundations, and those with media and marketing skills. There is also a shortage of bridging social capital as apparent in the struggle to maintain consumer member volunteers needed for

distribution. This contributes to an overall lack of time to work on building capacity to move beyond the day-to-day of growing and distributing food and management of the organization. While some infrastructure and financial resources have been acquired, in formal and informal conversations many express that much more are needed to make Prairie Farms sustainable. For instance, there are two part-time employees who mostly do accounting and marketing. Other management efforts, which amount to a half and sometimes a full-time job, are all volunteered. The mobile meat processing unit can only operate in one state, limiting producers who can participate, because there is no inspector in the adjacent state. Furthermore, political connections are lacking to help to address such barriers.

Honing in on the more cultural and symbolic aspects of Prairie Farms through identity and value frames, we can learn more about how resource access patterns are maintained symbolically, particularly concerning the exclusion of consumer members from the board. The primary frames of Prairie Farms include rural economic development, growing future farmers, and providing healthy food access. As Peter describes,

The goal is really to bring back the rural producers, and to keep their whole way of life alive... it is about keeping the small producers alive.—Peter

To achieve these goals, economic relations and the pragmatics of running a profitable business are emphasized. This shapes how cooperative members relate to each other. As Sara put it: “Farmers have a more utilitarian mind set when relating to consumers.” The utilitarian mindset aligns with other producers, which helps build and maintain connections among this group. Knowledge about farming and rural life helps facilitate relationships between producers and the other material resources they contribute (i.e. land and infrastructure). The decline in small farmers and young people, and the necessary role young farmers are viewed as playing in the future, contributes to the growing future farmers frame. Rural development helps gain that attention of foundations and other political connections, but these groups often value either more financial sustainability (i.e. not as reliant on volunteers) and/or food access for low-income communities. The utilitarian producer–consumer economic practice of Prairie Farms creates challenges to the latter, but they also struggle to “scale-up” enough to take on full-time employees.

While the rural economic development and young farmer values resonate with some urban consumer members, these values are not as salient for many city dwellers. Consumer members tend to be more interested in healthy foods. This preference aligns with many of the farmers who described getting involved with non-conventional agriculture for individual health reasons, mostly motivated by negative experiences with chemicals used in conventional agriculture.

Prairie Farms’ capital access is driven by a strong farmer identity that is often opposed to the consumer. While discussing the consumer-producer relationship, Jeff said:

Customers have a hard time grasping production. An extremely hard time grasping production. So when you let them- it’s great to take in their input and have the open lines of communication, because producers need to know what the consumers are looking for, but their input needs to be taken with a grain- an extremely large grain of salt, because if you focus solely on the consumer side of it, and lose focus of your producer side of it, you’ll get things so skewed that- you have no choice but to fail.—Jeff

By not including urban consumers in the framing process—only taking their input with a “large grain of salt”—boundaries to other resources that lie in urban consumer members are solidified (i.e. financial, political, and human capital resources). The consumer-producer identity dichotomy, in addition to the utilitarian frame, also limits the inclusion of other identity frames and related resources. For example, racial and political identities do not fit neatly into the utilitarian producer–consumer focus of Prairie Farms. It does not consider the other cultural and symbolic values—such as the type or affordability of food, or the dress and conversation at distribution and cooperative events—that might be keeping people, and resources, away. Most of the people involved are white and more socially and politically conservative, as described by a number of participants and supported in participant observation. This limits the access of resources from other groups (i.e. volunteers, skills, and financial commitments) as well as foundations that use the inclusion of underserved populations as an indicator of successful work.

Fair horizons food cooperative

Fair Horizons is a yet to open consumer cooperative grocery store located in the fast-growing regional magnet city (same city as target market for Prairie Farms). It was founded by a local community economic development non-profit called “Renovation” (pseudonym used). The demographics for the Fair Horizons neighborhood include a median household income of \$42,000 per year, 16% with a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 80% Hispanic or Latino (US Census). This neighborhood is commonly described as a “food desert,” indicating challenges to healthy and affordable food access.

As a cooperative in the planning stages, a primary focus is on membership recruitment. The cooperative has an annual membership cost of \$41 and currently has over 300 members and a board made up of staff of a local non-profit named Renovation and local community members and residents. This includes working professionals; newer and longtime residents; individuals with low and high education levels; and white, Hispanic and Latino, refugees, and low-income households. While there is diverse representation from these groups on the governing board, the membership is made up of more white, educated, newer residents. White educated men from Renovation are in the leadership positions including the board president. This assorted make-up of the membership contributes to a strong knowledge and skill set base for Fair Horizons. However, time and knowledge of running a cooperative grocery store are cited as constraints. Current leadership explained that they are skeptical that the cooperative would be able to get started and operate without the support of Renovation.

The diversity of the Fair Horizons network also suggests a higher level of bridging social capital. There are more connections within the community, to which Renovation and the cooperative contributes, and this supports social and political connections throughout the city and region. For instance, the mayor and other government officials have regularly attended events related to Renovation’s work. Such relationships also broaden the access to financial support through government and foundation grants. These grants are often used to support the work of Renovation that includes staff time and buildings infrastructure such as acquiring land, building, and parking.

Raising money through the membership has been difficult for a variety of reasons. One primary challenge is the potential role of the cooperative and Renovation in the gentrification process of the neighborhood. As Kate told me:

Is the work doing more harm than good? Because at this point, the co-op is accelerating gentrification in the neighborhood. For example, there was a real-estate sign down the road that says “1 mile from the Fair Horizons Food Co-Op.”—Kate

Gentrification creates uncertainty about whether membership will guarantee benefits to potential members. For example, people who buy membership now may be forced out of the neighborhood before the store is open. Related to this is concern over what foods the cooperative will carry. Some members and potential members value different foods, whether specific ethnic varieties or foods that reflect moral commitments such as organic, local, sustainable, and fair. These varying value frames—affordability versus environmental or healthy—is a tension point in the cooperative. A board member named Alison described how she felt conflicted about the cooperative carrying organic foods even though that is what she wants to buy. Alison said:

I wouldn't shop at the co-op if they didn't carry organic foods because I don't want to support that, but I have the financial capital to go to Vitamin Cottage. Many of the people in the neighborhood do not.—Alison

The uncertainty about who the cooperative is for contributes to a lower degree of trust among the members. Put another way, although the network is more diverse, there are challenges to creating bonding social capital. The process of determining what goods and services the cooperative will provide affects its role in broader networks. For example, Alison went on to say that by prioritizing affordable foods, the cooperative would contribute to unsustainable conventional agriculture methods. This is a problem for her and many other members. However, Renovation and many of the low-income members of the board want the priority to be affordable foods rather than healthy and sustainable.

Another primary value frame involves community economic development. When discussed with Renovation representatives, they explained that this language and focus, along with improving health, often resonates with funding organizations. This frame has further shaped the views of cooperative members and is a primary focus of the cooperative. Members speak of the cooperative creating jobs for the community, buying foods grown and prepared from the neighborhood, providing an ownership opportunity, and decreasing time spent traveling to distant grocery stores. Cooperative participants also describe healthy food access as a primary motivation for participating in the cooperative, which aligns with funding priorities of local foundations.

While the economic development and healthy food frames have helped gain political and financial support, inequality and justice have become increasingly salient in board meetings as issues of gentrification and trust continue to affect membership recruitment. One of the leaders of the cooperative and Renovation said:

I am seeing more and more how important race is to everything we are doing. I am seeing more and more how justice and equity need to be front and center of not only the public face and messaging but the values that drive decisions on the board and within membership. I think we drifted off course by saying ‘yeah, this is about race, but really it's about

economic power' but not being cognizant that we were falling into the same trap of making decisions that were going to reinforce privilege based on race. I always thought we could course correct but realize now that the DNA would be wrong if these aren't front and center in discussions.—John

Some cooperative participants view the lack of focus on inequity and race and the accompanying lack of trust (bonding social capital) as a result of the project being led by mostly white educated men and women. As one focus group participant put it:

I feel that there's an issue with the leadership not being reflective of community here in this area. I feel like there's a lot of leaders in our community—a lot of potential leaders in our community that could be reflective of who we actually represent. Sadly, I don't think we have that and so that creates a sense of disempowerment in our community.—Angel

Those with Hispanic and Latino identity frames often do not see how they fit into decision-making and day-to-day processes. In contrast, the primary leaders of Renovation are driven by the community developer identity frame and take less of a direct stance on issues of race and class. There is a tension between this occupational identity, those related to race and class inequities, and who the cooperative ultimately serves. At least in part, the acquisition of resources through foundations and political connections shapes this tension by emphasizing economic development over issues of inequality and justice. In other words, the economic development frame creates a boundary for Fair Horizons to address inequality and justice.

Green planet food cooperative

Started as a buying club in the early 1970s, Green Planet food cooperative is a small consumer grocery store located in a busy downtown area of a mid-size city (150,000). Much of the city economy and culture revolves around a state university and the brewery industry. According to the US Census, the city has a median household income of \$55,647, 89% identify as White, 10% Hispanic or Latino, and 52% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The cooperative has 2,400 members but very few spend more than \$20 per week at the store. The annual sales are over \$1 million, not enough to receive support from National Community Grocers Association for subsidizing United Natural Foods Incorporated purchases (must be over \$2 million).

The cooperative membership is made up of people from a variety of professional backgrounds including local business owners, researchers, professors, and government workers. While the city and much of the cooperative membership is highly educated, the cooperative struggles to develop and maintain store managers who have both the knowledge on how to manage a grocery store and also to work within a cooperative setting. There are also challenges related to having both the time and expertise for outreach for the cooperative.

The cooperative has been struggling financially for close to a decade. It recently had an acute disruption where overspending occurred, management was fired, and staff took pay cuts to keep the store going. There was a general lack of trust between staff, management, and board. As Gretchen reflected upon firing management:

There wasn't enough communication and trust. We were concerned about finances. I was just elected to the board and we had to do something so that the co-op wouldn't go under.
—Gretchen

Much of the staff regularly socialize together. Some described the cooperative as a “family.” This social bonding capital supports the cooperative in difficult times, such as financial and management struggles, but some are concerned with how it creates challenges with developing and maintaining relationships with the board, members, and other potential partners. One former employee described the impact cliquishness like this:

The co-op is enhanced and enabled by the cliquiness. It definitely impacts people coming-as to whether people are like, “oh, it's a clique. I don't want to shop here because there's cliquishness.”—Lars

Lars went on to explain how this also sometimes affects the ability of the cooperative to maintain relationships with other partners throughout the town such as other businesses. From our own experience at social and community events organized by the cooperative, and talking with members and staff, the cooperative generally struggles with community outreach (i.e. sustained engagement by diverse community members). The cooperative is also sometimes left out of discussions about the development of downtown that may affect them. Some perceived this being due to the cooperative's continued financial struggles and mismanagement. For such reasons, this cooperative can be understood as having strong bonding social capital among much of the staff but struggles with bridging social and political capital across the differences found on the board and throughout the community.

In terms of material resources besides financial capital, the cooperative does own the retail space. This built capital commonly comes up as an asset in meetings. However, the store's size is also viewed as limiting its ability to carry foods that appeal to an audience besides those able to afford healthy and organic foods. Because of the size and location, the cooperative has begun focusing on prepared foods for downtown professionals. Parking is a commonly cited issue, even though the store has space in a parking garage across the street that serves the downtown area. The access and limited inventory leads to the cooperative to being perceived as less convenient. This issue has become especially concerning for the cooperative members and staff as new corporate health food stores plan to open in the downtown area. Cooperative board meetings are frequently discussing how to differentiate the Green Planet from these new stores.

The primary value frames of Green Planet include environmentally sustainable and local foods, local economy, and community building. However, there is tension between these frames. Local and environmentally sustainable foods are important for some in the community-building process, but the higher costs of such products (compared to a conventional grocery store) lead other community members to perceive the cooperative as too expensive, thereby limiting patronage. The lack of physical store space and absence of value frames aimed at making foods more affordable or appropriate may further contribute to the perception that the cooperative is too pricy or not welcoming to shoppers. Community building in effect becomes restricted to those who can afford to prioritize local and sustainable foods.

Responses to the tensions between community building and local/environmental value frames have led to the formation of social boundaries between those who support the cooperative and others in the community. The local and environmental value frames

of other potential shoppers concerned with justice, equality, and affordability discourage their participation in the cooperative, so that the cooperative relies on a select group in the community-building process. While Green Planet staff and volunteers would like to offer social events and workshops to build community and attract potential new shoppers to the cooperative, the amount of time needed for such events exceeds their capacity, as they often describe themselves as being overextended. In sum, for Green Planet to shift to new value frames such as justice, equality, and affordability, thereby potentially broadening their community and capacity, additional resources such as time and leadership are needed. The difficulty in mobilizing such resources suggests that if cooperatives do not begin with values of justice, equality, and affordability, it can be difficult to transition to them down the road.

The environmentalist, progressive, and community member identities among the members help maintain the frames and associated practices. But, as Mike explains, this limits broader participation for those who can't afford and do not identify with the values and identities of the cooperative:

What I find with the co-op is that it is a group of people that are privileged enough to have these resources, whether it's education opportunities, financial means, reliable transportation. They are able to access the co-op because of those components. These same things are limited for a large part of our community, the very same 'community' that we like to idealize. It is something that is easy to idealize.—Mike

The labels of being mismanaged, in addition to being perceived as exclusive, limits patronage, social and political connections, and ultimately financial support. These challenges might become compounded by the new grocery store opening in the downtown area. How will Green Planet compete if the values and identities are similar but participation is cheaper at those stores? While cooperative values were brought up as something that differentiates the cooperative from these stores, there was a general concern about whether that is enough. Some think that more significant change may be needed in the cooperative to adjust to these developments, while others dug in their heels and claimed that they have competed with such stores for decades.

Discussion: Framing community capitals access

Through studying the cooperative cases described above, a number of themes arose in relation to the role of cultural and symbolic values—examined here through frames—in community development. First, we learned that frames both enable and constrain capital access. This is apparent in the variation between cooperatives, particularly how frames relate to practice. Second, tensions sometimes exist between frames in a cooperative and these tensions often reveal how the cooperative does, and possibly can, access resources. Third, this research suggests that as researchers and practitioners of community development, it is vital to consider the way that communities frame their experiences and look for ways to expand those frames toward more diverse resource access practices.

Frames both enable and constrain capital access

What cooperative participants identify with and value often reflects how they access resources. For instance, Prairie Farms relies upon traditional gender norms and market relationships, as well as bonds with other producers, to sustain much of their efforts. Economic development and farmer identity shape, and are shaped by, these connections. However, these value and identity frames limit bridging capital and access to political connections which constrains Prairie Farms' from other built, financial, and human resources such as volunteers, processing units, and grants to help build capacity through full-time staff. Similar patterns exist for other cooperatives, though in varying configurations. Fair Horizons' focus on community development, affordability, access, and tensions between occupational, racial, and gendered identities, is able to support more connections across difference and acquisition of material resources. However, their diversity of identities, and institutionalized inequities therein, creates challenges to ongoing commitment and building trust.

These findings support a view of cultural capital playing a bridging role between human and material resources (Pigg et al., 2013). While social capital does facilitate the connections between capitals, values and identities mediate the likelihood of such relationships forming. Though Prairie Farms may look and act like, and even implicitly value, community, by not being explicit about aiming to build community, real and potential social relationships are masked by economic relationships. For example, by prioritizing community, the cooperative may be able to build more solid connections with urban populations outside of producer–consumer economic transactions. Assuming that more diverse capital access improves community development efforts (Hale, 2017), it is critical to examine and encourage cultural values that limit or facilitate a variety of connections.

If one group is able to impose values unevenly on another, or if any group has a strongly disproportionate amount of symbolic power, then this limits an effort's access to diverse cultural capital (Flora et al., 2015). Such limits constrain political and social connections, diverse forms of knowledge, and associated resources such as time, built, and natural capitals. Understanding community development in mostly economic terms facilitates and limits relationships for Prairie Farms, just as sometimes neglecting equity and justice has limited and at times enabled Fair Horizons' efforts.

Tension often exists between frames

Frames can sometimes be in opposition to one another. The way that these tensions play out can contribute to the rigidity or transformative potential frames may have on capitals access. Further, as organizations age, they tend to become more rigid, whereas newer cooperatives can transform more quickly. For example, Green Planet's concern with community building, while also aiming to provide sustainable and local foods, creates tension around whom the "community" is for. The identities often associated with the cooperative constrain who the cooperative community includes. Indeed, identity frames do affect social conduct (Stryker, 2008). The method of community building has tended to focus on economic transactions, and this limits the community to those who can afford to shop there and identify with the cooperative's values and people.

Community tends to also be conflated with the social bonding, or cliquishness, of the staff. Creating community through shopping or through similar identities creates tension around what is community, how it is created, and whom it includes. This ongoing dynamic at Green Planet has created rigidity around how to adapt to more competition in the downtown area. Creating the space to interrogate what the cooperative means by “community” may open up spaces to be more inclusive, thereby accessing additional resources and remaining differentiated.

In its shorter existence, Fair Horizons has cultivated more space for varying values and identities to be expressed. The continued transformation toward a more explicit focus on issues of inequity and justice has occurred due to the concerns often raised by less privileged members of the cooperative. Renovation has been intentional in working directly with the Hispanic, Latino, and refugee communities in the area. By involving these groups in the work of the cooperative, and creating spaces for the exchange of values across varying identities, frame transformation is more likely for Fair Horizons. Indeed, it is important to anticipate how different identities may be expressed (Stryker, 2008) during community development efforts and adopt values and practices that allow groups to sustain relations across difference. One challenge is that desired practice, such as what foods are supplied by cooperatives, may not be the same for all groups. Is Fair Horizons going to carry more expensive, healthy foods? Hispanic and Latino foods? And/or food for various refugee groups? Maintaining commitments across identities and values can be challenging if people don't see how they will benefit. However, creating space for discussing possible overlap of interests allows the cooperative to further build connections across capitals and work processually toward Fairer Horizons.

Changing frames can help reorganize capital access

Much of what we have discussed so far has focused on the generalizations about the salient frames the cooperative cases, and their members, use to make sense of their activities. However, because these frames both enable and constrain access, a question remains: what sort of frames may better help the cooperatives with relationships both within and external to each? Participation in collective action, especially across difference, relies upon the process of frame alignment between individuals and organizations (Snow et al., 2012). The frame alignment process requires work to bridge and amplify frames, render them coherent to potential participants, and potentially transform frames. Further, it is important for frames to be continually reexamined (Snow et al., 2012).

For cooperative development, the frame alignment process would include looking for opportunities to create bridging frames across current and potential groups. For example, a community frame may be better suited for bridging productive connections between producer and consumer members than an economic or farmer identity frame. Or, a justice frame may help create connections between Green Planet and other community work as well as differentiate from competition. Groups can amplify their frames by responding directly to new developments such as, in Fair Horizons' case, gentrification. Taking an official stance in relation to an equity frame can potentially help amplify the message of Fair Horizons.

Conclusion

At times, the community capitals framework can seem frameless. Specifically, the cultural and symbolic relationships that make capitals recognizable and valued by communities are not as well theorized as are, for example, the interrelationship between capitals (e.g. their ability to have a spiraling-up effect [Emery & Flora, 2006; Pigg et al., 2013]). This work has aimed to wrestle with limitations of the community capitals approach to community development. Through conversations with colleagues and the fieldwork presented here, we have identified and used the concept of frames to study the role of cultural and symbolic values in capitals access.

Perhaps most importantly, this research confirms the claim that if one group is able to impose values unevenly on another, or if any group has a strongly disproportionate amount of symbolic power, then this limits an effort's access to diverse cultural capital and potentially other resources (Flora et al., 2015). However, for efforts to work to address such inequities, resources are themselves needed to sustain dialog and collective action, thereby connecting projects to broader structural inequities. The ways that groups navigate structural inequities through the frames and frame alignment processes relates to the capacity to sustain diverse resource access. Using a market focused, utilitarian frame as an organizing tool essentializes participation with monetary transactions.

A community-building frame may help groups value social relationships outside of the market. However, if the group remains unreflexive about how ideas of community may marginalize certain populations, then this can further reproduce inequities. Attention to inequality and justice in framing processes can help groups take more intentional positions about how cooperative development efforts relate to broader structural inequities. Yet, the justice frame may not resonate with all current and potential networks, thereby making other frames such as "community" a more negotiable starting point. Such steps may lead to more effective bridges between cultural and symbolic values and potential community resources.

Notes

1. We draw on the sociological and social movement theory lineage of "frames" although we do recognize that other disciplines use the term (e.g. communication studies).
2. By "capitalized," we mean the outcome of a contested process of reworking values so that additional capitals become recognized, sought after, and accessed.
3. Relational theorizing emphasizes the importance of relations rather than substances in patterning social life (Emirbayer, 1997). Put another way, relational theorizing focuses on how connections constitute objects, rather than the other way around. For instance, as this research examines, resource access might be less explained by individual or cooperative characteristics (substances) and more by the values and identity frames performed by cooperative participants.

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