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Alexandra J. Pill April 8, 2013

Changing Food Landscapes: Understanding the Food Truck Movement in Atlanta, Georgia

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Abstract

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Street food is a centuries-old concept and is often regarded as a global phenomenon. This study helps to further define and unveil the 21st century vending phenomenon of the gourmet, technologically savvy food truck industry in the United States, and specifically in Atlanta, Georgia. This research takes an ethnographic and exploratory approach to exposing the nature and scope of the Atlanta food truck movement through the perspectives of eleven local food truck vendors and five non-vendors involved in the movement. Moreover, this study provides the first ethnographic documentation of the Atlanta food truck movement. Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this report examines food truck vendor characteristics, motivations, challenges, ambitions, and observations in the Atlanta food truck scene. The findings indicate that the vendors' motivations for engaging in the Atlanta food truck scene are twofold: they are driven by both economic advantage and socio-cultural appeal. In addition, despite challenges with metropolitan Atlanta area's complex permitting and regulatory processes, vendors were optimistic and excited for the future and longevity of their business and other food trucks in Atlanta. As evident in the vendor and non-vendor interviews, the Atlanta food truck scene is constantly evolving, and suggests that with time, food trucks and the communities they create have the potential to flourish in the city.

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The inspiration for this thesis project comes from my 2011 research on street food vending policy in the Old Quarter in Hanoi, Vietnam. While studying in Vietnam, I had the opportunity to learn about the country's deep history and fully immerse myself in its lively cultural life. This research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Institute for Developing Nations and Emory's Center for International Programs Abroad. My time in Vietnam greatly influenced my curiosity to further examine street food in an entirely new setting and context: the up-and-coming food truck movement in Atlanta, Georgia.

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INTRODUCTION

Amidst the urban sprawl, diverse neighborhoods, and progressive culture in Atlanta, Georgia, a mobile street food movement is gaining momentum. Street food trucks gather in various areas throughout the city of Atlanta, communicating with their customers via social media and serving gourmet, artisanal foods. The purpose of this research is to raise awareness of the Atlanta food truck vendor's story and perspective and develop a better understanding of the nature and scope of the Atlanta food truck scene. This research provides the first ethnographic documentation of the Atlanta food truck scene. In doing so, this research explores the role of food truck vendors in Atlanta's rising food truck movement from the perspective of eleven vendors. Additionally, this study examines some of the cultural and economic characteristics of the food truck scene within the contexts of Atlanta and the United States.

It is widely cited that the 2007-2008 economic downturn initiated the modern food truck movement in the United States. Thus, this economic recession marks a serendipitous opportunity for entrepreneurship in a struggling economy with a highly receptive and progressive food culture. Fueled by economic, cultural, and social circumstances, the 21st century food truck movement offers a new opportunity for both vendors and customers. Although street food is a phenomenon that has existed for centuries, omnipresent in many countries and cultures across the world, the 21st century food truck movement represents a new, never-before-seen cultural, social, and economic opportunity. Food trucks have taken over the national scene as an exhibition of this trendy and highly accessible food culture. As with the global and historical phenomenon of street food, food trucks have effectively revolutionized urban eating options.

Food trucks have attracted much interest in the past few years. Featured in newspaper and journal articles, blog posts, television shows, and more recently in books and research

studies, food trucks have captured the public's attention. Moreover, by using social media to connect with customers, supplying delicious gourmet food, and bringing people and communities together within a new food environment, food trucks provide an outlet to enrich and enliven communities through a shared experience.

This study explores the nature and scope of the Atlanta food truck movement through both an ethnographic and exploratory approach. By examining the perceptions of eleven Atlanta-based food truck vendors and five non-vendors involved in the rising food truck movement, this research strives to better understand the characteristics defining the food truck movement and food truck vendors within the context of the city of Atlanta. In doing so, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the motivations, challenges, and future ambitions of Atlanta food truck vendors? What are the vendors' observations of Atlanta's food truck movement, and in what ways can their perspectives help us to better understand the city's rising food truck movement?

2. To what extent is the Atlanta food truck movement about enhancing food culture and/or about realizing economic opportunity for small businesses entrepreneurs?

In order to answer these questions, this research must first place the study of street food cultures within a global and domestic context.

This thesis begins by situating the study of street food within its historical debate and exploring street food vending trends at both an international and domestic level. In addition, background research examines the rising 21st century food truck movement in the United States focusing on the economic driving factors, shifting urban and public places, evolving street vending policies, and underlying cultural trends. With a better understanding of the context by which the modern-day food truck movement is situated, the following chapters (2-4) discuss the methods, findings, analysis, and conclusions of this research study. The study's findings explore

vendors' motivations to start a food truck business, challenges of owning a food truck in Atlanta, future ambitions for their business, and overall observations of the Atlanta food truck movement. By providing a time and place for personal contact with Atlanta's food truck vendors who are seemingly anonymous, this research highlights their personal story and perspective. In defining and exposing a new food consumption and socio-cultural trend, this research documents evidence of the rising Atlanta food truck movement, and thus reveals the current mobile street food vending culture within context of the city of Atlanta.

CHAPTER 1:

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

THE STREET FOOD VENDING DEBATE

Due to its role in culture and economy, street food vending exposes a deep, historic, and convoluted debate. On one hand, vendors contribute to economic activity, construct a city's cultural and social identity, and demonstrate grassroots entrepreneurship. On the other hand, street vendors work in contested public space, challenge urban governance, and pose public health concerns. The current debate centers on the formalization and acknowledgement of street vending in the global economy. It is important to note that there are many arguments for and against street vending; however, the following subsections will focus on the arguments aforementioned, examining street food vending on a global scale. The variety of approaches for regulating, mandating, and promoting street vending reflect an array of political, economic, social, and cultural motivations.

Arguments in Support of Street Vendors

As a contributor to economic activity, the provision of goods and services, and a linkage between social groups, street vendors are integral to the economy. Additionally, street vendors provide a key role in sharing food cultures and localizing commerce. Street vendors fill a niche that supermarkets and restaurants cannot fulfill because by their very nature, street vendors are highly mobile and small-scale. Furthermore, street vendors maintain convenient and flexible schedules, working at all hours and selling a variety of affordable goods (Robbins 2010). Traditionally, street vendors provide a dependable and easily accessible source of cheap goods and foods to their customers (Bhowmik 2005). In particular, food trucks represent a modern

urban and cultural phenomenon by serving trendy, artisanal foods[1] around a city and connecting with their customers in both physical and social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook.

In addition to providing a service to urban populations, street vending also promotes cultural transmission and exchange. In many countries, tourists view street vendors as part of the "authentic experience" and an image of traditional society (WIEGO 2011). In the United States, street food is often seen as an avenue to share cultural food knowledge and experience. Many food trucks in the United States sell "authentic" foods and market themselves based on their unique and specialty food offerings. For example, in Atlanta, Georgia, several food trucks offer culturally unique, niche foods, such as WOW! Food Truck's Venezuelan *arepas* or Smiley's Street Eats truck's classic po' boy sandwiches. By vending in public spaces and sharing foods with others, vendors can also help to enrich, and even help build, communities (Frommer et al. 2011). Through connecting people and building community, street vendors are commonly viewed as the life of the street by providing a unique atmosphere that positively influences the tourism appeal (Bromley 2000).

As an easy, lower risk entry point into the economy, street vending provides a chance for individuals to expand their economic opportunities and explore entrepreneurial ambitions. In this sense, street vending often provides individuals an avenue out of poverty or unemployment and a source for supplemental income; this is particularly true for vendors in developing countries (Frommer et al. 2011). Through street vending, workers can respond to seasonal and temporal employment demands, and therefore maintain occupational flexibility and spontaneity. Many vendors rely on street vending to support their families and make ends meet. Furthermore, because it requires relatively little capital to enter the vending market, street vending allows the

[1] Most food trucks specialize in a specific type of food or cuisine (for example, Korean tacos), market their trendy and progressive food offerings as "artisanal" and/or "gourmet," and sell their food at a cheaper price than sit-down restaurants.

poor and unemployed to create their own jobs; this is particularly true in developing countries. In this way, street vending provides a "social safety-net" for the poor, unskilled, and uneducated population (Bromley 2000). Street vending provides vendors the opportunity to learn entrepreneurial skills and promote themselves in a difficult economic environment. In addition, street vending "is a vital bottom rung in the ladder to upward economic mobility" (Bromley 2000:5). Therefore, street vending provides a compelling model for sustainable economic development (Hermosillo 2012).

Arguments Against Street Vendors

Public space is constantly contested in the street vending debate (Drummond 2000; Frommer et al. 2011; Bhowmik 2010). Since street vending sites are usually viewed as 'pseudo-public' space, in which vendors manage a private vending unit in a public vending area, the argument tends to focus on taxation, related costs, possible competition, and urban space use. Although there are lower costs involved in starting a food vending business over a brick and mortar restaurant, there are also drawbacks to not having the comfort of a private, physical location (Frommer et al. 2011). However, as inhabitants of public space, street vendors tend to cluster in similar areas in response to customer demand. Such congregations of street vendors represent "conflict zones" for city planning regulations and land use controls and plans (Bromley 2000). Moreover, vendors and their customers may also contribute to overall city congestion, traffic, and pollution (Bromley 2000).

Components of urban governance and street vending policy primarily focus on regulating vendors, establishing authorized vending zones, and creating monitoring systems to track, manage, and control or inspect vendors. City and health officials must work together to ensure that food safety, hygiene, and sanitation standards are met; "In theory, food safety laws of a

general nature extend to street food, but because of the special nature of street food activities […] more specific and targeted provisions are generally required" (Jayasuriya 1994:223). Due to street food's mobility, health officials are not only concerned with the hygiene and food safety practices and knowledge of the street vendors, but they are also concerned with the food's exposure to pollutants and possible contaminants.

As a result of urban development's market-oriented principles, cities are often challenged to determine whether or not street vending can exist in a modern, developed economy (Cross 2000). Likewise, cities must also confront such progressive ideals and determine to what extent mobile vendors can exist in an environment where private food establishments, such as brick and mortar restaurants, are highly influential. Historically, cities have limited street vending policy in order to curtail "unfair" competition felt by restaurants and other food outlets (Etkin 2009). In today's cities, restaurants are concerned about food trucks' propinquity and potential to create "unfair" competition by serving similar or comparable foods (Wessel 2012). Therefore, cities must determine how best to sustain an equitable food market. Moreover, some argue that street vendors represent an image of poverty and underdevelopment (Bromley 2000). In other words, "The proliferation of street vendors is seen as dysfunctional to the economy as a whole," and thus further demotes street vendors in a growing and modernizing economy (Bromley 2000:10; Cross 2000).

A Global Perspective on Street Vending

Street vending is a global phenomenon present in both the developed and developing countries, and as nations continue to modernize, urbanize, and globalize, street vending continues to expand throughout urban areas. These vendors thrive in public space, selling on

sidewalks and in streets, and moving about in search for customers (Bhowmik 2010). Street vendors can be either mobile or stationary; they may operate part-time, seasonally, and full-time; and they may offer a variety of services and goods including, but not limited to, shoe shining, fresh produce, and prepared, ready-to-eat foods.

In developing countries, vendors are drawn from the urban and rural poor, who strive to succeed in the informal economy. With minimal education and technical skills, street vendors often are women and enter the informal sector as a means to preserve livelihood (Bhowmik 2010). Consequently, as "a veritable sponge that can absorb large numbers of surplus labor," street vending continues to increase as economic development pushes cities to become urbanized powerhouses (Nirathron 2006:3). While street vending is omnipresent in the developing world, it also has deep roots in more developed countries; such examples include the historical 'Chuckwagon' and more well known hotdog and kebob stands. Street vending is present in many different social, cultural, and economic contexts and environments. Due to the variation in policies directed at urban public space and vending activities, a street vendor's ability to thrive is highly dependent on legislation.

Most countries in Asia, for example, have varying degrees of policy and regulation regarding the informality and formality of street vending, and many governments follow similar models of regulation, management, and implementation of street vending policy. In Dr. Sharit K. Bhowmik's (2005) *Street Vendors in Asia: A Review* he explains, "In almost all Asian countries, street vendors have no legal status to conduct their business and they are constantly harassed by the authorities" (2256). As is evident in Asia's successes and failures in implementing street vending policies, in order to be effective, such policies must be interdisciplinary in both theory and practice. Such legislation and policy affecting street vendors

in Asia tends to follow several effective modular paths that incorporate city planning, tourism development, transportation routes, urban expansion, and food safety and hygiene.

For example, in my own research on street food vending in Hanoi, Vietnam during the fall of 2011, I discovered that street food vendors exhibit a mix of compliance and resistance when faced with governmental regulation of their vending space and food practices. Given Vietnam's rapid development alongside a growing informal sector, this conflict has deep implications within socio-economic policy and public space use. The complex semi-compliant vendor attitude is further displayed by the overwhelming lack of confidence in the government to support them and their business. Taking the vendor's perspective into account and the responses I received throughout my interviews with city officials, policymakers, and researchers, it is apparent that Vietnam is actively working to improve the vending environment and attitude from both sides of the playing field. In essence, street food vending policy takes time to effectively and positively shape food vending activities and urban space use, especially in a rapidly developing economy. Therefore, given the dynamic cultural and economic nature of street vending, policy must be both contextualized and uniquely crafted to adequately address different urban environments.

FOOD MARKETS AND STREET FOOD IN THE UNITED STATES

As cities in the United States experienced industrialization, the food market and industry continued to diversify and modernize. For most of history, the food industry in the United States has prospered as one of the country's largest industries. Before the Industrial Revolution, farms and general stores dominated the market (Hampe and Wittenberg 1964). As people moved into cities, open markets popularized and eventually evolved into closed markets as state ordinances

took more control over food distribution channels. With greater control of food distribution and the invention of refrigeration in the 1950s, commercial centers and grocery stores surpassed traditional markets revolutionizing how Americans accessed food (Morales and Kettles 2009a; Frommer et al. 2011; Hampe and Wittenberg 1964). Chain grocery stores and supermarkets centralized food distribution and diversified America's food options as smaller grocery stores and specialized stores such as meat markets faded out (Hampe and Wittenberg 1964). By streamlining how Americans obtained food, the food industry effectively changed our notion of where and how to access food.

For over a century street food vending via food trucks and carts has permeated the American economy. From the invention of Charles Goodnight's 1866 'Chuckwagon,' which was used to transport and cook food for cattle herders traveling through the West, to the utilization of lunch wagons and night owl food trucks in New England in the 1890s, food trucks have helped define how Americans access and consume food for years (The History Channel 2012; Gold 2012). Historically, vendors represented immigrants and lower income classes, attracting working class customers and selling a variety of foods including ethnic and popular local dishes. However, as street food continues to diversify, "consumption is no longer demographically scaffolded [*sic*], although their vending still is the domain of individuals with limited economic resources" (Etkin 2009:93). Over the years, street food progressed into the iconic hot dog stands of New York City and the taco trucks of Los Angeles. Despite several changes, street food has remained a vital contributor to quick and convenient food, bringing people together and enhancing public space.

In response to the 2007-2008 economic recession and rise in social media, food trucks have moved into the national spotlight, further developing urban food landscapes and creating an

innovative movement of their own. As Morales and Kettles so eloquently explain, "Street food today is the synthesis of the American pastoral ideal and modern technology" (2009a:23). These new and revolutionized food trucks "[are] aggressively gourmet, tech-savvy and politically correct" (McLaughlin 2010). Heavily influenced by the economic atmosphere, food trucks have moved swiftly back into the street food scene and the food industry as a whole.

THE 21ST CENTURY FOOD TRUCK MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Following one of the worst economic downfalls since the Depression, the 2007-2008 economic recession left America in a state of shock and despair (Willis 2009; Shouse 2011). Given the economic instability, many Americans were forced to come up with creative responses and approaches to reentering and reinvigorating the labor market. Individuals with a moderate amount of capital and a desire to control their own economic venture began to explore starting a street food business as a way to take a less risky, more affordable step into the food industry. With these new food businesses, a novel food truck industry was born. While some food trucks began to pop up in 2008, such as the famous Kogi Korean BBQ food truck of Los Angeles, California, it was not until 2010 that food trucks really began to make their comeback across the United States. Although there is not a sound estimate of the number of food trucks in the United States – some have estimated several tens of thousands and others have estimated in the millions – it is believed that the number of food trucks is growing every day. The following subsections explore the role that the economy, policies and regulations, urban public space, and culture and social media play in the 21st century food truck movement.

An Economic Response

The 2007-2008 economic recession hit the United States hard, yet out of the hardship rose a pragmatic and "post-industrial phenomenon," the revolution of the food truck movement (Rao 2011):

> While the rest of the food-service sector has been suffering due to lower consumer spending rates, the street vendor industry has made leaps and bounds over the past five years. Street vendors were largely able to dodge the recession's blow by offering new and compelling products that attracted a more diverse client basis (IBISWorld 2012).

In response to the growth in food trucks, several books have been published about food trucks and street food in America, focusing on food truck recipes and the steps to starting a food truck business. In her book, *Food Trucks: Dispatches and Recipes from the Best Kitchens on Wheels* (2011), journalist Heather Shouse shares her extensive research on food trucks throughout the continental United States. With significantly lower start-up costs – approximately $400,000 is needed to open a standard brick and mortar restaurant, compared to the $50,000 to $100,000 needed to start a food truck business – the food truck movement attracts individuals of varied backgrounds but with similar, yet individualized, motivations (Shouse 2011; Ruggieri 2012). Shouse's research reveals that the food truck movement in the United States is a mix of old traditions and new trends, serving an array of foods and representing an assortment of life stories and backgrounds.

As food trucks become a more popular business venture, more and more articles and books are written about how to start a food truck business. Notably, "Small businesses are currently the fastest growing sector of our nation's economy" (Cutno 2010:23). A combination of economic and cultural factors motivates vendors to start up a food truck business (Robbins 2010). In addition to new small business ventures, established restaurants are opening their own food trucks as a way to attract new customers, get out into the community, and test new dishes

(Williams 2012; Stensson 2011). Food trucks offer an opportunity for self-sufficiency and a chance to forge a pragmatic business that helps enrich communities while sharing high-quality food with the public (Frommer et al. 2011; Rao 2011).

A recent IBISWorld (2012) street vendor market research report estimates that the United States food truck annual revenue was approximately $1.2 billion in 2009, and the industry as a whole had an annual growth rate of around 8.4 percent from 2007 to 2012. In addition, the IBISWorld research (2012) reports that over 15,500 people are employed in the street food industry. Moreover, in 2011, the National Restaurant Association recognized the food truck movement as "one of the hottest trends in the restaurant industry" (Stensson 2011). In a consumer survey, the National Restaurant Association found that almost 60 percent of Americans would willingly go to a food truck, almost a ten percent increase from the year prior (Stensson 2011). Furthermore, "One-fifth (18 percent) of consumers saw a food truck in their community this summer, and more than one-quarter (28 percent) of those who saw a food truck made a purchase" (Stensson 2011). It is apparent that four-wheeled establishments have become increasingly prevalent in a four-walled, brick and mortar dominated industry.

Policies and Regulations Targeted at Food Truck Businesses

As a result of the growing popularity of food trucks in the United States, cities and state governments must reevaluate and specify how best to regulate food truck vendors and their four-wheeled businesses. Due to its role in culture and economy, street food vending exposes a deep, historic, and convoluted debate. On the one hand, vendors contribute to economic activity, symbolize a city's cultural and social identity, and demonstrate grass-roots entrepreneurship. On the other hand, street vendors work in contested public space, challenge urban governance, and pose public health concerns. The current debate centers on the role that food trucks should or

should not play in neighborhood identity, economic activities, and urban public space (Hernandez-Lopez 2011). Additionally,

> While food truck litigation may focus on jurisdiction, statutes, and policymakers pondering over competition and "quality of life" issues, these debates are motivated by negotiations on food's contribution to communal identity, perceived socio-economic status, and public space (Hernandez-Lopez 2011:233).

Consequently, there are many arguments for and against street vending, and these arguments are often localized to specific cultural and economic settings. Therefore, the variety of approaches for regulating, mandating, and promoting street vending reflect an array of political, economic, social, and cultural motivations.

Food truck regulations cover a variety of areas: public space use and allocation[2], food safety, vending areas and locations[3], proximity bans[4], and duration restrictions[5]. Street food vending restrictions are put in place for a variety of reasons and influenced by competing businesses, concern for food safety, and public space regulation (Morales and Kettles 2009b). Although regulations are necessary to ensure certain safeties, the nature by which restrictions are implemented can greatly enhance or alter the street vending culture in a city. Hence "Planners should consider the context of a particular market or area of street vending in order to discern the most effective and efficient way to designate permitted vending space" (Morales and Kettles 2009b:5).

As an initiative of the Institute for Justice, Frommer et al. (2011) investigated the types of food vending regulations in 50 of the largest cities in the United States and analyzed the ways in which those cities can best use regulation as a way to foster economic opportunities and

[2] Public property bans are bans on vending in certain areas, such as streets or sidewalks.
[3] Restricted vending zones are public areas where food trucks are banned from stopping and/or selling.
[4] Proximity bans govern the distance food trucks must keep from other businesses or restaurants selling similar items.
[5] Duration restrictions are limits on the amount of time a vendor is allowed to stay in one place and sell.

encourage food truck businesses. In the 50 cities reviewed, Frommer et al. found that 22 percent of the cities reviewed have public property bans, 68 percent have restricted zones, 40 percent have proximity bans, 10 percent have stop-and-wait restrictions[6], and 38 percent have duration restrictions. In addition to these 'standard' regulations, some cities also have permit caps and curfews for vending hours. Due to the specificities and complexities of vending regulations, a vendor's permitting process is often tedious; however, by streamlining the process and implementing comprehensive regulations, food trucks may continue to prosper in today's cities.

Complementing Frommer et al.'s broad and persuasive research on food truck restrictions, Crystal Williams (2012) examines the different types of food truck regulations across eight cities in the United States. In her analysis, Williams investigates the complexities and overall effect of stringent, lenient, transitory, and food-truck-specific regulations. Williams reveals that cities without much food truck history usually initially rely on former regulations for ice cream trucks as a way to handle and govern food trucks. However, she claims this approach is insufficient in the long term, and thus cities with a deep history of food trucks, such as Portland, Oregon or Los Angeles, California, should be emulated for their policy structure and food truck regulations. As a result of more specified and comprehensive policies, the nature and implementation of food truck regulations in cities with high volumes of street food has the potential to greatly alter and enhance a city's public landscape and foodways.

Public Space and the Urban Landscape

As a consequence of selling in public spaces, such as streets, sidewalks, and open parking lots, food trucks pose interesting challenges for the regulation of this 'contested' public space. In this sense, food trucks are unavoidably situated within urban public space debates because they

[6] Stop-and-wait restrictions are restrictions on the amount of time a food truck is allowed to stop and sell to customers on the street.

effectively "employ the street as […] a place of business" (Morales and Kettles 2009a:25). Often, street vending sites are viewed within conflicting 'pseudo-public' spaces where vendors manage a private vending unit in a public vending area.

Within cities, there are many layers of subjectivity and contestation regarding the intended use of space and one's 'sense of place' (Herzog 2006). Thus, it is important to consider how cities prioritize contested public space – streets and sidewalks – and the manner by which policies around public space affect communities as a whole. To create an urban space, or landscape, with meaning that will in turn foster interaction and community is a complex task, especially when people rely on these spaces for a variety of reasons, such as social and leisurely activities (Mehta 2007; Herzog 2006). However, when streets or urban places successfully cater to the needs of the population, it "[has] been positively associated with economic growth, physical health, and a sense of community" (Mehta 2007:166).

Aside from being a physical entity, public space signifies a vital socio-cultural interaction that is representative of a community (Sanders 2009). Rickie Sanders' (2009) article, *The Public Space of Urban Communities*, examines the potential for urban space to create a valued sense of community. Sanders' explains, "In the current economic and social climate in America […] consumerism ha[s] an enormous effect on how we use, perceive, and behave in public spaces" (2009:267). Specifically looking at vendors, urbanist William Whyte, states, "By default, vendors have become the caterers of the city's outdoor life. They flourish because they're servicing a demand not being met by the regular commercial establishment" (1980:50). Thus, when properly regulated and integrated into social landscapes, food trucks have the potential to help facilitate how urban public spaces are used and perceived. If done effectively, mobilizing

food environments and businesses through food trucks will enrich food cultures and bring people together, and thus serve as a vital part of the urban landscape (Frommer et al. 2011).

An elegant study by Ginette Wessel (2012) examined the relationship between urban space use and electronic communication as well as urban concepts propinquity and accessibility with regard to food trucks in the San Francisco Bay Area. Wessel uses a theoretical basis in William Whyte's theory of triangulation, in which an external stimulus causes "people [to be] attracted to public spaces by the presence of other people" (2012:516). Whyte's theory of triangulation points to external stimuli, people, and the interactions they have due to such circumstances. In addition, Wessel cites another urban theorist, Melvin Webber as another theoretical framework to examine the food truck movement's material and non-material environments. Unlike Whyte, Webber's "concepts of accessibility rather than propinquity and social communication that transcend place are fundamental in exposing food trucks' virtual, spatial, and temporal patterns" (2012:526).

With these theoretical understandings, Wessel hypothesized that information technology, such as using Twitter, will influence a person's attachment and identification with urban public places, such as food truck parks. Surveying customers and food truck vendors, Wessel determined that customers were motivated to eat at food trucks for their quality of food, convenience, and for the interactive experience. Food truck vendors, on the other hand, chose location based on high pedestrian activity areas, valuing the experience for its economic exchange rather than environmental qualities of the vending area. Wessel concludes, "Although we are becoming less cognitively aware of the environmental attributes of places, we are actually more connected to these places by new means of accessibility and still prioritize the quality of our experience" (2012:529).

Consequently, street food is more than merely an outlet for food, it "is about creating a sense of place that liven up our streets and contributes to the urban experience" (Cutno et al. 2010:12). Moreover, food truck spaces and "outdoor food facilities are making economically productive use of public spaces" (Iams 2010:8). The benefit of comprehensively integrating food trucks into urban public spaces is twofold: food trucks serve to augment small businesses and serve as "urban revitalization catalysts" (Howell 2011; Ngo 2012) by improving 'dead' public space and bringing new groups of people together (Rao 2011).

Cultural Innovation and the Role of Social Media

As food trends evolve, the once popular and sought after all-around chef is transforming into the now popular artisan, specialty chef. The rise in gourmet and specialty food outlets has prompted a fresh new energy into the American food scene and brought much attention to the growing food truck movement. Today's popularized food truck not only serves inventive dishes and niche cuisines in convenient areas, but also offers meals at lower prices in comparison their to sit-down restaurant counterparts. Some trucks even pride themselves on serving local, sustainably grown foods (Rao 2011). Given the novelty of these reinvented food trucks, most of the research available on the food truck movement has been written within the past few years. The current food truck movement has been cited as a means of enlivening areas, drawing new people together, improving access to food (Morales and Kettles 2009a; Tester et al. 2010), and fostering community. In other words, street food and the food truck movement augments cultural capital by fueling social interaction and progressive food environments, which are difficult to create in today's urban environment (Caldwell 2012; Cutno et al. 2010).

Furthermore, the food truck movement has been highly revolutionized and glamorized through television and social media. Television shows such as the Cooking Channel's "Eat

Street" or the Food Network's "The Great American Food Truck Race" feature popular food trucks across the nation. In addition, many vendors use Facebook and Twitter as a way to inform customers of their location, menu, or specials for the day and further advertise their business. Television and social media outlets have greatly popularized food trucks and allowed them to occupy a modern street food culture at the junction between food and technology. The following images provide examples of a food truck's Twitter (Figure 1) and Facebook (Figure 2) updates:

Figure 1: An example of an Atlanta-based food truck's tweets[7] on Twitter

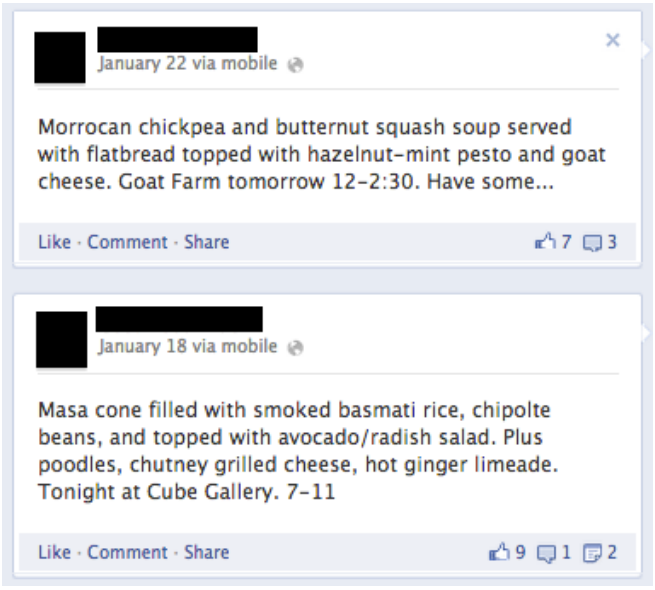

Figure 2: An example of an Atlanta-based food truck's Facebook updates[8]

In a compelling study conducted by Alison Caldwell, titled *Will Tweet for Food: Microblogging Mobile Food Trucks—Online, Offline, and In Line* (2012), she explores the

[7] Tweets consist of 140 characters and are posted on Twitter for followers to view online. Food trucks often use tweets to let their followers, or potential customers, know where they are vending for the day.
[8] As with tweets, food trucks often use Facebook updates to notify their followers (customers) of their menu and vending location for the day.

intersection between food and technology through investigating the role of Twitter among New York City's food truck vendors. Using Twitter as a mode to reach out to their customers and gain new customers, food truck vendors effectively forge a subculture by engaging a unique community in a technologically savvy environment. Customers and potential customers interact with vendors both online and offline creating a platform for both a virtual and physical community. In essence, this interaction revolutionizes a new sense of identity that fuses an individual's online and offline worlds. Through her research, Caldwell makes an interesting discovery:

> The combination of consuming artisan street food, the communication it manufactures in a virtual world, and the actual and virtual experience of the food truck appears to be transforming contemporary foodways and how people respond and interact with food on the street (2012:318).

By transforming urban space and concepts of food and social media, the food truck movement creates a new pseudo-public and -virtual environment where "cultural and class boundaries in these social spaces are becoming blurred" (Caldwell 2012:319). In conclusion, Caldwell calls for more research on the food trucks in today's cities and the contributing cultural and economic aspects that shape this social phenomenon.

CASE STUDIES OF FOOD TRUCKS IN CITIES ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

Los Angeles, California

With a deep history of taco trucks, Los Angeles, California was one of the first cities to experience the new wave of modern food trucks in 2008, most notably with the Kogi BBQ truck; Los Angeles now has over 2,400 trucks roaming the streets (Gaar 2012). It is important to recognize the distinction between traditional taco trucks and the new, trendy food trucks of Los Angeles. Traditional taco trucks, or *loncheros*, are mostly stationary food trucks that sell

traditional Latin food to a diversified customer profile; these trucks have been selling in Los Angeles for many years (Hernandez-Lopez 2011; Hermosillo 2012). On the other hand, the new food trucks prepare gourmet, fusion foods, use social media to connect with their customers, and do not have a permanent vending location (Hernandez-Lopez 2011; Shouse 2011). For the most part, taco trucks and the newer food trucks see themselves on different levels of the street food spectrum, and thus they operate as independent and separate entities with their own associations, customers, and vending neighborhood areas (Hernandez-Lopez 2011). Yet, as a whole these two groups of food trucks are lumped together in city and county regulations on urban space use, food safety policies, and other specific regulations (Williams 2012); however, it has been shown that these regulations inadvertently emphasize the social and cultural distinctions between these two types of trucks (Hernandez-Lopez 2011).

As a result of the implementation of duration and permitted vending location regulations, the "taco truck war" broke out in 2008 between city officials and local street food vendors. Arguing for public health inspections, parking regulations, and improving "neighborhood identity" to intentionally reduce congestion and customer diversity, these local government ordinances ignited a wave of cultural arguments linked closely to local economies and identities (Hernandez-Lopez 2011; Hermosillo 2012). This conflict over public space use and food truck sovereignty revealed the arbitrary factors involved in creating such legislation and provided a wake-up call to local governments to culturally and economically sensitize food truck regulations. For example, Los Angeles food trucks must keep a certain level of mobility during operation and return to a licensed commissary for overnight cleaning and storage (Weber 1012). In essence, Los Angeles presents an example of how food truck legislation has altered historic street food culture into modern-day terminology and policies.

Portland, Oregon

Often thought of as one of the most progressive cities in the country and a hub of alternative and trendy cultural activity, Portland, Oregon provides a welcoming platform for the street food industry. Portland has a history of mobile food dating back to the 1912 produce carts (Urban Vitality Group 2010). Today's vendors represent a diverse group of people, and food carts or trucks offer new entrepreneurs the chance to break into the economic playing field, something especially vital for lower class and immigrant populations (Urban Vitality Group 2010). Currently, Portland supports over 400 food carts (Swart 2012; Cutno et al. 2010). The food truck movement thrives in Portland because the city encourages this form of economic and socio-cultural development.

In 2010, the Urban Vitality Group and the City of Portland's Bureau of Planning collaboratively studied the pros and cons of food carts and the implications for urban design and community economic development of pushcarts and stationary mobile carts. Their study, titled *Food Cartology: Rethinking Urban Spaces as People Places*, found that food trucks both qualitatively and quantitatively contribute to community and social interactions as well as economic vitality. Since "the City of Portland's approach has encouraged the recent growth of carts on privately-owned commercial land, rather than sidewalks" (Urban Vitality Group 2010:9), seven food lots have opened downtown and lots can have anywhere between 20 to 60 carts (Swart 2012). Even with health regulations and vending location restrictions, Portland continues to encourage vending (Williams 2012). Portland serves as an example of a city with a welcoming response to vending and the effective implementation of regulations to preserve urban livability and vitality while promoting consumer safety.

Austin, Texas

As a city known for its hip, young culture, exciting live music scene, creative food offerings, and technologically savvy companies, Austin, Texas openly welcomed the food truck scene as a means of enhancing socio-cultural outlets and promoting small business entrepreneurs. From 2006 to 2011, the Austin street food scene grew almost twofold with an estimated 1,620 permitted mobile food vendors by the end of 2011 (Weber 2012). Austin vendors unite together under the Food Trailer Alliance, a food vendor association that started in May 2011 (Weber 2012). The Austin food truck scene has not only contributed not only to the growing "culture of entrepreneurship and innovation," but also the city's cultural vibe (Gaar 2012).

With such a booming street food culture, Austin's vending regulations have followed a similar path to Portland, Oregon (Howell 2011). Essentially, the rise in food trucks in Austin "has put the city's regulatory apparatus into reaction mode, opting for a more hands-off, but safety concerned, liberalized approach" (Howell 2011:59). Simply stated, Austin has taken a "liberalized, laissez-faire approach to regulating food vendors" (Howell 2011:63). That being said, vendors in Austin still must adhere to the city and health regulations and permits specified in the October 2010 Food Vendor Ordinance. Additionally, Austin is a "low density" city with many vacant parking lots and spaces for food trucks to vend (Howell 2011). Many vendors operate out of fixed trailers around the city, and often food trucks or trailers will cluster together in parking lots to vend, creating a mobile outdoor food court serving downtown Austin (Howell 2011; Weber 2012). Despite having to react retrospectively to the fast growth in food trucks throughout the city, Austin has a thriving food truck scene and an optimistic future for social and cultural street food innovation.

FOOD TRUCKS IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Contextualizing the City of Atlanta

As a city receptive to change, with a historically strong food scene and a widespread urban sprawl, Atlanta is a prime city for food trucks to prosper. The metropolitan Atlanta area attracts people from all backgrounds as a hub of diverse cultures, and thus the city has a high potential to harness its diversity and enrich its cultural capital.

Consequently, it is often noted that Atlanta suffers from an identity crisis due to its urban sprawl and disconnected areas. This disconnection and unevenness also applies to Atlanta's food landscape. Atlanta struggles to maintain areas with adequate access to affordable and nutritious food; therefore, many of the city's neighborhoods are marked by food deserts[9] (Giang et al. 2011). Demographic, diet-related health issues, and socio-economic differences further reflect the uneven distribution of food. In addition, Atlanta has a high Food Retail Index[10] relative to other similar sized cities (Cutno et al. 2010). In Atlanta, 56 percent of the stores that sell food at are convenience stores and 11 percent of them are supermarkets; having a high Food Retail Index is not beneficial and is reflective of the higher prevalence of food deserts in the city (Cutno et al. 2010). Therefore, there is a great need for more healthy food outlets in Atlanta.

Although Atlanta fails to maintain consistent access to healthy food options throughout the city, Atlanta is also home to many diverse and progressive-mined dining options. Food trucks are often seen as the natural step toward the innovative and trend street food scene rapidly stretching and growing across the nation. Given Atlanta's disconnectedness, the city provides a great urban scene for food trucks to prosper. Also, because food trucks are mobile, they may also serve as a possible way to permeate food desert areas (Morales and Kettles 2009a). In

[9] Food deserts are areas with limited to no access to fresh, healthy, and nutritious foods.
[10] The Food Retail Index is found by dividing the total number of fast food restaurants and convenience stores by the total number of supermarkets, produce stores, and farmers markets.

addition, food serves as a way to unite the diverse pockets and neighborhoods within Atlanta; in this sense, street food serves as a "triangulation" factor (Cutno et al. 2010). Street food enlivens public space by transforming empty parking lots, formerly 'dead' space, into dynamic food truck parks (Cutno et al. 2010). Cited in a news article (Schoolcraft 2010) about Atlanta street food, Greg Smith, the founder of the Atlanta Street Food Coalition, claims that

> We're two or three years behind what's happened in other cities, but Atlanta is the perfect place for this to happen. There is so much sprawl here, it makes sense for food trucks to come to the people, rather than the people come to them.

The Food Truck Scene

According to the Atlanta Street Food Coalition website, there are approximately 70[11] food truck businesses in Atlanta. Trucks sell a wide variety of artisanal foods, such as gourmet cupcakes, Indian food, southern fusion barbecue, Belgian-style fries, arepas, and tacos. Vendors sell in a variety of locations throughout the city, including vending almost every day at the Atlanta Food Truck Park on Howell Mill Road, Wednesdays for lunch at Underground Atlanta and Stove Works in Inman Park, Wednesdays for dinner in Virginia Highlands, Thursdays for lunch at 12th and Midtown, and Fridays for lunch at 14th Street Storage and Atlantic Station. More recently, food trucks have also ventured outside of the perimeter into Marietta for Monday Food Truck Rallies, Smyrna for Food Truck Tuesdays, Alpharetta, and Kennesaw for Dinner at the Depot (Watson 2012). In order to help coordinate food trucks, organize vending activities, educate vendors on how to start a food truck business in Atlanta, and support local vendors, attorney Greg Smith founded the Atlanta Street Food Coalition in 2010.

The only formal research available on Atlanta specifically was the *Atlanta Street Food Feasibility Study* conducted by Cutno et al. in 2010. Cutno et al. present a comprehensive study

[11] This number is from the vendors listed on the Atlanta Street Food Coalition's website. While there may be approximately 70 vendors in Atlanta, only a portion of these trucks actually vend on a regular basis.

on Atlanta's vending opportunities, current street food policy, and several short studies on urban design, economic impact, and food environment. While Cutno et al. provide relevant information about Atlanta's street food scene, the policies reviewed have since been revised, and thus their analysis and recommendations are somewhat out of date. In sum, Cutno et al. recommend several policy changes to help support and cultivate the street food vending culture and economy. With significant customer support and interest, all Atlanta needs is to reinvigorate policies to positively promote food truck businesses.

Starting a Food Truck

In 2012, Greg Smith and his wife, Maggie Smith, self-published *The Atlanta Street Food Guidebook*, the first comprehensive set of guidelines for starting a food truck or street food business in Atlanta. Specifically, this guidebook details the requirements, permits, and regulations vendors must abide by in order to legally vend in the Atlanta area. Between the various costs of permitting (approximately $1,500), ascertaining kitchen space, and outfitting a truck, they estimate, conservatively, that an average capital expenditure of $100,000 is needed to get a food truck business going for the first few months. Street food vendors must jump through several hoops before they can legally vend; the Smiths note that finding a "fixed kitchen […] is regularly the biggest stumbling block to starting a mobile food service operation in the state of Georgia" (2012:3). Each vendor must have access to a commercial kitchen to prep their food and a place to dump their dirty water; both the truck and the kitchen must be inspected and permitted (Cutno et al. 2010; Department of Public Health 2012; Smith and Smith 2012).

Given that food trucks are a relatively recent concept in Atlanta, there is a highly complicated and onerous permitting process (Smith and Smith 2012). If vendors are selling food that is prepared *on* the truck (such as cooking and preparing a burger), they are considered *food*

service, and must go through the respective county health department and city offices for the correct permits. For each county that a vendor intends to operate and prepare food on their truck in they must obtain a Mobile Food Service Permit; this permit allows vendors to operate in no more than two locations. On the other hand, vendors that are selling *pre-packaged* foods (such as popsicles or cupcakes) are considered *food sales* and must go through the Department of Agriculture. Lastly, the City of Atlanta requires that vendors carry a mobile vendor permit that they can obtain through the Atlanta Police Department; vendors are required to have these permits for each location they intend to sell.

Evolving Street Vending Regulations

Until recently, Atlanta had a 30 minute duration restriction for food trucks and a 1,500 foot proximity ban, or buffer zone, from businesses selling similar items, which was the largest proximity ban in the country (Cutno et al. 2010; Frommer et al. 2011). These regulations were not contextualized for food truck businesses because they were originally intended for ice cream trucks (Cutno et al. 2010; Department of Planning and Development 1991). In early September 2011, under the leadership of Kwanza Hall, the Atlanta City Council established the Food Truck Ordinance, which allowed for new, more specified regulations for food trucks (Suggs 2011). The Food Truck Ordinance allows vendors to have multiple vending locations per permit and reduced the proximity ban to 200 feet from brick and mortar restaurants selling similar items.

Further complicating a street vendor's ability to gain access to public space in Atlanta, the City of Atlanta's Public Vending Program outsourced public property leasing and governance to General Growth Properties (GGP) a company based in Chicago, Illinois (Cutno et al. 2010; Watson 2013). Outsourcing public property leasing led to the lawsuit, *Miller v. City of Atlanta*, which was filed July 2011 by local street vendors in Atlanta and legally backed by the

Institute of Justice. In a press release from the Institute for Justice, Robert Frommer, the lead counsel for the lawsuit, was quoted saying, "Atlanta should be encouraging entrepreneurship in these tough economic times, but Atlanta's vending monopoly stifles the economic growth that the city desperately needs" (Institute for Justice 2011). On December 21, 2012, the Fulton County Superior Court favored street vendors and struck down the program that was negatively impacting the vendors and monopolizing public space availability in the city. An article (Watson 2013) published shortly after Atlanta street vendor's win against GGP relates how this change in public space governance will affect street food vendors:

> While the food truck movement was not directly affected by the GGP contract because they operate on public property, the Dec. 21st victory removed what would have been another hurdle for mobile food vendors to win the right to vend on public streets.

These revised regulations aforementioned have opened the door to the street food industry allowing for the potential for food trucks to take off in the City of Atlanta.

CHAPTER 2:

METHODS

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research for this study was carried out between November 2012 and February 2013 in Atlanta, Georgia. The study includes interviews with eleven food truck vendors in the Atlanta area and five other individuals involved in the food truck movement through food truck event organization, academic research, law, and food writing. Data were collected by semi-structured interviews and participant observation at the various food truck gatherings throughout the Atlanta area. Emory University's Institutional Review Board (IRB 00052156) approved this study with exempt status.

JUSTIFICATION

In the United States it is widely cited that the 2007-2008 economic downfall initiated the modern food truck movement. Thus, the economic recession marks a serendipitous opportunity for entrepreneurship in a poor economy with highly receptive and progressive food culture. Fueled by economic, cultural, and social circumstances, the 21st century food truck movement ignited a new opportunity for both small business entrepreneurs and their eager customers. As an actual and virtual culture, food trucks expose a unique value for cultural capital, cultivated by advocates, vendors, and customers. Aside from Cutno et al.'s (2010) study on street food feasibility in Atlanta, the only other available information on food trucks in Atlanta that exists is through news articles, blog posts, and via word of mouth. Although research conducted by Cutno et al. is comprehensive, it focuses only on the potential (feasibility) for food trucks to exist

via policy and does not delve into the foundation of this economic-cultural movement nor does Cutno et al.'s research explore the movement through the vendor's perspective.

The gap in ethnographic research and the timeliness of this research, lends value to this exploration of cultural, social, and economic implications and effects that food trucks are having in cities like Atlanta, Georgia. In particular, it is interesting to explore this movement through the vendor's eyes as a way to better understand this mobile food movement and its specific nature in Atlanta. Therefore, as the food truck movement continues to grow across cities in the United States, it is important to understand the motivations, challenges, and ambitions that drive food truck vendors into this entrepreneurial opportunity.

SAMPLE

The sample was primarily comprised of eleven food truck vendors. Additional interviews were conducted with two academic researchers, a notable southern food writer, a local food truck park event organizer, and a lawyer involved in Atlanta vending legislation.

A total of eleven[12] Atlanta food truck vendors (approximately 30 percent of the trucks that operate on a regular basis in Atlanta) were opportunistically recruited based on their willingness to be interviewed and time availability. Of the vendors interviewed, one of them owned two food truck businesses, and thus a total of twelve food truck businesses were examined through these interviews. All vendors interviewed for the study were street food vendors who operated food trucks and sold prepared, ready-to-eat foods from their trucks throughout the Atlanta area. To recruit this portion of the research population, I made initial contact with the vendors either online, via email, or at one of the many food truck vending

[12] This number is considered a significant portion of the street food vending population that operates on a regular basis in Atlanta; the eleven-vendor sample size for this study is estimated to be about 30 percent of the total street food vendor population to date.

locations. I then explained my project and intention as a researcher and upon receiving oral consent I interviewed the vendors.

For the interviews with other five individuals involved in the movement, I contacted them via email after reading about them during my background research. These individuals included: Dr. Alfonso Morales, an Associate Professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Wisconsin–Madison; Mr. Mike Cutno, an urban planning consultant; Ms. Bettie Cagle, an Atlanta food truck event planner; Mr. John T. Edge, the Director of the Southern Foodways Alliance; and, Mr. Robert Frommer, an attorney with the Institute for Justice. All of the non-vendor interviewees were informed of my research intentions beforehand, and upon receiving oral consent, these research participants were interviewed. Moreover, all interviews for both vendors and non-vendors were conducted either in person or over the phone.

DATA COLLECTION

Participant Observation

I completed all Atlanta food truck vending visits between November 2012 and February 2013. I spent several weekends at the Atlanta Food Truck Park and Market, dinners at the Virginia-Highlands Food Truck Wednesdays and Home Grown restaurant on the weekends, and lunches on Wednesday at The Stove Works in Inman Park and Thursday at 12th and Peachtree. While there are several other parks in the Atlanta area and outside the perimeter, I chose to go to these locations because they were the most centrally located. While at these locations, I engaged with the vendors and their customers and observed the various interactions and happenings at the respective locations. In addition to physical observations, I also followed the food trucks various social media pages on Facebook and Twitter.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To provide me with a better understanding of the Atlanta food truck movement, I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with food truck vendors and other individuals involved in the movement. Interviews were either conducted in person, at a food truck vending location or a mutually convenient public location, or over the phone. Interviews with vendors and non-vendors lasted from thirty minutes to an hour. Vendor interviewees were asked questions about their motivations, challenges, observations of the movement, and future ambitions for their food truck business. Basic demographic questions were also asked of the vendors to gain a better understanding of the sample population.

In order to maintain confidentiality, all vendors are referred to with pseudonyms and their food truck businesses are referred to by the food they sell. Non-vendors gave me permission to quote them by name. Non-vendor interviewees were questioned on the nature of their work or involvement, understanding, and observations of the movement. Interviews with the vendors were not audio-recorded, although extensive interview notes were written during and at the end of each interview; most of the interviews with the non-vendors were recorded. The specific questions comprising the interviews for the vendors (Table 1) and non-vendors (Table 2) are listed below. These interview questions served only as a flexible framework, not a rigid interview procedure.

Table 1: Vendor Semi-Structure Interview Questions

- Basic demographic information: age, marital status, number of children, highest level of education received, etc.
- How long have you been vending/when did you start vending?
- Have you previously worked in the food industry? Is your food truck linked to a brick and mortar?
- What motivated you to start a food truck business? What other occupations have you had before or during?
- Do you consider your food truck a family business?

- What factors did/do you consider when selecting which food item(s) you sell?
- Where do you vend? Why do you choose to vend at these locations?
- Do you have regular customers? If so, what kinds of social groups/classes do they represent?
- What makes your vending unit and offerings different and/or the same as others? Do you feel any competition toward other vendors? How would you describe your relationship with other vendors?
- What are the biggest challenges you encounter as a food truck vendor?
- What do you think about Atlanta's street vending regulations? Do you think they could be improved, and if so, how?
- Are you satisfied with your occupation as a vendor? What do you see yourself doing in the future?
- How do you view the Atlanta Food Truck movement - is it cultural, economic, social, or some combination of those aspects? What observations do you have on the movement as a whole? Is it a growing movement, and if so, what are your thoughts on the longevity of the movement - both in the US and in Atlanta?

Table 2: Non-vendor Semi-Structured Interviews

- To what extent are you involved in the food truck movement?
- What are your observations of the food truck movement in the United States? Atlanta? How does Atlanta compare to the other cities you've researched? (Culture, community, vendors, policy, etc.)
- What do you think was the main cause for the rise in food trucks? What role do you think the 2008 economic recession played in the surge of food trucks in America?
- In what way do you think food trucks can benefit a city? Enhance culture? Build community?
- What themes did you begin to see in your interviews/research/interactions with food truck vendors?
- To what extent to you think policy propels or limits food truck vendors? Do you think policies affecting street food vendors are generally reactive or proactive? How do such policies shape ideas on urban public space use?
- Where do you see the food truck movement in America going? (Food truck movement's lifespan/direction)

DEFINITIONS

To clarify the terminology used in this paper, the following definitions are noted. "Street food" includes any prepared food ready-to-eat upon purchase on the street, outdoors, or in a publically accessible place; this study includes all foods sold from food trucks in Atlanta that were prepared to order on the truck and excludes any prepackaged foods. For this study, a "food

truck" refers to a large, motorized vehicle that has a kitchen, onboard power source, and a refrigeration unit (Cutno et al. 2010:18). All food trucks included in this study are considered "food service" businesses/vehicles. "Food service" refers to the "preparation of food for consumption *on* premises," such as cooking and preparing fish tacos or assembling an Indian curry rice bowl (Smith and Smith 2012:5); this excludes "food sales" businesses/vehicles that prepare their food *off* premises and sell the prepackaged food item, such as popsicles or cupcakes, on the truck. All food trucks in this research sold their food at "food truck parks" or food truck gathering areas. "Food truck parks" are private, permitted locations throughout the city; most often, "food truck parks" are empty parking lots.

CHAPTER 3:

FINDINGS

This section explores the findings from the interviews with eleven Atlanta food truck vendors and five non-vendors. Due to the small sample size and ethnographic nature of this research, the study's findings are presented qualitatively. The tables in this section display comparable findings with regard to the characteristics of the vendors interviewed (Table 3) and their respective food truck business (Table 4). These tables illustrate the vendor sample population and compare each vendor based on specific individual and business characteristics; Table 5 provides a summary of the findings presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Each of the eleven interviewed vendors shared aspects of their personal perspectives and background stories. To better explain the information provided in the tables, eleven short vignettes to briefly introduce each vendor. Each vignette varies depending on how open the vendor was to sharing their life story, business ambitions, and thoughts on the food truck movement in Atlanta. Furthermore, these vendor introductions aim to contextualize the research findings and provide a more complete understanding of the vendor's positionality within the Atlanta food truck movement. Following this, I briefly present the findings from my interviews with five other individuals (non-vendors) involved in the food truck movement.

THE VENDORS: A SUMMARY

Table 3: Vendor Characteristics

#	Vendor* (N=11)	Vendor (Interviewee) Information						
		Gender	Age	Married or single	Have children	Atlanta native***	Highest level of education	Previous work in food industry
1	James**	Male	N/A	Single	Yes, 2	No	MBA	No
2	Dan	Male	40	Married	No	Yes	Bachelors	No
3	Eddie	Male	44	Married	Yes, 2	No	BBA	Yes
4	Joe	Male	37	Single	No	Yes	Bachelors	Yes
5	Isabel	Female	31	Single	No	No	Masters	No
6	Anthony	Male	43	Single	No	Yes	High school	No
7	James**	Male	N/A	Single	Yes, 2	No	MBA	No
8	Jorge	Male	33	Married	Yes, 2	No	Bachelors	No
9	Keith	Male	21	Single	No	No	Associates	Yes
10	Kyle	Male	23	Single	No	Yes	Bachelors	Yes
11	Sam	Male	28	Single	No	Yes	Bachelors	Yes
12	Emily	Female	40	Married	Yes, 3	No	Bachelors; Culinary diploma	Yes

* Pseudonyms are used in place of actual names of all vendors in order to protect their identity.
** James owns two trucks in the metropolitan Atlanta area, Truck 1 and Truck 7.
*** A vendor's status as an "Atlanta native" was determined by his or her own perception; for example, several vendors said that they were *not* Atlanta natives, but that they have lived in the area for many years.

Table 3 provides several characteristics of the vendors interviewed in this study to date. The majority of the eleven vendors interviewed are male; only 18 percent of the vendors interviewed are female and 82 percent are male. It is also important to note that the majority of the vendors interviewed have business partners, both male and female. Vendors ranged in age from 21 to 44 years old, with an average age of 34. With regard to marital status, four (36 percent) of the vendors are married, whereas the other eight (64 percent) vendors are single. The majority (64 percent) of vendors interviewed do not have children.

Five out of the eleven (45 percent) vendors claim to be Atlanta natives. Although several of the vendors have lived in Atlanta for at least ten years, they still did not consider themselves

Atlanta natives. The majority of vendors are college-educated with a Bachelors degree or higher. Six out of the eleven (55 percent) food truck vendors interviewed have had previous experience in the food industry either through working at a restaurant and/or through more formal training, such as through culinary school or an Associates degree program in Hotel and Restaurant Management. It is important to note that the food truck number, vendor, and additional information correspond with the following information regarding "Food Truck Business Characteristics" presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Food Truck Business Characteristics

#	Vendor* (N=11)	Type of food sold	Date opened	Brick and mortar	Family business
1	James**	Salads, sandwiches, wraps	05-2011	No	No
2	Dan	Gourmet French fries	06-2011	No	No
3	Eddie	Puerto Rican food	07-2011	Yes '13	Yes
4	Joe	Southern (fusion) BBQ	08-2011	Yes '11	Yes
5	Isabel	Smoothies, sandwiches, soups	08-2011	No	No
6	Anthony	Fried chicken and waffles	11-2011	No	Yes
7	James**	Panini sandwiches	11-2011	No	No
8	Jorge	Cuban food	04-2012	No	Yes
9	Keith	Meatball sandwiches and sliders	04-2012	No	Yes
10	Kyle	Bubble tea	08-2012	No	No
11	Sam	Indian food	11-2012	No	Yes
12	Emily	French crepes, soups, salads	04-2013	No	Yes

* Pseudonyms are used in place of actual names of all vendors in order to protect their identity and business.
** James owns two trucks in the metropolitan Atlanta area, Truck 1 and Truck 7.

Table 4 displays the comparable characteristics of the food truck businesses interviewed for this study to date. Vendors and their respective food truck business(es) are listed in order of the date that they began operating in Atlanta. As presented in Table 4, the food trucks sold a variety of types of food, including salads, sandwiches, french fries, Puerto Rican food, BBQ, smoothies, chicken and waffles, Cuban food, bubble tea, Indian food, and French crepes. Of the

food truck vendors interviewed, the earliest opening date was in May 2011 (which claims it was the sixth truck on the streets of Atlanta) and the most recent is scheduled to open for business in April 2013. Only two (18 percent) of the vendors interviewed owned brick and mortar restaurants that are connected to their food truck, one of which is scheduled to open for business during the spring of 2013. Furthermore, seven out of the eleven (64 percent) food trucks interviewed were considered family businesses, most often meaning that the truck was run by family members, such as a set of siblings.

Table 5: Summarized Findings

Vendor (Interviewee) Characteristics*:							
Gender		Married/single		Atlanta native		College degree	
Male	Female	Married	Single	Yes	No	Yes	No
82%	18%	36%	64%	45%	55%	82%	18%
Food Truck Business Characteristics*:							
Industry experience		Brick and mortar		Family business			
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No		
55%	45%	18%	82%	64%	36%		

* For both vendor and business characteristics listed above, N = the number of vendors interviewed, 11.

Table 5 summarizes the results presented in Table 3 and 4 and reveals a more complete picture of the sample vending population in this study. The compiled findings reveal that the most common vendor profile is a single male (approximately 34 years-old) that does not consider himself an Atlanta native; has had some experience in the food industry; considers his food truck business a family business; and does not own a brick and mortar restaurant. That being said, whether or not a vendor is an Atlanta native or has previous experience in the food industry was relatively evenly distributed across the sample population, 45 and 55 percent, respectively.

INTRODUCING THE VENDORS

James: Truck 1 and Truck 7

"[Food trucks have] worked in Austin for years and years, so I thought, you know what? Let's bring food trucks to Atlanta!"

Following a long career in the high tech industry, selling technology and large enterprise software systems, James took a year sabbatical to volunteer with Habitat for Humanity. During this time, James discovered his entrepreneurial calling. James then quit his job in high tech and started a document destruction business in Atlanta from scratch that soon became widely successful. After five years, James sold the business and moved to Austin, Texas for another job in high tech. While in Austin, James ate regularly from food trucks. Shortly after reentering high tech, James decided that it was time for another radical career change. After convincing his business partner that the food truck industry should be their next move, James started to make plans to open a food truck in Atlanta, Georgia. In May 2011, James launched his first food truck, specializing in healthy salads, sandwiches, and wraps, and six months later he launched his second food truck, featuring Panini sandwiches.

Due to the challenging, somewhat onerous permitting processes in Atlanta, James thought he could help other vendors gain access to commercial kitchen space[13] by converting the building that once housed his document shredding business into a commissary kitchen, following a smaller-scale model of the commissaries in Los Angeles, California. Since all food trucks in Atlanta are required to have access to commercial kitchen space, James, being the businessman that he is, thought it would be a great source of income and way to promote the food truck movement by renting commercial kitchen and storage space to other vendors in Atlanta. James

[13] In Atlanta, all food truck vendors are required to have access to a commercial kitchen; these kitchens must also be approved and permitted by the health department. In my interviews, I found that many of the vendors expressed grief and frustration in securing commercial kitchen space.

now leases commercial kitchen space to nine other food trucks in the metropolitan area. He hopes that his commissary kitchen can serve as a model for other kitchens to come or even for a city of Atlanta-supported and -monitored space.

Dan: Truck 2

Recalling a famous spot in New York City that sells French fries and the many gourmet fry shops in Amsterdam, Dan thought it would be a great idea to open a French fries food cart in Atlanta. After doing some research, Dan combined his concept with his business partner, who is a local chef, and together they bought a food truck. During the 2011 summer, they launched their food truck. Dan said that he does the majority of the day-to-day and business aspects of the truck, whereas his business partner contributes recipes and oversees the culinary aspects of the truck. In addition to owning a food truck, Dan owns several small businesses in the area. Dan views his food truck as another business venture rather than committing himself fully to the truck; he claims, "My truck was done with as little investment as possible, knowing it was not going to be full-time."

Nonetheless, Dan's fries are wildly popular and he has many regular customers and followers on Twitter. He explained that during the winter time it is difficult to make ends meet, but that the warmer months are great for business; in fact, Dan is already putting up a lot of money to register for upcoming events and festivals. In considering the movement as a whole, Dan thinks that food trucks are great for neighborhoods because they bring people together and provides people with a new, creative, and social activity. Even though food trucks are exciting for the city of Atlanta, Dan explained that there is still "a lot of confusion and a lot of back and forth" with the various county and state departments that a vendor must go through to get permitted. "I think we are legal, but it is such a new concept," reflects Dan. He hopes that over

time Atlanta will find a better way to streamline the permitting process; for example, he suggests that the city should create a separate department to handle street food.

Eddie: Truck 3

Growing up in Puerto Rico, Eddie worked on his aunt's food truck. Eddie was instantly attracted to the whole operation: taking orders, interacting with customers, the great atmosphere, and the delicious, fresh food. Intrigued by his aunt's entrepreneurship, Eddie always thought that one day he would like to run his own food truck. After noticing that there was a complete lack of Puerto Rican food options in Atlanta, Eddie started a Puerto Rican catering business in 2007. In doing so, Eddie realized that many of people are under the misconception that all Spanish food is the same, and so he hopes that little by little he can change that. Several years later, Eddie left his full-time job in IT to dedicate himself to his goal of opening a food truck. After much research on the food truck movement, Eddie launched his food truck in July 2011. His business took off quickly and Eddie is now a full-time food truck owner.

Now that he has been vending for over a year, Eddie has a good sense of the Atlanta food truck movement. He reflects that, in general, the food truck movement is due to both cultural and economic factors because "what is the use of a cultural movement if it does not promote the economy?" He explained that the industry is very cut throat and that each vendor must bring innovative, high quality food to be successful in the food truck and street food industry. "Everybody is out there to make a statement with [his or her] truck," he explained, and serving high quality, unique food will definitely help a rising vendor succeed. Eddie is currently working on opening up a brick and mortar Puerto Rican restaurant.

Joe: Truck 4

"The food truck movement is a nationwide phenomenon."

Joe grew up in the restaurant industry; his parents owned several Chinese restaurants throughout Atlanta. Joe graduated with a Bachelors degree in International Business right after the 9/11 attack and explains that it was very difficult to find a job in his intended industry. Using his newfound knowledge of business and previous experience in the restaurant industry, Joe opened a burrito shop with his sister and managed a pizza shop with another friend. While these businesses were successful, Joe was always interested in opening a barbeque (BBQ) business. Joe's business partner at the pizza shop was also interested in opening a BBQ business and so he bought a smoker to make BBQ out of his previously established pizza trailer at a local market in Atlanta. In the first afternoon vending, the BBQ sales were so much better than in Joe's restaurants that he decided to open a BBQ brick and mortar shop.

Following this, Joe began talking to other food truck vendors in Atlanta and decided to lease out space at a nearby parking lot for food trucks to vend, creating a permanent food truck gathering location in Atlanta. Joe charges trucks a daily, weekly, or monthly fee to set up shop. In addition to managing a brick and mortar BBQ shop and a food truck park, Joe owns three BBQ food trucks, one of which he leaves permanently at the food truck park and the other two which rotate around Atlanta. Joe hopes to slowly phase out of the mobile food business and focus more on catering and expanding his BBQ concept to other permanent locations.

Isabel: Truck 5

Motivated by money, the prospect of being self-employed, and entering a budding industry in Atlanta, Isabel and her business partner were very eager to open up a food truck. With a background in accounting, and her business partner's background as a bankruptcy

processor and personal trainer, they thought it would be a great idea to open up a truck that promotes healthy eating and exercise. Together they started a healthy sandwich, soups, and smoothie truck in August 2011. By marketing their truck for its promotion of healthy foods, Isabel thought that their idea would be new and unique within Atlanta's food truck market. Although they focus their food truck marketing efforts on healthy lifestyles, Isabel still senses competition from other food trucks because "people still love unhealthy food"; even so, they do get along well with the other vendors.

With regard to Atlanta's street vending regulations, Isabel noted that the regulations are not easy to adhere to and that they limit her business' potential to sell across the metropolitan area. She believes that with time the regulations and permitting processes will improve. As for the food truck movement in Atlanta, Isabel highlighted that it is a new way to experience food by creating the opportunity for others to try different foods.

Anthony: Truck 6

"There are a lot of foodies out there, but they [just] don't know they are foodies yet."

After twenty-five years in the clothing industry, Anthony lost his job and six-figure salary. This all happened "right around when the food truck movement was coming East," and so Anthony started asking himself, "What can I do to pay my bills?" With the recession, explained Anthony, people had to start thinking outside the box. Anthony soon developed the concept of opening a fried chicken and waffle truck. Before purchasing a truck, Anthony toured around and gathered ideas in Portland, Los Angeles, and Austin. Knowing that "it was a big gamble to invest all I had into an idea," Anthony explained that "sometimes you just have to take a chance," and so he took the plunge and bought a truck for $7,000 in Houston, Texas. He then drove the truck to Florida to refurbish it and get pictures of himself with his grandmother, who is

both the inspiration and brain behind his recipes. By November 2011, Anthony had fixed up his truck and returned to Atlanta to start vending.

After a great first year, Anthony has started to look for other vending outlets and locations in Atlanta because he fears that the current food truck vending areas are starting to become too saturated. Nevertheless, he remarked, "I truly believe that no one can do what we're doing." As for the future, Anthony explained, "my vision is huge." He has so much energy and passion for his business, and he sees no failure. He hopes to franchise his business to South Carolina, Long Island, Miami, Memphis, and more cities, and his goal is to have 200 trucks in the next five years. He's also in the process of pitching his fry batter to chain restaurants to use or sell in their stores. Anthony explained, "You gotta be a go-getter" to succeed in this business. His next step is to open up a permanent truck at the main food truck park location in Atlanta.

Jorge: Truck 8

Originally from Colombia, Jorge lived in Miami before settling down in Atlanta. In Miami, Jorge first experienced Cuban food – little did he know the many Cuban sandwiches he ate in Miami would lead to the concept behind his food truck. After doing research on the Internet, Jorge decided to open the first and only Cuban food truck with his sister in Atlanta in December 2011. Given the seasonal nature of food trucks, Jorge works at his insurance agency during the winter in addition to managing and working on his food truck. He explained that owning a "[food truck] has its ups and downs" and that when they work at big events, they bring in a lot of money.

Jorge notices that his customer base is very diverse and that they are mostly working class people that come to eat during his lunch shift. As for the other food trucks, Jorge does not think there is much competition unless there are too many trucks at a vending location.

Moreover, all the other food truck owners seem to get along and there is also a wide variety of food offered. Although Jorge is grateful for the support of the Atlanta Street Food Coalition, he believes that the vending regulations in Atlanta are hard on his business because of the requirement to have an approved and permitted commissary kitchen as well as the complicated permitting processes. That being said, Jorge knows that it is good for the trucks to be regulated. Meanwhile, Jorge strives to grow his business and he eventually hopes to own his own deli restaurant.

Keith: Truck 9

"If we do not work together, we won't be successful."

Keith's mother's side of the family is full-blooded Italian and his great-grandmother's meatball recipe is legendary. After seeing an increase in Atlanta's food trucks and with a delicious recipe in hand, Keith and his brother took one year to plan and prepare to open a meatball sandwich and sliders truck; they opened their truck last spring in April 2012. This timing was ideal, Keith explained given the seasonality of food trucks. To reach out to and communicate with his customers, Keith uses Twitter and Facebook.

Keith did not seem to sense much competition among the food truck vendors, explaining, "[the vendors] all try to work together [because] we all know if we do not work together we won't be successful." Despite this, Keith expressed excitement at the events[14] he gets to vend at and the ability that food trucks have to get families to come out and socialize. Food trucks offer a different atmosphere than a restaurant; at a restaurant, people just want to be served and then they leave, but at a food truck event, people socialize and meet new people. Additionally, Keith explained that his customer base is often very diverse, especially in places like Underground Atlanta, which can be considered a less-safe part of town, but at lunch it is different because all

[14] Such food truck events include lunch and dinner gatherings around the city, festivals, private events, and more.

kinds of people come out together and it is a very positive experience. Currently, Keith and his brother are working on getting a permanent, fixed trailer and are in the process of coming up with a new concept for a second food truck. In the future he hopes to have three or four types of trucks in the Atlanta area and maybe even expand to Athens, Georgia or Charleston, South Carolina.

Kyle: Truck 10

Kyle and his business partner are the youngest duo working in the Atlanta food truck scene. They previously worked at the same restaurant together in downtown Atlanta and later decided to open a bubble tea boutique-like shop together. Realizing how expensive that would be, Kyle and his business partner realized that a "food truck was so much more practical." Kyle opened up his bubble tea food truck in August 2012. Although Kyle is invested in his food truck, he views his food truck as more of a business for him than a creative outlet. He is an illustrator and costume designer by training and his food truck is a great way to make some money and explore a different industry.

Despite the difficult permitting process and obstructionist regulations in starting up his business, Kyle explains that all the initial adversity brings you closer to vending and being part of the leading edge of something new. Regardless, Kyle hopes that the government will work harder to promote vendors and better streamline the permitting process. Six months after rolling out his food truck, Kyle is starting to gather a solid set of regular customers from all over the Atlanta area. Additionally, he explained that there is little sense of competition amongst the other vendors. In reflecting on the food truck movement in Atlanta, Kyle believes food truck gatherings and events help build community. He explained that it is refreshing to see people outside and acting in a "more real" way, in a sense the food truck parks and gatherings foster a

"great micro-culture." Moreover, "[he's] never seen anything like this [food truck park] before, it is like having mini-festivals everyday."

Sam: Truck 11

"If you're at a storefront then customers have to come specifically to you, but the food truck park gives them a chance to discover you."

Sam began his journey in the food industry in 2000 after graduating from culinary and hospitality school. He worked his way through Atlanta's top hotels for ten years before conceptualizing and planning his Indian street food truck, which was recently opened in November 2012. Sam is enthusiastic and passionate about his business and thrilled to share his food with new customers, especially when the Atlanta community is so eager to embrace these new "mom and pop" businesses, he explained.

In addition, Sam said that the quality of life is different, if not better, as a food truck vendor, and that he is working to achieve a good balance between the truck and his personal life; he explained that there is much more flexibility and appeal to running his own business than working at a brick and mortar restaurant. On a national level, Sam explained that most vendors are in the same boat: they are all small business entrepreneurs, with a unique concept and a strong desire to grow their brand. While Sam is excited to be a part of the food truck movement, he off-handedly remarked, "to be honest, I would have started five years ago if the city embraced [food trucks]." Recognizing the importance of regulations, Sam expressed an interest in seeing Atlanta adopt more standardized procedures for food trucks, but he said that this take time and as Atlanta continues to discover the benefits of having food trucks roaming the city.

Emily: Truck 12

"I haven't started yet, but hopefully I will start vending in the first week of April 2013," exclaimed Emily. Emily attended culinary school in Paris, France and has worked in fine dining

across the country; she even used to own her own French restaurant. When she moved to Atlanta three years ago, she was not initially interested in starting a food truck because of the stringent laws. She also noticed that a lot of the initial vendors (several of which are no longer around) that were interested in starting a food truck were "backyard folk" without much experience in the food industry who wanted to take short cuts; this made her hesitant to enter the food truck market in Atlanta, but over time she has observed an increase in understanding and caliber among Atlanta's vendors. In the meantime, Emily did several events at The Atlanta Underground Market[15] to test out her recipes and get to know other chefs in the area.

After doing a lot of research and reading up on the food truck movement, Emily decided she wanted to open up a French food truck so that she could sell "good food that is interesting at an affordable price." Emily was incredibly enthusiastic about the food truck culture, explaining that "food is an amazing common denominator" that enables people from all walks of life come together. In addition to the culture brought on by the movement, Emily touched on the economic benefits, recognizing that starting a food truck business will cost her[16] much less than starting up a restaurant. In her past experience, it cost her upwards of $225,000 to start up her last restaurant (this does not include maintenance costs or the costs of goods), whereas a starting up food truck will only cost her around $75,000. Despite the benefits of starting a food truck over a restaurant, Emily explained that the permitting process in Atlanta "seems like an endurance race." In time, she hopes that the city will better educate its office workers about the policies affecting vendors because as of now there seems to be a lot of internal confusion. She also believes that the city should consider opening a mobile street food vending department to handle mobile food

[15] The Atlanta Underground Market is a monthly, members-only venue for chefs, local cooks, caterers, and food entrepreneurs around Atlanta to share their food and talent. Membership is free and the events are held in throughout the Atlanta area at different, secret locations that are revealed the day before the event.

[16] It is important to note that Emily is in a unique position because she just needs to breakeven; her husband works full-time as a physician, so her food truck will not be her family's main source of income.

businesses so that oversight can be better streamlined as well as opening up more public spaces to vend around the city. Regardless, Emily is very excited to start her business.

THE NON-VENDOR PERSPECTIVES

To further contextualize my findings from the interviews with eleven Atlanta food truck vendors and owners, five other individuals involved in the Atlanta food truck movement were also interviewed. These individuals included: Dr. Alfonso Morales, an Associate Professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Wisconsin–Madison who has written extensively about street vendors and marketplaces in the United States; Mr. Mike Cutno, an urban planner and the project leader for the *Atlanta Street Food Feasibility Study*; Ms. Bettie Cagle, an Atlanta food truck event planner and organizer with Redbird Events; Mr. John T. Edge, the director of the Southern Foodways Alliance and author of *The Food Truck Cookbook*; and, Mr. Robert Frommer, an attorney with the Institute for Justice, member of the Institute's National Street Vending Initiative, and lead counsel in the *Miller v. City of Atlanta* lawsuit[17]. These individuals were asked about the nature of their work, and their involvement, understanding, and observations of the movement[18]. In general, the findings gathered from the non-vendor interviews lend credence to the findings from interviews with the Atlanta food truck vendors.

Understanding the Food Truck Movement

Non-vendors were asked about their observations and understandings of the food truck movement in the United States, specifically what influenced the rise in food trucks and what

[17] The *Miller v. City of Atlanta* lawsuit, filed in July 2011, "argues that Atlanta lacks the power to grant an exclusive vending franchise and that its actions violate the Georgia constitution" (Institute for Justice 2013). In December 2012, the Fulton County Superior Court ruled in favor of the vendors and struck down the program that was negatively impacting street vendors and monopolizing public space availability in the city.
[18] Refer to Chapter 2, Table 2 for the non-vendor semi-structured interview questions.

impact food trucks have on today's urban economies. Mr. Robert Frommer, a lawyer involved in Atlanta street vending legislation, explained that the growth in the food truck movement is due to primarily two factors:

> One [factor] is the recession; I think a lot of people ended up out of work. […] There are a lot of stories […] that I've seen around the country where people have to reinvent themselves. The other [factor] I would say is the rise in social media, particularly Twitter, which has allowed the trucks to be on the move yet still connect with their customers. […] It's technology on the one end making it easier for trucks to directly connect, and on the other side are the economic factors, which sort of gave the impetuous for people to start up these new businesses.

Moreover, according to southern food writer Mr. John T. Edge, there are different tiers of street food and food truck markets throughout cities in the United States. He explained,

> I think there are first tier cities, second tier cities, third tier cities, and now we're seeing the fourth tier cities coming along […] Atlanta was a third tier city. Each one of those cities will go through their gourmet moment when everybody's trying to do like foie gras and bonbons on a cart, and I think eventually all those foie gras and bonbon-types are going to burn out, they're going to be out of business and irrelevant in a few years. […] What will survive, I think, will be people trying to cook good food that has integrity, substance, and that isn't about chef-ly posturing, but about feeding good food to people.

In addition to examining the evolving street food markets in cities across the United States, urban planner Mr. Mike Cutno reflected on the potential benefits that food trucks have for cities. Cutno explained that food trucks have the ability to revolutionize "dead space," or empty public spaces, in cities. Through his research, Cutno found that food trucks link technology and urban space, allowing "public spaces [to] come alive when vendors occupy [them]." Likewise, Cutno stated that food truck gatherings "are not just about food, but about being around other people"; they create a different, more festive atmosphere than restaurants. Accordingly, Ms. Bettie Cagle, a food truck event planner, expressed the idea that "food trucks create the ability to have dinner with your neighbors." Moreover, Cagle explained, "Food trucks provide an opportunity to rebuild our economy, rebuild our country's jobs." Several non-vendors, including

Dr. Alfonso Morales from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, noted that food trucks require a much lower start-up cost than brick and mortar restaurants and are therefore more appealing to budding entrepreneurs interested in entering the food industry. In addition to promoting social media platforms, new public gatherings, and innovative outlets for entrepreneurship, Dr. Morales explained that,

> There's also a [new] system of ideas behind the hit crowd – the people that embrace food trucks – that you can see that through tweeting, GPS locations, and all the ways that food trucks vendors are connecting with their fans.

Consequently, these new outlets for communication and socialization are effectively creating new webs of connections that have no prior precedent.

Evolving Street Food Vending Regulations

Not only did the non-vendors observe similar trends, such as social media, in the United States food truck movement, but they also expressed concern over the varied and inconsistent vending regulations for food trucks across cities in the United States. When asked about the policies affecting vendors, non-vendors tended to reflect that while much public attention is placed on the foodie culture and uniqueness of mobile vending, the regulations and policies affecting vendors deserve equal investigation. Vending regulations vary significantly among cities, explained Dr. Morales:

> Some cities ignore [street food vendors] completely, and then they get a lot of complaints and then they have to address it [reactively], that's like Los Angeles. Some cities are very proactive; they see it as an opportunity and they take advantage of it, that's like Madison, Wisconsin. Some cities, say well we want to have this, but we want to restrict it pretty carefully, so they want to restrict it on location or health regulation, so that's like New York. And some cities are pretty open about regulations, but they want to restrict what the vending looks like, in other words what their carts look like, and that's like Portland.

Consequently, the policies and regulations that affect vendors can greatly alter how a vending culture takes into effect. Edge places a more culturally and socially fueled explanation to differences in city regulations and policies toward street food vending.

> [Street food vending] in cities like Austin and Portland developed outside the glare of city regulations, they weren't a threat because it built slowly; they weren't a threat because there wasn't a lot of publicity applied; they weren't a threat because, in Austin, at first it wasn't 20-something hipsters doing it, it was Mexican-American taco trucks that the proprietors of which and the customers for which lived on the other side of town, lived across the tracks, lived out of sight and out of mind. So even though we've analyzed what's goes on in Portland and Austin, one of the reasons those scenes were able to develop and become so vital is because nobody was paying attention to it at all.

Edge continues to further contextualize his observations from Austin and Portland by examining the reality facing Atlanta's street food vending culture.

> In Atlanta, you've got the city involved and everybody's falling all over themselves trying to figure out how to [handle food trucks], everybody's fighting about something, [street food vending] is such a big business now, because entrepreneurs make money, because the press is paying attention to it, because people like me are writing books about it. […] It's no longer this food truck led thing, it's a force of the food world and that makes things more difficult.

Food Truck Vending in Atlanta

When asked about Atlanta's street food vending environment, non-vendors were quick to place Atlanta within its social, cultural, economic, and political framework. Providing an interesting historical viewpoint, Edge explained,

> When I began thinking about the south and southern cities [versus] how street food is practiced in the Pacific Northwest or in a city like Austin, the southern version of that was someone cooking a whole hog and selling it on the side of the road or tamale vendors that roamed the streets of the south in previous generations. All the roots are there, but I think because the south was so intolerant of black entrepreneurship and because those cities were unwelcoming of new immigrants, which were traditionally the drivers of street food in America, that there wasn't much street food.

According to Edge, the reason why Atlanta is slower to pick up on the food truck movement is because of its history as a city that is both resistant to change and socially divided.

Cagle, on the other hand, takes a narrower look at Atlanta's vending culture, reflecting on the political and regulatory environment in recent years. She expressed frustration with the fact that "everybody interprets the food truck ordinance in their own way," which in turn makes Atlanta look behind or slower in comparison to other cities. In addition, Frommer examined the political and regulatory aspects of the movement. He informed me of the previous monopoly that General Growth Properties had over public space and the potential positive effect that the win with the *Miller v. City of Atlanta* case will have on Atlanta's food trucks. Since,

> The city did not appeal the decision [that removed General Growth Properties' governance over public space], so the monopoly program that was set up back in 2009 is gone now, which should hopefully give the trucks an opening to be able to say 'why don't you start letting us operate on public property, you know, out on the streets'.

Frommer continued to explain that the food truck scene in Atlanta appears to be growing and that "the laws in Atlanta that the food trucks have to live with are still probably holding the industry back; particularly the fact that they can't sell on public property." He explained that in Los Angeles, California,

> The county checks your truck to make sure all your equipment is up to code, they do periodic, unannounced inspections where they come out and they check to make sure you're operating in a safe and sanitary manner, and that's really it, that's all L.A. does. As a result, L.A. has a huge food truck scene, it's probably the biggest one in the country, and that benefits thousands of people everyday. They end up getting meals that they otherwise wouldn't be able to get.

According to Frommer, food trucks have several economic benefits, including the creation of jobs and provision of food to large populations, and social benefits by revitalizing rundown areas. In Washington, D.C., Frommer highlighted that "we've seen that the food trucks can revitalize areas that have been neglected and are rundown and they can bring a new life to them." He furthered emphasized his point by stating, "I think Atlanta could learn some lessons and expand its market, it could start getting some of those benefits."

CHAPTER 4:

DISCUSSION

KEY FINDINGS

This research examines the perspectives of eleven Atlanta food truck vendors and five non-vendors involved with the food truck movement in Atlanta and/or the United States. From these interviews, several overarching themes were discovered. The key findings are summarized below as a preface to the following discussion:

1. **Motivations**: Vendors were motivated to enter the food truck industry for a variety of reasons. The most common motivations to enter the food truck business discussed by vendors included: the entrepreneurial or self-employment appeal, lower cost business venture, improved quality of life, and the chance to take part in a nationwide movement.

2. **Challenges**: Vendors expressed several challenges to opening and running a food truck business in Atlanta, including: permits and regulations, securing commissary kitchen space, and the seasonality of the street food vending business. Despite struggles with the permitting processes and the other challenges aforementioned, vendors were optimistic about the future prosperity of food trucks in Atlanta.

3. **Future Ambitions and Prospects**: For the most part vendors were interested in staying in the food truck business and expanding their vending efforts. Several vendors viewed their food truck as the building blocks to brick and mortar restaurant, providing them easier entrance into food industry. Other vendors were more interested in opening up more food trucks, focusing their efforts on catering, and/or establishing a fixed truck at a permanent location.

4. **Observations of the Atlanta Food Truck Movement**: According to vendors and non-vendors, food trucks benefit the city of Atlanta and other cities across the United States by generating and developing the local economy; providing the potential to create jobs and offer a sustainable avenue for small business growth; revitalizing neighborhoods and enhancing 'dead' space; bringing people together to socialize and interact; and providing an outlet for cultural diversification, learning, and exposure. In doing so, food trucks allow for cultural and community building by gathering people together physically at food truck parks and festivals and virtually through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.

MOTIVATIONS

The food truck vendors interviewed for this research exhibit a mixture of similar and distinctive motivations and aspirations for their businesses. Vendors mostly agree that the economic environment and 2007-2008 recession ignited their pursuit of small businesses and alternative methods to paying their bills. According to Anthony, the proprietor of the fried chicken and waffles truck, with the recession, people had to start thinking outside the box. Resonating this idea, Atlanta food truck event planner Ms. Bettie Cagle remarked that the food truck industry "provides [the] opportunity to rebuild our economy [and] our country's jobs." Food trucks offer an opportunity for self-sufficiency and a chance to forge a pragmatic business that helps enrich communities while sharing high-quality food with the public (Frommer et al. 2011; Rao 2011).

Accompanying economic-driven motivations, vendors discussed several benefits to opening a food truck rather than a brick and mortar restaurant, including: self-employment or entrepreneurial appeal, lower cost, improved quality of life, and taking part in a nationwide movement. While these motives were common for many vendors interviewed, there is still space for variation and individualized rationale for starting a food truck business. This notion is also supported by journalist Heather Shouse's (2011) research on food trucks in the United States, which found that the food truck movement attracts a wide variety of individuals with similar, yet individualized, motivations. As consistent with the findings in this study, a combination of economic and cultural factors motivates vendors to start up a food truck business (Robbins 2010). The following subsections examine the vendor's motivations in greater detail.

Entrepreneurial Appeal

Only a slight majority, six out of eleven (55 percent) vendors interviewed had previous experience in the food industry. Food industry experience ranged from formal training at culinary (Emily) and/or hospitality school (Keith and Sam) to working in a restaurant and/or catering business (Emily, Kyle, Joe, Eddie, and Sam). In addition, several vendors (James, Joe, Eddie, Jorge, and Dan) have a business background, either through education or experience. For example, James and Dan have started up several other successful small businesses in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Moreover, vendors were attracted to owning a food truck because it would allow them to be their own boss.

While food trucks provide a strong entrepreneurial appeal, not all vendors were in it for the long run. Kyle and Dan viewed their food truck as more of a limited business venture, only committing some of their assets with the hope that in the future someone might want to purchase their business. On the other hand, many vendors committed all of their savings to their food truck business venture; in particular, Anthony and Sam were adamant that they were in the food truck industry for the long run. Anthony explained, "it was big gamble to invest all I had into an idea, but sometimes you just have to take a chance." To further emphasize his dedication to the food truck movement and his business, Sam claimed that, "this is it, this is my everything."

Additionally, James and Joe turned their interest in the food truck movement into its own business. James currently owns, maintains, and rents his commissary kitchen space out to other food truck vendors in the metropolitan Atlanta area. He prides himself on helping the Atlanta movement continue to progress and creating more jobs. In his interview, James explained,

> Think about all the jobs we've created. First of all, we built a $250,000 kitchen, [which required] plumbers, electricians, drywall, and expensive equipment. […] We've [also gotten] a whole bunch of entrepreneurs off the ground and they're hiring one or two people each. So it's great, [especially] when you talk about job creation!

Similar to James' commercial kitchen, Joe owns and leases vending space at the main food truck park in Atlanta. Joe explained that by providing consistent vending space to local food trucks, he is helping propel the Atlanta movement and keep vendors afloat. Together, James and Joe have creatively taken the food truck movement in Atlanta into their own hands; James hopes that his commissary kitchen space and Joe, his food truck park, will serve as a model for the city of Atlanta as street food vending policies and levels of support continue to evolve.

Complementing the assorted avenues vendors take to explore their entrepreneurial interests, many vendors claimed that one aspect to their personal business success and the success of the food truck movement as a whole is the fact that they are family-driven businesses, which gives them a "mom and pop" appeal. Seven of the eleven (64 percent) vendors consider their business a family venture, whether it be through family involvement and support, family history in the food industry and restaurant business, or a family-run business venture. For example, Keith and Anthony emphasized that the concept behind their food truck was strongly driven by their grandmother's family recipes. Eddie, Joe, Jorge, Keith, Anthony, Sam, and Emily all reflected on the importance of family involvement and support in their food truck business ventures in my conversations with them. "The trucks that work are family owned," remarked Anthony. "It's the mom and pop," explained Sam, it is about putting a level of passion into a product that the community wants to embrace and "the [Atlanta] community embraces the mom and pop businesses."

Lower Cost Business Venture

Almost all the research reviewed emphasized that food truck businesses have a heightened appeal to brick and mortar restaurants in today's economy because of their lower cost (Shouse 2011; Ruggieri 2012; Frommer et al. 2011; Weber 2012). Likewise, according to Dr.

Alfonso Morales from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, food trucks are popular among potential entrepreneurs in the food industry because of their low start-up costs. Jorge explained that a truck is not nearly as expensive as opening and maintaining a brick and mortar restaurant. Kyle said that given his financial capital, he would not have been able to open a brick and mortar, but because of a food truck's significant lower cost, he was able to do that instead. Recalling her past experience, Emily said that it costs at least $225,000 just to start up a restaurant, whereas her food truck is costing her around $75,000. Regardless, there are variations in how vendors choose to invest in their trucks. Some vendors, like Anthony, bought a relatively cheap truck and refurbished it, while others, including Sam and Isabel, bought top-of-the-line food trucks. Nonetheless, the start-up costs found in this study are similar to those found in other research (Shouse 2011; Ruggieri 2012; Smith and Smith 2012; Weber 2012).

Joe maintains a different perspective as someone who has spent the majority of his career working and running brick and mortar restaurants; he does not think that food trucks are economically better. With this statement, however, Joe was taking into account the costs of purchasing and maintaining a commercial kitchen; most vendors, on the other hand, seek kitchen space that they can share with other vendors or businesses. Nevertheless, Sam, with ten years in the brick and mortar restaurant industry, has no interest in returning to it, and neither does Emily, who started and owned her own restaurants in the past. In this sense, food trucks allow vendors to be more flexible and have a greater sense of ownership and choice.

Quality of Life

Although one's sense of "quality of life" is relative to their own perspective and experiences, many vendors spoke about their high "quality of life" as a food truck vendor. Most vendors entered the food truck business with the objective of trying something new and

meaningful, often leaving their previous professions with a sense of dissatisfaction, whether their past employment was in the food industry or another industry. In addition, several vendors complained that in their previous jobs they had to work longer hours and were not able to channel their own creativity in their profession.

Food trucks, on the other hand, provide vendors with a creative outlet to express their individual culinary ideas and direct their business ambitions. Many vendors interviewed in this study prided themselves on the business independence and flexibility involved in owning a food truck business, stating that it has in turn provided them with an enhanced quality of life. The general consensus among the vendors interviewed was that owning a food truck is an enjoyable and fulfilling business venture, providing for: more flexible and self-governed work hours, increased ability to find a happy balance between life and work, and a different and possibly more welcoming sense of community and camaraderie in their work environment.

Cultural and Social Enhancement

Many vendors mentioned that one of the most appealing aspects of the starting a food truck was the opportunity to be part of such a unique, nationwide cultural and social movement. The modern-day food truck movement is fueled by diverse, gourmet food and social media outlets, and thus provides the platform for a novel virtual and physical community (Caldwell 2012; Wessel 2012; McLaughlin 2010). Vendors in this study discussed several socio-cultural benefits to opening a food truck, including food diversification and exposure as well as taking part in building community through social media and food truck events. According to a lawyer involved in Atlanta street vending legislation, Mr. Robert Frommer, the food truck movement is due to primarily two factors: "the recession […and] the rise in social media". These benefits represent characteristics of the food truck movement and reveal that the increase in food trucks

in the United States is more than just a spike in small businesses as a result of the 2007-2008 recession. Rather, the food truck movement also encompasses a unique, internally driven socio-cultural reality that has effectively enhanced and transformed foodways and the ways in which people come together with street food across the United States.

Taking this all into account, there are three primary socio-cultural enhancements that arose in the interviews with the vendors and non-vendors for this research. Firstly, several vendors discussed their interest in educating people about their food and sharing their food's culture with their customers. Eddie, the owner of a Puerto Rican food truck, hopes to change the "misconception that all Spanish food is the same" through educating customers and exposing people to his food. Jorge has similar aspirations with his Cuban food truck as does Sam with his Indian street food truck and Emily with her French-cuisine inspired truck. Secondly, vendors talked about their use of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to reach out to their customers and build their network. Every vendor interviewed for this research said that they take advantage of these social media platforms to increase awareness and share their location and specials with their followers, or customers. Thirdly, vendors discussed the importance of having consistent food truck parks or gatherings and the manner by which these parks bring people together. Kyle remarked that the food truck park is "like [having] mini-festivals everyday." "The food truck parks," explained Sam, "gives [customers] a chance to discover you." Furthermore, Ms. Bettie Cagle, a local food truck event planner, observed that food truck parks and gatherings bring together "such a diverse group, including small families, young and old people, etc." and provide the space to congregate and build community.

CHALLENGES

When asked about the challenges of food truck vending in Atlanta, the most common response was the difficult, and often frustrating, permitting process to become a legal mobile street food vendor. Subsequently, vendors were also asked if they had any ideas or suggestions for improving the regulatory and permitting process in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Along with the permitting process, vendors discussed difficulty finding commissary kitchen space. In addition to the confusing permitting process, vendors discussed their struggles with the seasonality of the business. It is important to note that for the most part, vendors agreed that there was little sense of competition among the other Atlanta food trucks; however, there was concern voiced by some vendors about future saturation of the Atlanta food truck market. The concern in market saturation was also acknowledged by all of the non-vendors interviewed. The following subsections examine the main challenges discussed by the Atlanta food truck vendors.

Mobile Food Vending Policies, Permits, and Regulations

All vendors interviewed for this research agreed that their biggest challenge in opening and maintaining a food truck in the metropolitan Atlanta area is the permitting and regulatory hoops they must go through in order to get their business started. In addition, some vendors like Eddie agreed that such regulatory processes were pretty standard, such as "things you'd expect if you've done your research," he commented. Likewise, James explained, "I think the state of Georgia is doing the right thing, they're taking it slow and trying to figure it out," and that "the city of Atlanta is starting to loosen up." With a mixture of pros and cons, Joe remarked that while "Atlanta doesn't make it easy for the food trucks, [they] are still coming out with new legislation and policies," and that with time, food truck's popularity will eventually force the city

to open public property to vendors. Other vendors, however, expressed that the policies and the manner by which the policies are enforced makes the process rather frustrating and difficult.

Kyle believes that the government should be working harder to promote vendors, especially when people are so enthusiastic about food trucks. He continued by saying that Atlanta has the wrong philosophy around vendors, making it much more difficult to secure the necessary permits. According to Mr. John T. Edge, a southern food writer and Director of the Southern Foodways Alliance, Atlanta is struggling with mobile food vending policies because "everybody's falling all over themselves trying to figure out how to [handle food trucks], everybody's fighting about something, [and street food vending] is such a big business now." In reflecting on the permitting process, Emily proclaimed, "it seems like an endurance race!" Similarly, Sam commented that the city has not fully embraced food trucks and so until then it will take a little longer and cost a little more, he explained, "the longer we're in the game, the more standard it will become." Sam is confident that the city of Atlanta will be able to figure out how best to handle vendors and that with time Atlanta will see greater benefits to having food trucks roam the city.

Moreover, Dan feels that the laws written about trucks are vague, especially since it is such a new concept in Atlanta. Dan and Eddie both mentioned that when the laws change, not everybody is informed because there is considerable variability across the counties within metropolitan Atlanta. Therefore, if a vendor wants to vend in Fulton County and Cobb County, they must go through the specific permitting processes in each respective county. Kyle and Jorge followed this up by stating that the policies toward and oversight of mobile vending is inconsistent and that there is a general lack of congruence among counties regarding policies and permitting procedures. Emily furthered this point by explaining that many city office workers

that handle mobile food vending permits are often uninformed about the Atlanta's mobile food vending policies. Although vendors discussed frustration with the complexities of the permitting and regulatory process in Atlanta and its neighboring counties, in general, vendors were hopeful and had a positive outlook for the future prosperity of the Atlanta food truck scene.

When asked what suggestions for improvement they had regarding Atlanta's policies, the majority of vendors said that they would like to see a more streamlined permitting process; one of the vendors talked about having a food truck vendors association to support vendors and give feedback; several vendors thought that it would be best if there was a separate department created to handle mobile food business permits and policies; and, a few vendors suggested that the permitting process should be governed at the state-level rather than the county-level.

Finding Commissary Kitchen Space

In order to legally vend street food in Atlanta, all food trucks are required to have access to commissary, or fixed, kitchen space. According to Smith and Smith's *The Atlanta Street Food Guidebook*, "the fixed kitchen […] is *the* key component to [a vendor's] entire operation, and is regularly the biggest stumbling block to starting a mobile food service operation in the state of Georgia" (2012:3). In Atlanta, vendors either build their own, share space, or lease existing commercial kitchen space; either way, securing kitchen space is often quite expensive. According to James, the owner of two local Atlanta food trucks as well as a commissary kitchen that he leases out to other food truck vendors,

> The state of Georgia wants you to have a commissary kitchen for a number of reasons, one is that they want to know where the truck is going to be at the end of the day so that they can inspect it and they want it to be properly cleaned, a place where the truck can dump its greywater.

While all vendors explained that it was necessary to have such kitchen space, several were frustrated with how difficult it is to secure kitchen space. Kyle, who owns a bubble tea

truck, claims that the commercial kitchen requirement is "the bane of his business" because it seems silly to have secure access to kitchen space when all he makes and serves is bubble tea. That being said, Kyle understands that it makes sense for other trucks and that there are no exceptions to his truck, but either way it is very hard to find businesses or people that are willing to share their kitchen space. Jorge and Emily discussed similar annoyance with securing access to kitchen space.

As an owner of two food trucks in Atlanta and a businessman at heart, James decided to invest in a commercial kitchen and lease out the space to other vendors in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Following a smaller-scale model of the Los Angeles commissary kitchens, James explained, "we hope to become the poster child for what a commissary kitchen looks like, how to operate a commissary kitchen" for the city of Atlanta. Of the vendors interviewed for this research, two lease kitchen space from James. When asked about their thoughts on James' kitchen space, they explained that it is an incredible advantage because James has taken a lot of the expense out of it by providing the building and maintaining it and the kitchen, making it possible for the vendors to just worry about their own business.

Seasonality

In talking with the vendors, several mentioned their struggles during the winter months to make ends meet and pay their bills. As with most outdoor vending and events, weather governs customer patterns and profitability. In Atlanta, late November through early March represents the difficult months for food truck vendors. The business is very weather dependent, explained Jorge, and so he continues to work at his insurance office during the winter months so that he can pay his bills. When it is cold or raining outside, vendors get significantly less customer traffic, they do not make as much money, and thus it is challenging to pull in enough revenue to allow

them to be profitable at the end of the day. Moreover, according to Eddie, some Atlanta food trucks go into hibernation during the winter because profits are so low. "It does get slow [during the winter]," remarked Eddie, "but you get to see who your loyal customers are."

Future Ambitions and Prospects

Each vendor interviewed was asked about his or her future ambitions for their food truck business. In reviewing their responses, vendors tended to follow similar paths. Most vendors intend to stay in the food truck industry and are interested in focusing more on catering, starting more trucks, having a permanent truck or trailer, and/or opening a brick and mortar restaurant. However, Kyle and Dan, who had previously mentioned that they viewed their food truck as more of a business venture than an investment in the movement, said that they would be willing to sell their business if the right buyer came along.

When asked about his future plans, Anthony exclaimed, "my vision is huge!" He sees no failure in his business concept and in the next five years he hopes to franchise his fried chicken and waffle truck. Keith intends to open up a permanent trailer or truck at the main food truck park to sell his meatball sandwiches and sliders. In addition, Keith explained that he and his brother are in the process of developing another concept for a food truck. Sam also plans on getting a second truck to sell his Indian street food, and then he plans to just respond to whatever the community is looking for, "whatever the people, [his customers], want!"

Jorge, Eddie, and Joe all plan to focus their future efforts on selling their food in more permanent locations. Joe hopes to focus more on his restaurant and emphasize catering over vending; in doing so, he intends to open up more permanent locations to sell his BBQ. Likewise, Jorge hopes to open up a Cuban sandwich brick and mortar restaurant. Meanwhile, Eddie is

currently working on opening up a brick and mortar Puerto Rican restaurant in the spring 2013. Eddie explained that he thinks it will be easier to open a permanent location now because they already have the exposure and customer following. Although vendors have similar, yet individualized ambitions and prospects for the future, all vendors interviewed intend to continue with and expand their food truck business.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE ATLANTA FOOD TRUCK MOVEMENT

All vendors and non-vendors were asked about their observations of the food truck movement in the United States and Atlanta. Most noted several key benefits to having a successful, booming mobile street food movement. Food trucks open up a multitude of opportunities for entrepreneurs that would have normally been overlooked, explained Sam. Food trucks benefit cities by generating and developing the local economy, creating jobs and offering a sustainable avenue for small business growth, revitalizing neighborhoods and enhancing 'dead' space, bringing people together to socialize and interact, and providing an outlet for cultural diversification, learning, and exposure. These benefits were also noted in the background research (Frommer et al. 2011; Cutno et al. 2010; Wessel 2012; Caldwell 2012). According to Mr. Mike Cutno, who conducted extensive research on the feasibility of street food in Atlanta, food truck gatherings "are not just about food, but about being around other people." While Atlanta food trucks may positively serve economic, cultural, and social factors, the protectionist regulations facing vendors and sense of competition among local restaurants have delayed and limited the expansion of food trucks in Atlanta. Despite the challenges that vendors discussed, they are keen to see how the food truck movement evolves over time and continues to permeate the city of Atlanta.

Between social media, food truck parks, and Atlanta festivals, food truck vendors have greatly developed the mobile street food options in Atlanta. Vendors use social media, primarily through Facebook and Twitter, to connect with their customers and gather people at specific locations throughout the city. Most vendors commented that social media plays a huge role in their customer outreach, especially with regard to notifying their customers of their whereabouts and daily specials. Furthermore, Joe opened a food truck park in Atlanta because he saw the need for a permanent, reliable location for trucks to vend at daily. Dan and other vendors explained that they are more profitable and interact with a higher volume of customers when they vend at festivals in Atlanta.

Food trucks allow for cultural and community building by gathering people together physically at food truck parks and festivals and virtually through social media platforms. Likewise, Dr. Alfonso Morales from the University of Wisconsin–Madison reflected that food trucks are creating new webs of connections and communication that have no prior precedent. It is refreshing to see people outside and acting in a "more real" way, in a sense the food truck parks and gatherings foster a "great micro-culture," observed Kyle. Moreover, Eddie explained that the lack of competition among the vendors shows that vendors have more of a "we are in it together mentality." Combining their love of good food, goal of earning money, and interest in community gatherings, vendors are constantly looking for ways to enhance and grow Atlanta's food truck parks and vending options.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Although the findings of this study are substantive, there are several limitations that must be taken into account. Given the small, limited population interviewed in this study, the findings

and structure of this research provide only a basic framework for making generalizations about food truck vendors and the food truck movement in Atlanta and the United States. That being said, it is important to take into account the potential for variation across the United States given that each city has its own economic, political, social, and cultural characteristics that may in turn create unique and individualized food truck vending environments.

With only two academic semesters to complete data collection and interviews, analysis, and compile findings, this research is limited in its scope and reach. This research does not examine vendors overtime and therefore is just a glimpse into a vendor's life. In addition, this research only provides the perspectives eleven vendors, approximately 30 percent of the active food trucks in Atlanta to date. All data and information gathered was highly dependent on the interviewee's willingness and openness to share their perspective as well as their time availability. In addition, it was difficult to get in touch with most of the vendors and the non-vendors given their limited time availability. However, it is possible that with more time to conduct research, this study could have incorporated more vendor and non-vendor perspectives. Given the lack of precedent and the newness of the food truck movement in the United States, this study is intended to serve as a basis for further research and to contribute to better understanding the food truck movement in Atlanta and the United States.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

This research sheds light on the vendor and non-vendor perspectives with regard to the rising Atlanta food truck movement. Uncovering vendor characteristics, motivations, challenges, future ambitions, and observations of the food truck movement helps paint a comprehensive picture of the implications and nature of food trucks in Atlanta and the United States. Due to the

limited background research available and lack of ethnographic studies on food trucks and street food in the United States, this research provides a compelling, firsthand look into the 21st century food truck movement.

During the course of this research, several food trucks opened up shop and it is expected that this trend will continue. With time the Atlanta food truck movement and the respective policies and regulations facing mobile food vendors will continue to take shape and evolve. This is particularly evident from the fact that public vending space in the city continues to be under debate as this research comes to fruition; in particular, the Fulton County Superior Court lifted the monopoly over public vending space in the December 2012 ruling in favor of street vendors in the *Miller v. City of Atlanta* case. Although the impact of this decision has yet to be felt, it has the potential to shift and expand existing policies and regulations affecting Atlanta vendors. Furthermore, these modern, gourmet, and social media savvy food trucks have existed in Atlanta for only a few years and in this short time they have shown their potential to transform public space into socially and culturally innovative communities. Therefore, it will be interesting to see how the food truck scene continues to evolve in the coming years.

This study exposes numerous avenues for future research to better understand food trucks and food truck vendors. Given the novelty of food trucks in the United States, it would be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study on food truck vendors to see how the movement advances over time. A longitudinal study would enable researchers to examine vendors at different stages in their life, the life cycle of their respective food truck businesses, and the various street food cultures across the United States. While my research provides insight into vendors' lives and their future ambitions, it does not examine how they cope with their challenges, how such challenges change over time, and how their future business ambitions pan

out. Moreover, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study of food truck scenes in various urban centers. In addition, this would allow for comparisons between different cities in the United States and examine policy effectiveness.

Additionally, it would be interesting to do a pilot study of food trucks in different neighborhoods to see how food trucks might serve as motivators or catalysts for economic development. As mentioned by Mr. Robert Frommer at the Institute for Justice, food trucks in Washington, D.C. have helped to transform and revitalize rundown, poorer areas of the city. Given Atlanta's socioeconomic division and food-deserted areas, it would be interesting to examine how food trucks might help to increase food access in these neighborhoods.

It is also suggested that future research examine the customers or food truck followers themselves. By doing so researchers could look at the food truck scene as a whole, exploring the various players in the movement, analyzing consumer preferences and trends, and examining how such trends might influence food truck businesses. Additionally, it would be interesting to further explore the role of social class within the food truck movement. As evident in the literature review, the food truck movement is highly interdisciplinary. To this end, research efforts on the food truck movement in the United States and Atlanta could investigate the food truck movement in a variety of disciplines, including, but not limited to: anthropology, food studies, sociology (Caldwell 2012), urban and community planning (Howell 2011; Cutno et al. 2010; Hermosillo 2012; Ngo 2012), architecture (Wessel 2012), law and policy (Hernandez-Lopez 2011; Williams 2012), and economics.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Driven by the 2007-2008 economic recession and rise in social media, the food truck movement sheds light on modern food trends, exposing innovative ways to transform public space and culturally enrich communities. This research uncovers the social, cultural, and economic factors influencing Atlanta food truck vendors' motivations, challenges, future ambitions, and observations of the rising food truck movement. In doing so, this study documents the first ethnographic evidence of Atlanta's rising mobile street food movement and sheds light on the vendors' perspective and understanding of the Atlanta food truck scene. By focusing on the food truck vendor perspective, this research develops a basis for understanding and researching 21st century street food in the United States and food industry trends. As expressed by the vendors in this study, their motivations were twofold: driven by both economic (entrepreneurial appeal and lower cost business venture) and socio-cultural (improved quality of life and to take part in an exciting nationwide movement) appeal. Moreover, despite the vendors' challenges with the complex permitting and regulatory processes, they were optimistic and excited for the future and longevity of food trucks in Atlanta. Although it was difficult to research a topic that is simultaneously changing and evolving, it was an exciting experience to lend insight into a new, highly multidisciplinary area of research.

The Atlanta movement has the potential to greatly transform public places, community gatherings, and food outlets throughout the city. Attracting people from all walks of life, the street food industry presents entrepreneurs with a chance to progress and move upward in the economy. Vendors offer an important service by providing ready-to-eat, affordable, and convenient food in urban areas. Likewise, food plays an important role in bringing people together by promoting social interaction and building community, alluding to yet another way

that street food can enhance urban space. However, it will require effort and support on many levels – vendors, policymakers, customers, etc. – for food trucks to continue to prosper in the city. As revealed in the vendor and non-vendor interviews, the Atlanta food truck scene is constantly evolving, and with time and legislative support, food trucks and the communities they create has the potential to continue to grow and flourish in the city.

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