

Community Food Initiatives: Grassroots Innovation in Practice

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Abstract

As community food initiatives have become more widespread and well-established, they have become increasingly recognised for their ability to generate innovative civil society responses to a range of local needs and societal challenges (not least those framed around sustainability and social justice). However, despite their potential for catalysing action at the grassroots, significant challenges are faced in overcoming limited resources and power; and in attempting to maintain internal stability whilst working towards generating long-term and transformative social change. This thesis advances understanding of the dynamics of grassroots innovation by examining how community food initiatives negotiate the landscape of opportunities and challenges they face, in order to work towards developing sustainable practices at the local level in line with societal-level aims and objectives.

The thesis critically engages a communities of practice approach, drawing on understanding of social learning to develop a framework for analysing innovation as both negotiated within communities, and co-produced through connections as part of landscapes of practice. In-depth engagement with collaborative partners Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester and their broader networks, has enabled analysis at a range of scales, exploring the role that shared histories of learning and connections across the landscape play in the development of grassroots innovation.

In the context of increasing resource scarcity, the thesis finds that the interconnected challenges of maintaining survival and creating long-term impact are central to framing of innovation and learning. Capacity for innovation is not confined to organisations, but is carried within and between communities of practice and is generated through interaction across the landscape. In the final stages of the research, findings were put into practice by bringing together key partners to facilitate shared learning between cities and catalyse practical action towards developing a stronger network of community food initiatives in Sheffield.

By developing understanding of the dynamics of grassroots innovation, the findings of this thesis contribute to debates around the role that community based organisations can play in transitions to sustainability. The thesis argues against focus on outcomes, scaling up, diffusion, and narrow understandings of knowledge for sustainability; and challenges a binary view of internal versus external processes. Instead, it demonstrates the value of understanding community organisations as generators of capacity for innovation, co-producing sustainable practices as they work across boundaries in landscapes of practice.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Community food initiatives have become more wide-spread and well-established over recent years, presenting innovative civil society responses to a range of broad societal challenges, not least those framed around sustainability and social justice. The potential benefits of community food initiatives are broad ranging, including their ability to mobilise environmentally and socially conscious behaviour in their participants. However, there is a well-recognised struggle in attempting to maintain impact and internal stability whilst working from positions of limited power and resources. This thesis will advance understanding of how community food initiatives innovatively negotiate the ever-changing landscape of opportunities and challenges they face, as they strive towards changing practices at the local level, in line with societal-level aims and objectives.

The research approach taken is highly participatory and is based on engagement with two key collaborative partners, Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester. Work with Grow Sheffield commenced at the inception of the project and helped shape the research focus and design from the early stages. Through this initial engagement, a fundamental problem was identified - the ongoing challenge of creating and sustaining *long-term* impact, with often *short-term* funding and resources. Engaging with this inherent challenge provided a springboard to exploring the complexities and ongoing need for innovation and learning within small scale community organisations. In order to increase the scope of the research, Feeding Manchester was chosen as a comparative case study, working at a broader scale by facilitating networking and strategic action at the city and regional levels. This thesis is the culmination of extensive engagement with these two case studies over a period of 3-4 years, addressing the innovative potential of community food initiatives working at different scales, towards more sustainable food practices and systems.

Central to the framing of the thesis and the research approach taken is a communities of practice approach. As well as providing the language and tools of analysis, a communities of practice framework has enabled conceptualisation of the complex dynamics working within and between community food initiatives. A key contribution of the thesis therefore is in critically exploring and developing a communities of practice framework for understanding processes of innovation

inherent to community food initiatives, as they function as part of broader landscapes of practice. The ways in which communities of practice theory has been drawn upon and developed will be discussed in-depth in the Chapter 2, forming the basis for theoretical analysis.

1.2. Background

Community Food Initiatives

Community food initiatives work to provide localised grassroots responses to both local needs and societal-level issues. While they may be considered as part of broader movements, drawing on and reproducing ideas and practices shared across national and international scales, the solutions they provide are uniquely mediated through local understandings and values and targeted towards meeting local needs. While not without criticism, the benefits of community food initiatives have been well explored, demonstrating a range of environmental, social and economic impacts. Organisations are as a result wide ranging in focus and framing- with food often being used as a vehicle to achieve broader social aims and objectives. The processes of negotiation through which meanings associated with food are developed will be a central focus of the thesis. So too will be the ways in which these meanings are performed through material practices such as growing, cooking and eating. Food is visceral, embodied and universally embedded in everyday life, and at the same time connects us to broader systems and shapes our experience of the world and engagement with it. The various framings of food in relation to the processes and practices of community food initiatives will be explored further in the literature review (Chapter 2).

For the purpose of this study, community food initiatives are loosely defined to include grassroots, community-led enterprises aiming to achieve social objectives through a focus on food. This aims to encompass the diversity of locally negotiated meanings and practices associated with community food initiatives, and allow exploration of the landscape of food actors through engagement with the case study organisations. It also recognises the changing and dynamic nature of initiatives, as their structures and ways of working develop over time and in relation to a range of factors. While the study is confined to only two key case studies, they are viewed as existing as part of a broader interconnected network of actors interested in and working on a range of food related issues - whether the focus be on community food growing, food access, food waste, sustainable food, local food networks, or any other emergent themes. As well as allowing flexibility to explore the interrelations between multiple food actors and issues, this approach aims to recognise the ability of citizen-led organisations to work innovatively across disciplines in ways that might not be possible in more formal mainstream structures. With practitioners coming from broad ranging backgrounds, bringing with them

unique sets of skills and diverse forms of knowledge, community food initiatives have the potential to provide fertile ground for working towards creative and innovative local solutions to perceived problems at multiple scales.

While the benefits of community food initiatives might be wide ranging, so too are the challenges they face. Their capacity to bring about change is limited through reliance on “people with limited power, limited resources and limited ability to influence others” (Middlemiss and Parrish, 2010, p. 7559). Some of the key pressures facing organisations include: availability of funding, reliance on and need for effective management of volunteers, conflict within and between organisations, and the availability of key skills (White and Stirling, 2013). Community food initiatives must therefore negotiate conflict and develop cohesion whilst remaining inclusive; and recruit, manage and empower volunteers, whilst ensuring effective distribution of power and responsibility. Beyond such 'intrinsic' pressures, Seyfang and Smith (2007) identify challenges around 'diffusion', describing the difficulties faced by initiatives as they attempt to exert influence beyond the local scale in accordance with aims centred on broader-scale change. Such challenges include difficulties in communicating and translating ideas beyond the locality whilst maintaining relevance, and attempting to find project based solutions whilst working within structures than they are trying to change (Smith, Fressoli and Thomas, 2014, p. 114).

Through developing a communities of practice approach, this thesis will contribute to understanding of how such challenges are negotiated through ongoing processes of learning and innovation. How do they compromise between meeting ambitious aims, and managing with limited resources? How do they balance the challenge of maintaining core functions, with the need to sustain ongoing impact and constantly move forward? What forms of knowledge and competencies are developed in the process, and how do these become part of the repertoire of the organisation? As ‘shared histories of learning’ bring together diverse forms of knowledge (Wenger, 1998), communities of practice provides a useful framework for analysing the dynamics of innovation within community food initiatives and through engagement with the outside world.

Transitions to Sustainability

There has been much interest in academic and policy spheres in the role that civil society actors might play in bringing about societal change towards sustainability. Community based organisations have been identified as sources of energy and enthusiasm, capable of producing unique place-specific solutions to global problems. Furthermore, literature on sustainability transitions views community food (and other grassroots) initiatives as spaces for innovation, with the potential to influence broader societal and 'mainstream' spheres (Seyfang, 2009). At

the same time, community food initiatives also often frame themselves in terms of (their own definitions of) sustainability, with ideas of transitions towards more sustainable and equitable social practices being a key part of guiding visions and aims. However, considering the challenges highlighted above, how far do community food initiatives have the capacity to feasibly contribute to sustainability transitions - and under whose terms?

The field of Grassroots Innovations has recently emerged to address the development and diffusion of civil society based sustainability projects. In their seminal paper outlining a research agenda on the topic, Seyfang and Smith (2007, p. 585) define Grassroots Innovations as “networks of activists and organisations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved”. While much of the focus on grassroots innovations has been on their external impact and the role they could play in bringing about social change, Seyfang and Smith (2007, p. 596) themselves point out that organisations spend up to 90% of their time surviving, with only 10% focused on developing their activities (Church, 2005; Wakeman, 2005). Despite the overwhelming challenges facing organisations, the dynamics of ‘survival’ have been largely overlooked. This thesis therefore moves away from focus on outcomes, and challenges a binary view of internal versus external processes. Instead it views innovation in community food initiatives as an inherent and ongoing part of survival, in an ever-changing landscape in which novelty is always in demand.

It is through dealing with these ongoing challenges that Grassroots Innovations develop various forms of knowledge, not only of 'how to do sustainability', but of how sustainability fits into people's lives, the various meanings and identities it develops, and the limitations of current systems and structures (Smith and Seyfang, 2013). This “valuable diversity of knowledge and know-how for innovation and sustainability” (Smith and Seyfang, 2013, p. 4) might be part of what Feenstra (2002) describes as the 'invisible web' underlying sustainable food networks through which actors are connected - whether through formal structures or informal encounters. These analyses resonate with the central focus on learning described in a Communities of Practice approach, in which knowledge “resides in the skills, understanding, and relationships [...] as well as the tools, documents and processes that embody aspects of this knowledge” (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002, p. 11). The thesis will therefore explore how meanings of sustainability are negotiated and put into practice within the case study organisations - and how they work towards developing sustainable practices (with often unsustainable resources). What compromises are made and what conflicts occur in this process of attempting to convey meaning, and in translating ideals into actions?

Central to this framing is support for the need to move towards more pluralised understandings of transitions- recognising the interrelated nature of broad ranging social issues. White and Stirling (White and Stirling, 2013) point out that as such initiatives and organisations work towards meeting a variety of ends, the focus on a “singular 'transition' to 'sustainability', rather than more indeterminate and potentially multiple kinds of 'transformation' (Stirling, 2011)” can be problematic. Furthermore, while transitions literature has been traditionally focused on 'scaling up' of innovations, Stirling (2009) calls for a move towards more pluralised understandings of progress, recognising the value of *directionality*: appreciating diversity and opening alternative pathways, rather than working towards closing them down in the move from one dominant system to the next. In line with this, understandings of sustainability will be drawn from the case studies, as they negotiate meanings and develop practices in local and context specific ways. Rather than focusing on simplistic notions of 'scaling up', the analysis will focus on exploring core challenges and identifying areas where intervention might be most effective, recognising the complexity of processes involved, not least those associated with the overlooked challenge of survival.

Evolving Food Landscapes

As well as focusing on the dynamics and processes within community food initiatives, through engagement with case study organisations and their networked relations with outside actors this study also aims to examine processes working at different scales of analysis. It examines how the case study organisations articulate themselves, learn from, and contribute to knowledge at a range of interrelated levels. Focus therefore will not only be on the organisations themselves, but on their connections to, and understandings of the world beyond their boundaries.

Although there are criticisms that communities of practice approaches are often inwards facing, Wenger (1998) asserts that communities of practice should not be viewed in isolation, but as part of broader landscapes of practice. Following this, there has been a recent shift in focus towards examining processes *across* (rather than *within*) communities of practice (Wenger, 2010; Blackmore, 2012; Omidvar and Kislov, 2014). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015a, pp. 13, 15) use the concept of landscape of practice to describe a “complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them”, which “constitute[s] a complex social body of knowledge”. As will be explored further in the literature review chapter, this concept will be used to explore the ways in which the case study organisations interact with and shape the local food landscapes of which they are part.

This development in communities of practice theory coincides with a shift in Grassroots Innovation literature towards examining the connections across the networks in which grassroots initiatives are embedded, as part of Grassroots Innovation Movements (Smith *et al.*, 2017). The thesis builds on these developments to examine how the community food initiatives in question respond to the challenges and opportunities they face as part of broader systems and contexts. While the landscape is shaped by uneven relations of power, and increasingly scarce resources, the thesis examines how initiatives creatively respond to the challenges they face, as well as how opportunities emerge through interactions across the landscape. From this perspective, initiatives are viewed as creative spaces of negotiation, developing responses that are shaped, but not determined, by the external pressures they face and the contexts within which they are situated.

In shifting analytical focus to the landscape level of analysis, the thesis contributes to a newly emerging direction in both communities of practice and grassroots innovation literatures, as will be explored further in Chapter 2. In addition to this, it aims to generate understanding of the dynamics of interrelation between community food initiatives (and other actors), as part of an increasing trend towards collaboration and partnership building in the sector. The next section outlines each of the case study organisations, before going on to outline some of the key contexts within which they are situated.

1.3. Outline of Case Studies and Contexts

This section introduces the two key case studies, Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester. The first part gives an overview of each case study, and explores the aims, background, organisational structure, and the key projects that will arise in the discussion part of the thesis. The second part outlines some of the broader contexts in which the case studies are embedded, including key regional, national and international trends and movements that have influenced the case studies to varying degrees. This will lay the foundation for later empirical discussion of how communities of practice influence and are influenced by broader processes, movements and trajectories. While this section provides a brief introduction to the case studies, Chapter 3 (methodology) goes further to explain the nature and purpose of engagement with them, justifying the approach to the research design that has been chosen.

Grow Sheffield (GS)

Grow Sheffield is the primary collaborative partner in the research project and has been engaged since the early stages of the research design beginning in 2013. Grow Sheffield focuses on the promotion of food growing, by engaging with and enabling individuals and communities to grow

In 2011, Grow Sheffield was successful in a bid to the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund (LFF), which granted approximately £200,000 over a three-year period to fund the 'Grow' project. This marked a turning point in the history of the organisation, as formalisation in registering as a Company Limited by Guarantee coincided with a significant change in structure and character of the membership of the organisation. Receiving funding meant a step-change in capacity, enabling Grow Sheffield to recruit a small staff team to lead operations, scaling up existing projects and developing new models¹.

The end of the LFF marked another significant transition, with a drastic reduction in levels of funding, the loss of staff team (to be replaced by two new coordinators) presenting a significant loss of capacity. However, having secured another (albeit much smaller) grant before the end of the LFF, working with higher education institutions in Sheffield (through the Sheffield on a Plate project² (SoaP)), Grow Sheffield was able to continue much of its activity on a smaller scale, and with the development of new projects and practices (particularly in relation to promoting self-sufficiency through self-generation of income).

The end of the SoaP project once again marked a period of decline in capacity, with decreasing staff time available and dependency on small grants, donations, core funds and a small amount of self-generated income. During this time focus has been on moving away from dependency on unsustainable large scale funding, to a more diverse income base in which funds are gained through partnership with other organisations, self-generation, and with support from a range of small scale grants.

The context described above is characterised by the challenges of sustaining practices and attempting to maintain capacity despite increasingly limited resources. It is within this context that the theme of grassroots innovation is explored, as the organisation negotiates the challenges faced, and develops new strategies and ways of working in order to sustain and continue to develop the social practices that constitute the organisation. While Grow Sheffield presents a unique case in terms of both the specific context and approach, many of the challenges faced, as will be discussed throughout the empirical section, are symptomatic of broader pressures faced across the landscape.

¹ The key period of transition associated with the Local Food Fund is explored in depth in Chapter 5.

² SoaP was a two-year program which was part of HEFCE's Green Fund, bringing together Sheffield's two universities and City College, with community partners including Grow Sheffield and FairShare. Grow Sheffield's role was to deliver workshop and provide the expertise on growing and harvesting.

Organisational Structure

The structure of Grow Sheffield is dynamic and has developed over the research period depending on the needs of the organisation and the capacity available. Throughout the research period however, it has maintained a stable 'core team' of volunteers, who form the board of directors and are responsible for decision making and negotiating the direction of the organisation. It has also typically employed a small (part-time) staff team³ that has been responsible for co-ordinating and administrating operations. As this is contingent on the availability of funding, contracts are often relatively short term. Beyond this, it has a broader and more peripheral membership, including a wide range of volunteers (many connected to specific projects), those with a general interest or connection to activities, 'co-opted' members and advisors who might be committed to a particular aspect of Grow Sheffield activity. Grow Sheffield also has a bank of freelance workers, who have particular skills and are available on an ad-hoc basis to work in their specialised area (for example, running specialist workshops, producing reports or funding bids, or IT consultation).

Key Projects

Since its inception in 2007, Grow Sheffield has initiated or collaborated on a large number of projects, with various length, scale and impact. For the purpose of the research, a number of key projects have been selected, which are described below and will be referred to throughout the empirical section.

Abundance

Abundance was one of Grow Sheffield's initial projects and has continued to develop throughout the history of the organisation. It is recognised as one of Grow Sheffield's most well-known, successful and long-lasting projects and has its own base of dedicated and skilled volunteers. The project has also spread to other cities in the UK, as various other independent 'Abundance' groups have formed.

³The number of staff members and the number of working hours available is dependent on the availability of funding and so has fluctuated over time.

Abundance aims to harvest and redistribute local fruit from both public and private land that would otherwise have gone to waste⁴. The practices involved are broad ranging and include harvesting fruit, distributing it within the community, as well as juicing (at events), preserving (through chutney and cider making); as well as winter time activities including fruit tree planting, pruning and grafting. A major focus of the project is developing the skills and confidence in volunteers to be able to identify, harvest, eat, and preserve the 'abundance' of uneaten fruit that exists in the urban environment.

Community Growers

The Community Growers project ran during the period of the LFF from 2011-2014, creating 12 growing hubs across the city. A small team of 'community growers' were employed and assigned to each of the projects to help develop skills and confidence, and generate a sense of community around food growing. A number of different models were piloted, depending on the communities and partner organisations involved, with varying degrees of success. While some of these projects ended when the LFF came to an end, many continued independently, with the continued support of Grow Sheffield, or under the umbrella of partner organisations. Beyond the LFF, the elements of the Community Growers model continue to be put into practice through various other partnership based projects. The Community Growers project is explored further, forming a key case study in Chapter 6.

Sheffield Food Network (SFN)

The SFN began as a physical paper map in a pop-up community art space in Sheffield as part of a collaborative project working with the University of Sheffield Architecture department. Members of the public were offered free fruit collected by Abundance in exchange for sharing their stories, ideas, art, fruit; and adding to the map their favourite local/green food places. During the LFF the Sheffield Food Network was formalised and developed as one of the three key projects (along with Abundance and Community Growers), with a member of staff dedicated to its development. A key output of this was the development of an online map that could be updated by volunteers, to include all 'sustainable food' in Sheffield - "food that's locally produced, fairly sourced and independently sold" (Grow Sheffield website, accessed 2016). The map aims to enable consumers, retailers, producers and growers to connect with each other in support of developing a more sustainable food system in Sheffield.

⁴ In the 2015-2016 harvest season approximately 3 tonnes of fruit was harvested, over a third of which was distributed to the community (including local community groups and charities, libraries, schools, community centres etc) with the remainder being distributed to volunteers and fruit tree owners.

A Brief History

Feeding Manchester was initiated by the Kindling Trust (see below) in 2009 as a series of events bringing together food practitioners from across Greater Manchester to work strategically towards developing a more sustainable food system in the region. The network aims to hold 3 conferences per year, with varying formats - from focus on specific topics and themes with workshops and discussions, to social and networking events. Early workshops focused on working towards developing practical knowledge and solutions and on developing shared tools and resources (such as definitions, website, structures and ways of working). Later events focused on the collective development of a 'Greater Manchester Sustainable Food Strategy', which was launched in 2014. Since then the focus of events has broadened, and the initiative has become a platform for discussion and networking around various topical issues and themes (including those relating to food poverty, food waste, and sustainable food; and the impact of Brexit on food and farming).

Organisational Structure

Although Feeding Manchester is comprised of an open network of food actors, its co-ordination is primarily led by the co-directors of the Kindling Trust, with support from a small advisory subgroup⁵. Despite taking a practical lead in organising and maintaining Feeding Manchester, the coordinators are keen for it to maintain a sense of autonomy as a network, rather than being seen as a project belonging to Kindling Trust (as will be discussed in Chapter 5). The project doesn't receive any major funding, with costs of events usually being covered by a small admission fee and with organisational capacity being provided by the Kindling Trust. Feeding Manchester provides a broad platform for networking and collaboration, with a changing and dynamic membership as well as a more stable core group of participants.

Although Feeding Manchester is the focus of the case study, the connections to the Kindling Trust and some of the other projects led by the organisation are also investigated. The Kindling Trust was registered in 2007 as a not for profit limited company, which aims to catalyse social change through food, by focusing on three key strands: sustainable production, sustainable living and sustainable activism. As well as two co-directors, Kindling Trust employs a number of staff coordinators to run projects and manage volunteers. It is well recognised across Manchester, and more broadly across the UK, being well connected with national organisations

⁵ There have been short periods when Feeding Manchester has been run by funded coordinators, although not during the period of research. Reliance on external funding was generally perceived as not being a sustainable long-term solution as will be discussed further throughout the empirical section of the thesis.

such as Sustain and Sustainable Food Cities. The key projects that are led by the Kindling Trust that will be discussed in the empirical section of the thesis are outlined below.

Key Projects

Feeding Manchester and the Kindling Trust are both concerned with progressing the sustainable food system in Greater Manchester, and there are a number of connected projects that have been developed to help further this aim. As a forum for discussing barriers and solutions to sustainable food, Feeding Manchester has provided an environment in which ideas can be developed. The stability and capacity of the Kindling Trust has enabled some of those ideas to be developed into projects - some examples of which are listed below.

The Land Army

The Land Army aims to support local organic farmers during busy times of the year and is inspired by the women's land armies of the first and second world wars. The idea for the Land Army arose from discussion at early Feeding Manchester events, where it was identified as a solution to both the lack of volunteer opportunities in growing, and the difficulties of organic farmers in managing labour intensive work cost-effectively.

FarmStart

While the Land Army is designed as a first step in providing experience in organic growing, FarmStart was designed for those who wish to try growing on a commercial scale. It aims to provide a safe environment for new growers by providing land, tools, support of an experienced grower, and access to market connections in exchange for a land rent fee and commitment to the project. The initiative was the first of its kind in the UK, with a second site having recently opened by the Kindling Trust nearby in Stockport. They also run training days for groups across the UK who wish to set up similar schemes.

Manchester Veg People (MVP)

Manchester Veg People is a co-operative of organic food buyers and growers in Greater Manchester. The rationale behind the project is to provide a better connection between growers and buyers to ensure a mutual beneficial balance of supply and demand. Through MVP, buyers can request particular crops, and growers can co-ordinate with each other on what best to grow for the season. MVP has recently developed a veg box scheme to increase distribution to the public, and is also looking at public sector procurement of organic veg, developing menus for schools.

The projects above are part of an attempt to systematically increase both the supply and demand of organic veg - developing the market through partnerships with local businesses and

institutions, whilst simultaneously training growers, and attempting to remove or mitigate the barriers to organic farming facing new comers. The Kindling Trust is currently working towards buying land to develop a ‘Kindling Farm’, bringing together key projects in order to create an environment where further innovations can be developed and shared, both across Greater Manchester and the UK more broadly.

Broader Food Landscape

This section examines some of the key contextual factors that have influenced the case study organisations during the course of the study. While it is not possible within the scope of the project to begin to document all of the trends and influencing factors that have emerged, Table 1 aims to give a sense of some of the most significant impacting factors that have shaped the investigation. Key themes will arise in the empirical section of the thesis, in examining how the case studies have responded to the various opportunities and challenges they have faced.

Theme	Example	Description
Funding	Local Food Fund (LFF)	<p>The Local Food Fund has been influential both for Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester. The LFF was a £59.8m programme focusing on food projects that was developed by a consortium of National environmental charities. Launched in 2007, the main aim of the programme was to “make locally grown food accessible and affordable to local communities” and to catalyse projects that use food as a vehicle for broader social change, by “improving local environments, developing a greater sense of community ownership, and encouraging social, economic and environmental sustainability” (Kirwan <i>et al.</i>, 2014, p. 6). The LFF is perceived as unique as a fund of its size in recognising the inherent value of local food projects (rather than focusing only on the outcomes).</p> <p>The scale and reach of the LFF has meant that hundreds of projects were developed across the UK. As will be discussed in the empirical chapters, the LFF provided a significant boost to the local food movement, but also impacted upon the power relations and connections across the community food landscape.</p>
	Growing Together	<p>Growing Together was a two year, £800,000 Big Lottery Fund programme that was initiated after the LFF, and aimed to support and enable community food initiatives to develop alternative funding streams, diversify away from reliance on external grants, and develop enterprising, innovative and sustainable business models. Growing Together offers tailored consultations to organisations, and has worked with both Grow Sheffield and Kindling Trust. The initiative is significant in highlighting a conscious shift towards self-sustainability in terms of income and away from reliance on cycles of grant funding.</p>

Political Climate	Austerity	The period of austerity in which the research has taken place has had far reaching consequences for community food initiatives and the third sector more broadly. At the same time as reducing the amount of funding and resources available, cuts to public services has increased demand for many of the services provided by the sector. Further to this, the general election in 2015 galvanised action in connection with both case studies, who held various events in the run up to, or following the election.
	Food Poverty	The rise in food poverty over the time scale of the study also influenced both case studies and shifted the debate within the broader food landscape. This has included building connection with the Right to Food Movement, increasing involvement through events relating to food justice, as well as direct engagement with food banks. Connection with a growing number of initiatives around food waste also contributes to a broad response to food poverty.
	Brexit	The 2015 election result and resulting referendum led to Feeding Manchester to a debate on the pros and cons of EU membership for food and farmers. This debate has unfolded nationally through working with the Food Research Collaboration, with events including the London Food Symposium 2015, and various citizen focused events in London and Manchester.
National / International movements	Sustainable Food Cities (SFC)	The sustainable food cities programme has influenced both cities and many others as part of a nation-wide movement. They have engaged with Feeding Manchester by providing speakers, and funding a related project called Feeding Stockport (also managed by Kindling Trust). I have also encountered the organisation through various other events including academic/practitioner conferences in Cardiff and Edinburgh.
	Food Sovereignty	The Food Sovereignty movement arose in relation to the Kindling Trust, which aligns itself with food sovereignty principles ⁶ . I attended several food sovereignty related events in Manchester, as well as the 'national gathering' in 2015 in Hebden Bridge at which the Kindling Trust presented (including about their work with Feeding Manchester). The UK Food Sovereignty Movement is a relatively young part of a global movement having formed in 2012. It is inspired by the broader food sovereignty movement, originating in the global south, and aims to connect and inspire groups working on food issues across the UK.

Table 1: Key contexts influencing case studies.

⁶ The six defining principles of food sovereignty as defined by the International Food Sovereignty Movement: **Focuses on food for people; Values food providers; Localises food systems; Puts control locally; Builds knowledge and skills; Works with nature.**

Although the contextual factors selected and described above are by no means exhaustive, they give an impression of the political and social climate in which the case studies have operated over recent years. In the case of Grow Sheffield, this has meant going from a period of relatively high levels of funding to very scarce funding. For Feeding Manchester, it has brought challenges in relation to convening a network of increasingly resource scarce actors. It is within this context that the dynamics of grassroots innovation is observed as actors attempt to develop new ways of working, new practices and new connections in response to increasing landscape pressures.

1.4. Research Contributions

The previous sections aim to give a sense of the context from which the focus of the study has emerged. While community food initiatives are recognised for broad ranging benefits and potential for bringing about change towards sustainable practices, there is a lack of understanding of the dynamics through which they navigate challenges and opportunities at multiple levels. As will be discussed further in the literature review and theoretical framework sections, the thesis aims to address this gap by developing understanding of innovative processes of negotiation within community food initiatives, through a communities of practice approach.

As a collaborative research project, engagement with the case study organisations has been crucial in shaping the research design, which has evolved throughout the duration of the project. Having been involved with the case studies over a relatively long time period of 4-5 years (particularly in relation to engagement with Grow Sheffield), there has been opportunity to observe (and participate in) the development of their trajectories over time. This has offered a unique perspective on how community food initiatives identify, respond to and learn from the opportunities and challenges that arise.

Drawing on a communities of practice approach has proven useful in a number of ways. Firstly, it has provided the tools and language of analysis, as will be elaborated on in Chapter 2. It has also provided an effective means of understanding the complexity of dynamics at work within community food initiatives, and the ways in which they engage with each other and with broader systems and landscapes of practices. In addition, it has enabled me to analyse my own trajectory within the case study organisations, particularly within Grow Sheffield where I have been most intensively engaged, eventually joining the board of directors. Being inducted into and becoming part of the shared histories of learning of the organisations has provided opportunity to reflect on, share insights, and initiate and respond to opportunities as I have navigated the landscape from my own evolving position as researcher and practitioner. This positioning and the

challenges and opportunities it has posed will be elaborated on further in the methodology chapter (3).

In addition to providing an effective means of analysing my induction into the Grow Sheffield (and to a lesser but still some extent Feeding Manchester), my involvement has led to encounters with key characters and organisations that are interconnected and active across the food landscapes in Sheffield and Manchester. In the final empirical Chapter (7) I build on this, drawing on key insights and findings from empirical engagement, along with my own network of connections that has developed over the period of the study, to facilitate the sharing of knowledge between the cities through bringing together key individuals and organisations.

Through in-depth engagement and analysis framed by a communities of practice approach, this study aims to contribute to understanding of the dynamics and processes of innovation within community food initiatives, as they work towards developing innovative practices that respond to the opportunities and challenges they face, and aim to bring about positive social change in line with broader scale objectives.

1.5. Thesis Outline

Having introduced the background, case studies and key contexts of the research, this final section of the introductory chapter lays out the structure of the thesis. Chapter 2, provides a review of the relevant literature and development of the theoretical framework for the research. It examines the literature around community food initiatives, innovation and capacity - highlighting areas of potential contribution. It then turns to literature on grassroots innovation, exploring progress so far, before examining how a communities of practice approach could help further understanding in the context of innovative community food initiatives. The final part of chapter 2 sets out a communities of practice conceptual framework, which will be drawn upon in discussion in the empirical chapters (4-7).

Chapter 3 begins by outlining the research questions, before going on to set out how they will be addressed through an ethnographic research design that draws on a practice-based approach. It describes the methods of data collection and analysis used, before going on to examine some of the challenges and limitations of the approach through reflecting on the research process.

The empirical section of the thesis begins with Chapter 4, which is the first of four discussion chapters. It focuses on the emergence of each of the case studies initiatives as communities of practices, looking at the development of identity and practice as part of their social formation.

The formation of the community of practice is framed as a key part of their shared histories and thus key themes that arise inform the following chapters as practices unfold and develop over time. Chapter 5 continues by examining the historical trajectories of the initiatives, analysing how communities of practice respond to the various opportunities and challenges they face. Focus is on the processes of negotiation within the communities and the assembly of various skills and capacities as they attempt to ensure long term survival and impact whilst managing and maintaining limited capacity.

Chapter 6 focuses on processes of innovation, examining how the case study initiatives work across boundaries to share learning and practice beyond the community of practice. Processes of social learning are explored and innovation is conceptualised as being co-produced through engagement with various actors. It also examines the sporadic nature of innovation, and development of spaces of innovation which facilitate learning and collaboration between actors.

Chapter 7 shifts analytical gaze to the level of landscape interactions. It examines how individuals travel the landscape of practice carrying with them various competencies and capacities as they move between communities of practice. It explores how the landscape is shaped by the collective identities and competencies of the various organisations that constitute it. Finally, it reflects on a piece of action research in which members of the two case studies are brought together in a networking event aiming to facilitate shared learning.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by drawing together key themes and learning arising from each of the discussion chapters (Chapters 4-7), and highlights the key contributions of the thesis. It addresses the limitations and areas for further research. In the final remarks it comments on the future direction of research and of the case study organisations on which the thesis is based.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explores existing literature around community food initiatives and grassroots innovation, identifying areas for further research, before going on to develop a framework that aims to address those gaps. Section 2.2. begins by taking a broad view of how and where innovation has been identified within the community food sector, before going on to examine the influence of capacity in responding to challenges facing initiatives. It then turns to progress so far in the field of grassroots innovation (2.3.), identifying areas where understanding could be developed further through empirical engagement with community food initiatives. It then examines how a communities of practice approach can contribute to understanding of grassroots innovation (2.4.) before outlining a set of conceptual tools that form a framework that will be drawn throughout the empirical section of the thesis (2.5.).

2.2. Innovation and capacity in the community food sector

This section explores the way in which innovative potential within community food initiatives has been recognised and analysed in the literature. While there are examples particularly in more recent work that view food initiatives (of varying types) explicitly as grassroots innovation, this section also casts the net more widely to examine broader potential for innovation in the community food sector, even where the language of innovation is not explicitly drawn upon. As highlighted in the introductory chapter, for the purpose of this study innovation in the context of community food is defined broadly as the ability to develop bottom-up innovative solutions to local needs and challenges (drawing on Seyfang and Smith, 2007). While this will be unpacked further in section 2.3., the aim here is to explore the broad ranging framings, and multiplicity of ways in which community food initiatives can be seen to exhibit innovative potential. Through this it aims to develop a broader conceptualisation of what counts as innovation within the community food sector, as well as highlight key themes that might arise through empirical engagement with innovative community food initiatives. This will be used to interrogate the suitability of current grassroots innovation frameworks for understanding innovation in the context of community food, before the final part of the chapter works towards developing a framework which draws on a communities of practice approach.

Diversity

As highlighted by White and Stirling (2013, p. 844) in their study of communal growing in the UK, diversity across the spectrum of community initiatives is a key source of innovative potential. As well as reoccurring in literature as a key characteristic of community food initiatives, diversity is also noted by the Food Ethics Council (2017, p. 5) in their recent food census: “civil society work on food remains vital, vibrant and varied in addressing a host of major food and food-related issues”. Figure 3 shows the distribution of time spent on major food issues by local-scale civil society organisations covering a range of key themes (drawing on 2017 food census data, Food Ethics Council, 2017)⁷. Whilst this provides a broad overview of trends and distribution of civil society work on food, academic work on local and community food also points towards diversity in terms of broad ranging impacts and potential benefits. As such, initiatives can be framed in various different ways, for example in relation to sustainability, healthy eating, or in connecting people to food and land (Kirwan et al, 2013, Courtney, 2014; Holloway et al., 2007).

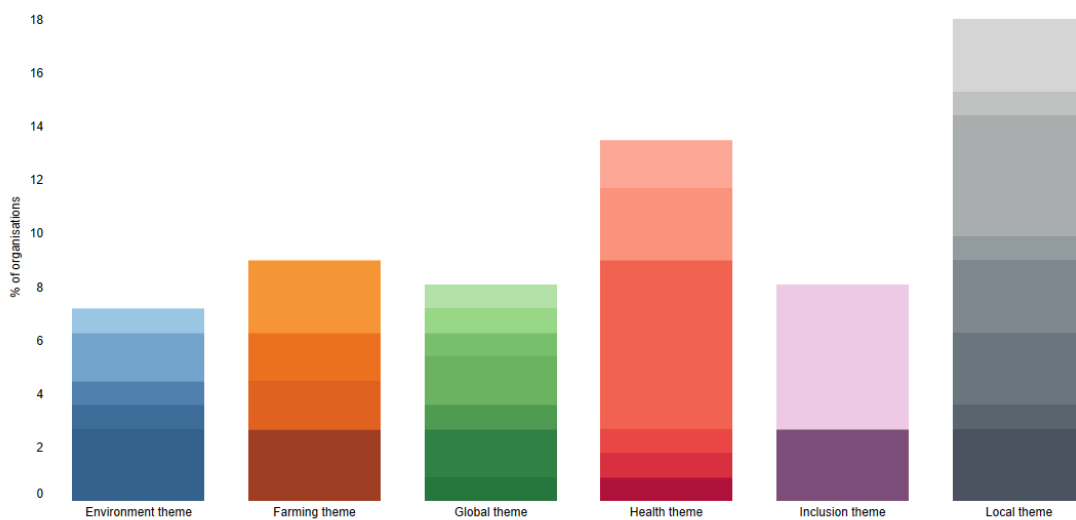


Fig. 3: Food Census data showing number of ‘local-scale’ organisations working on key themes⁸. (Food Ethics council, 2017; <http://www.foodissuescensus.org/> [accessed 2017])

⁸ Themes are broken down into the following ‘issues’, listed in order of time spend on each: **Environment** includes sustainable production, land use and ownership, sustainable consumption, recycling and biodiversity; **Farming** includes urban agriculture, farming and horticulture, organics and food processing and manufacturing; **Global** includes food security, rural economy, climate change, agricultural policy, fair trade, labour conditions and technology and innovation; **Health** includes food poverty and access, child health and nutrition, adult health and nutrition, infant health and nutrition, public health policy and food hygiene and safety; **Inclusion** includes community development and social inclusion; and **Local** includes

Diversity exists not only in the focus of activities of community food initiatives, but according to White and Stirling (2013, p. 838), in the broad ranging 'ends to which growing is seen as a means'. While food forms the central focus of engagement, it is often framed as a 'vehicle' to address a variety of social issues (Brunori, 2007; Connelly, Markey and Roseland, 2011; Christy *et al.*, 2013; Knezevic, Landman and Blay-palmer, 2013). The language of food as a 'means' or 'vehicle' is widely echoed in the literature, with community food being "more than just veg" (Kirwan *et al.*, 2013) or with there being "much else [being] grown in the process – including community, confidence, welfare and skills" (White and Stirling, 2013, p. 838). This indicates the potential of food to carry broad ranging meanings, and to act as a catalyst for change at the community level. Others recognise the social benefits and embeddedness of community food as contributing to their potential to stimulate community development and transformation (Brunori, 2007; Connelly, Markey and Roseland, 2011). Firth, Maye and Pearson (2011) frame community food initiatives as generators of social capital and community cohesion, going as far as to say that in the context of community gardens "what is grown is secondary to what else is achieved" (Holland, 2004, p. 303). Diversity arises then through the generation of local-level solutions that develop "according to the needs prevailing in the community concerned" (Holland, 2004, p. 303), with initiatives being unique to the places and communities in which they are embedded.

Along with broad social benefits, Glover (2004, p. 143) and Holland (2004) highlight the positive environmental impacts, with initiatives endeavouring to "renew their declining urban neighbourhoods and turn neighbourhood liabilities into assets". Guitart, Pickering and Byrne (2012) however, find in their analysis of literature on urban gardening that while the motivations and social outcomes are well documented, less so are the economic and environmental benefits (Holland, 2004). Church and Elster (2002) on the other hand point out that multiple initiatives across cities may yield significant aggregate environmental benefits. Others look towards the *indirect* environmental benefits of community food, through changing behaviours and attitudes in other aspects of people's lives and contributing towards the development of more sustainable practices (Middlemiss, 2011; Turner, 2011). Through encouraging individuals and communities to reconnect to the "sociocultural importance of food" (Turner, Henryks and Pearson, 2011, p. 489), community food initiatives have the potential to enable "development of embodied and

local food, waste, retail, seasonal food, catering, public procurement, marketing and transport and distribution.

embedded relationships to place, the food system and, consequently, [to] promoting sustainable urban living practices”.

Although food in the context of community initiatives is considered to be a vehicle for a broad range of aims, it is important not to overlook the inherent qualities of food through which it has the potential to shape our everyday lives and the ways in which we engage with one another. Firth, Maye and Pearson (2011) highlight the “unifying role” that food can play, with practices around food and the spaces in which they are performed in a community setting often being informal, social and “potentially very inclusive”. Delind (2006, p. 121) examines the often overlooked role of “the sensual, the emotional, the expressive” for maintaining “embodied relationships to food and to place”. Turner (2011) questions how these embodied relationships enable people to engage with the urban landscape and sustainable practices in different ways, pointing towards influence on practices beyond the borders of the community initiatives themselves. In his thesis on community gardening Tomkins (2014) highlights the texture of embodied practice, describing the ‘rhythm’ of food growing as an ongoing process connected to seasonality and temporarily, punctuated with moments of performance. Here it is not the social impacts or outcomes that are important, but the immeasurable creative, playful and material connections that generate “performative moments that are not just individual but neighbourly” (Tomkins, 2014, p. 194). How then can work on grassroots innovation go beyond outcomes, and take into account the textured and embodied experiences that underpin engagement with community food?

While the benefits and social impacts of community food initiatives are well-documented, so too are limitations, challenges and broad ranging critiques (Knezevic, Landman and Blay-palmer, 2013). Winter (2003) calls for greater interrogation of ‘embeddedness’ that is exhibited in the turns towards ‘local’ and ‘quality’ food, pointing to the risk of engendering ‘defensive localism’ (as opposed to the narratives of sustainable and alternative that local food is often framed within). Such critiques offer important points of reflection for local and community food, and call for questioning of assumptions not just around the ‘ends’ and ‘means’ of community initiatives (White and Stirling, 2013), but around the ways in which they are framed and the narratives they produce (Allen, 2010). Kilmer (2012) highlights the broadly echoed call for reflexivity in addressing such concerns, particularly those framed around issues of social justice arising from local and community food (Allen, 2008; Guthman, 2008; DuPuis, Harrison and Goodman, 2011). Whilst communities can be generative of capacity and connections, they can also be sources of exclusion, and reproducers of entrenched and inequitable ideologies (Allen, 2010). Others highlight the lack of demographic diversity within initiatives, and the imbalance of power in creating and controlling narratives around local food (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011).

Reflexivity is identified as central to addressing inequality and injustice in the context of community food (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005; Born and Purcell, 2006). Going a step further from Allen (2010, p. 305) who asks, “can we understand the limitations of local food systems while still working for change on the ground?”, the question arises as to how grassroots innovations can account for processes of reflexivity needed to challenge social injustice and inequity. In the contemporary context of austerity, with increasing levels of food poverty and reduced public service provision, there are a growing number of community food initiatives focusing on tackling these issues⁹ (Food Ethics Council, 2017).

While there is clearly innovative potential in developing locally embedded solutions to sustainability and social justice at the community level, how far can initiatives contribute to broader scale change given their context specific nature? Kirwan and Maye (2013, pp. 2, 25) assesses the overlooked potential of local food to contribute to food security in ways that “encompass the needs of communities”, calling for a reframing of food security “in more holistic, inclusive, dynamic and diversity-receptive terms”. Others point to the role of community in food initiatives in generating more democratic forms of participation and contributing to food citizenship (Glover, Shiner and Parry, 2005; Baker, 2013). Holland (2004, p. 304) goes as far as to say that “community gardens can provide a model of sustainability in action” and highlights the need for support at the policy level. The next section examines how at such challenges have been approached at the broader landscape level.

Engagement at the System Level

While much work on community food focuses on processes within the initiatives themselves, or on direct impacts on participants and local communities, there is also growing recognition of the role of landscape or system level connections and processes in bringing about social change. The Food Ethics Council (2017) census shows that collaboration and development of partnerships is a growing focus for civil society organisations, with recommendations being made for funding to be targeted in this area. In their study of communal growing initiatives, White and Stirling (2013), point to role that intermediary organisations play in supporting small scale projects and organisations, highlighting the importance of the broader networks of which they are part. Further to this, underlying the diversity of ends to which food and growing can be a means, they highlight the broad range of supporting organisations “as an institutional reflection of the range of normative perspectives and practices towards which growing initiatives can contribute –

⁹ When comparing 2011 and 2017 census data there is a significant increase in both the number of organisations, and their time and resource input into food issues relating to health and inclusion, including food poverty, food access, and nutrition.

health, education, community building, disability support, training, therapy, Sustainable and secure food systems, organic and permaculture techniques, wildlife” (White and Stirling, 2013, p. 839). While most studies of communal gardening focus on processes within the community, this is an important step forwards in understanding how communities and the innovation they generate is embedded in and contributes to broader systems of practice.

Focus has increasingly been placed on the role of urban food planning at the city level (Feenstra, 1997; Morgan, 2013; Hardman and Larkman, 2014). Urban food strategies present a way of generating context specific place-base solutions to sustainable food challenges, whilst integrating diverse actors from across the local food system (Moragues *et al.*, 2013). Carey (2013) uses the development of Bristol’s food charter to examine the ways in which a city can influence the broader food system, central to which is the role of cross-sector partnerships in building robust and resilient strategies. However, a key challenge arises in incorporating the diverse voluntary sector in a way that promotes innovation and ensures collaboration; and that ensures diversity, creativity and manages vulnerabilities, not least those related to an increasingly resource constrained environment.

Feenstra (2002) highlights the need to create and protect social, political, intellectual and economic spaces in order to enable sustainable community food initiatives to develop and thrive. It is within such spaces that those working collaboratively to develop grassroots community based approaches towards sustainable food systems are able to experiment with and cultivate diverse innovative practices. However, many challenges persist, with White and Stirling (2013, p. 843) highlighting the chronic lack of funding as a crucial issue facing intermediary organisations working towards developing ‘sustainable food systems’ and ‘more supportive operating environments’ for community food initiatives. Building on this further, the next section assesses some of the limitations to innovation through the lens of ‘capacity’.

Linking Innovation and Capacity

While the innovative potential of community food initiatives is well documented, they do not exist without challenges. In their civil society food census, the Food Ethics Council (2017, p. 5) point out that while work on food is “vibrant, vital and varied”, it is also “vulnerable, relying on limited and irregular funding, and on the individual passion, commitment and goodwill of thousands of people”. Such challenges are well covered in the literature, particularly in relation to funding and management of volunteers. White and Stirling (2013, p. 389) examine the

requirements of ‘sustainability’¹⁰ in innovative communal growing projects, recognising that benefits and diffusion rely on the maintenance of the initiative itself: “If communal growing activities are to contribute meaningfully to broader shifts towards Sustainability, then the projects and the organisations that support them must survive, evolve and thrive”. The ability of community food initiatives to contribute to the development of Sustainable practices therefore, requires them to be themselves sustainable.

In their seminal paper on grassroots innovation, Seyfang and Smith (2007) also recognise the challenges facing initiatives, highlighting the centrality of survival (as opposed to development) as the focus of 90% of activities within organisations. At the same time, the ongoing demand for novelty means that survival also relies on ongoing innovation, creating a tension between the need to innovate and the need to maintain stability. Kirwan *et al.* (2013) highlight that the emphasis for new funders is often on novel rather than established practice, creating a need for initiatives to constantly reframe and respond to funding programmes. As innovation is inherently risky and experimental, Seyfang and Smith (2007) also highlight the needs for space for failure, from which valuable learning can be generated. These claims are supported by the Food Ethics Council census, which suggests that resources scarcity and competition meant that organisations struggled to focus on core “foundational activities”, instead taking a short term project approach, leading to potential burnout (Food Ethics Council, 2017, p. 8). Short term projects based on short term funding can undermine attempts to generate more sustainable long term projects and deeper change within the food system. White and Stirling (2013, p. 839) highlight the inherently instable nature of innovations as new configurations that are “subject to demanding forms of evolution and learning over time.” They call for further understanding of dynamics and responses within the niche to pressures, highlighting the tension between the ongoing demand for novelty, and the need to sustain the basis on which innovation is developed.

In order to develop resilient community initiatives a number of barriers need to be addressed. Mount *et al.* (2013) highlight the overarching challenges associated with reliance on insecure and scarce funding. White and Stirling (2013, p. 389) also examine a number of long-term ‘pressures’ and short-term ‘shocks’, which call for ongoing reflection and strategic governance of community food initiatives. These include: “Pressures framed as shocks [...]: energy levels in the group, volunteers leaving, funding (both its loss, application and sometimes reward), availability of land, vandalism, and interruptions to securely tenured land. Pressures framed as

¹⁰ Note the differentiation between ‘sustainability’ and ‘Sustainability’: the lower-case version referring longevity and ability to be maintained over time, and the latter referring the Brundtland Report (1987) definition in relation to Sustainable Development.

stresses included funding and its management, land access and conflict in groups, in addition to the availability of skills” (White and Stirling, 2013, p. 389). This thesis aims to contribute to understanding of the complex dynamics of how community food initiatives negotiate such broad ranging pressures and shocks, in order to ensure long term stability and resilience that underpins innovation.

Further to this, Mount *et al.* (2013) also comment on the way insecure funding can lead to competition between local food actors, creating a significant barrier to collaboration and connection across the city/regional scale. Funding therefore doesn't just influence capacity directly, but influences interactions between organisations at a range of scales. Foster-Fishman *et al.* (2001) discuss the challenges of creating 'community coalitions' or 'multi-stakeholder' collaborations as a way to increase capacity and reduce competition between different actors. They conceptualise the 'collaborative capacity' needed to achieve this, which is underpinned by different types of capacity within organisations (including member capacity, organisational capacity, capacity to develop internal and external relations, and programmatic capacity).

Here, capacity provides a useful framing for understanding the resources and capabilities that community food initiatives need to survive and innovate in complex landscapes. In order for community food initiatives to exist, function and develop, the communities in which they are situated and the individuals that take part need to be able to draw upon various resources, skills and abilities: from personal attributes required for individuals to participate, to organisational structures, resources and values. The capacities available and those that are required are highly diverse and dependent on the community context and the particular set of needs that the initiative aims to fulfil, as well as the motivations and understanding of those participating. Using capacity as a way of thinking about what people and organisations are able to do allows consideration of both the strengths and weakness of different communities, and the limits as well as potential of initiatives can be explored.

Capacity has been conceptualised in a multiplicity of different ways and is often broken down into a number of constitutive elements, which vary between frameworks and approaches. Middlemiss and Parrish (2010), develop understanding of 'community capacity', describing four categories of capacity: personal, organisational, infrastructural and cultural to conceptualise the ability of grassroots initiatives to catalyse change towards low carbon lifestyles and fulfilment of ecological responsibilities. Kirwan *et al.*, (2014) describe the outcomes and outputs of local food initiatives in terms of personal, material and cultural capacities. As local food initiatives draw upon a wide range of assets, and reveal a diverse range of outcomes, and at different scales, the

way capacities are utilised and developed is diverse. As such, different capacities are overlapping and interconnected (as demonstrated in the table below).

Type of Capacity	Attributes
Personal capacities	Personal development, skills, knowledge, confidence, empowerment, democracy.
Organisational capacities	Ability to manage/function (often reliance on skilled individuals), develop partnerships and networks, time, resources, expertise, leadership, communication.
Material Capacities	Often referring to tangible assets or infrastructure, such as land, tools, but ranging to members, events, and at a broader scale structures of provision.
Cultural capacities	Values, understandings and experiences, identification with particular framings, shared histories and background

Table 2: Overview of types of capacity with community food initiatives

Middlemiss and Parrish (2010) describe how rather than being a stationary resource, capacities are dynamic, developing along with the grassroots initiatives that draw upon them. This raises the question not only of what capacities are required to bring about change from a grassroots perspective, but how these capacities evolve and interact over time. Furthermore, how are they influenced by interaction at broader scales, as initiatives increasingly network and build partnerships and collaborations. Walker (2013) highlights the importance of paying attention to instances where a lack of capacity leads to failure, in order to ensure consideration of issues of social inequality and injustice. Middlemiss and Parrish (2010) highlight how disadvantaged communities might draw on their strengths to compensate for, or to develop, capacities that may have initially been limited. In approaching the case studies I aim to examine how the challenges and limitations they face influence capacity, and in turn how different capacities are assembled in negotiating these challenges.

2.3. Framework Development I: Grassroots Innovation

Having outlined the potential of community food initiatives as sources of innovation, as well as the challenges they face in relation to generating and maintaining the capacities that underpin their activities, this section turns to the literature on Grassroots Innovation. It examines progress so far and points towards the ways in which a communities of practice approach could further understanding in this relatively new and developing field.

Much work on innovation for sustainability within the context of civil society refers a seminal paper by Seyfang and Smith (2007), in which they describe grassroots innovation as: “innovative networks of activists and organisations that lead bottom-up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved”. Martiskainen (2017, p. 78) highlights a key distinction of grassroots innovation (from market-based innovation) in that it is characterised by motivation for “creating social good” and constitute “new social experiments”.

Work on grassroots innovation so far has been broad-ranging in focus, investigating a range of empirical topics. As well as work on community food (Seyfang, 2007; White and Stirling, 2013), grassroots innovation literature has covered areas such as community energy (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2013), upcycling, alternative economies (Martin, Upham and Budd, 2015), community water and sanitation (Smith, Fressoli and Thomas, 2014), and community currencies (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2013). Such topics have been explored from a range of different angles, taking into account various factors “such as local traditions, pre-existing practices, voluntary effort, interpersonal networks and community cohesion [all of which] are important for the success of grassroots innovations” (Martiskainen, 2017, pp. 78–79; including for example: Ornetzeder and Rohracher, 2013; Longhurst, 2014; Seyfang *et al.*, 2014).

As such, Grassroots innovations are well recognised for their broad potential to contribute to sustainable development in a number of ways. However, significant challenges have been noted in ‘scaling up’ or ‘diffusing’ grassroots innovations in order to influence mainstream systems. Grassroots innovations literature arose from work on socio-technical transitions (e.g. Geels, 2002, 2010), which has influenced the approach to such challenges, leading to the generation of strategies such as Strategic Niche Management (Schot and Geels, 2008) and proactive niche protection (Smith and Raven, 2012). Work using a Strategic Niche Management framework typically applies and develops lessons learnt in the context of technical innovation, to grassroots innovation in a civil society context (e.g. Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). From this perspective, processes for developing innovative niches focus on managing expectations, promoting social networking, and facilitating learning (Raven, van den Bosch and Weterings, 2010). In relation to the diffusion of grassroots innovation beyond the small scale, three key processes are identified including: the *replication* of initiatives producing aggregative change, the *scaling-up* of initiatives to increase their participation and influence, and the *translation* of niche ideas into mainstream settings (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012; Maye, 2016, p. 5). However, as Smith and Seyfang (2013, pp. 8–9) point out, such tools have proven inadequate in their application to complex civil society arenas as they “neither tell the whole story nor operate as directionally as early niche models predict”.

Seyfang and Smith (2007) conceptualise this in relation to 'intrinsic' challenges and challenges associated with 'diffusion'. While the previous section has touched on what might be considered 'intrinsic' challenges facing community food initiatives, highlighting the capacities that underlie their ongoing ability to survive, challenges around 'diffusion' describe the difficulties faced by initiatives as they attempt to exert influence beyond their local contexts in accordance with aims centred on broader-scale change. Such challenges include difficulties in communicating and translating ideas beyond the locality whilst maintaining relevance, and attempting to find project based solutions whilst working within structures than they are trying to change (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2013). Smith and Seyfang (2013, p. 3) draw upon Smith, Fressoli and Thomas (2014) to identify three major conflicts facing initiatives as they attempt to:

- “ • Attend to local specificity and contexts yet seek wide-spread diffusion;
- Be appropriate to existing situations that they frequently wish to transform;
- Work with project-based approaches to problems whose root causes requires strategic structural changes in political, social and economic relations.”

While these challenges describe the inherent difficulties facing organisations, others have called for a more nuanced approach, with plural understanding of 'transitions' and 'sustainability' as introduced in chapter 1. Rather than focusing singly on scaling-up or replication, there is increasing understanding of the need to recognise and value the diversity of solutions arising from local knowledge as part of grassroots innovation. This thesis therefore recognises Stirling's (2011) call for a shift towards focus on plural 'transformations' characterised by multiplicity.

Building further on this, recent work on Grassroots Innovation Movements recognises their potential to “provide a source of reflexivity in society, by pointing to the contention and plurality involved in sustainable developments and opening up more spaces for doing the politics of alternative sustainabilities” (Smith *et al.*, 2017, p. 6). Following recent developments in Grassroots Innovation literature, focus has shifted from following trajectories of single innovative niches, to examine broader networks of innovations. Smith *et al.* (2017, p. 3) build on work by Seyfang and Smith (2007), to articulate a slightly broader definition that represents Grassroots Innovation Movements as: “networks of activists, development workers, community groups and neighbours [that] have been working with people to generate bottom-up solutions for sustainable developments; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved; and where those communities have control over the processes involved and the outcomes”. Here the focus is on the interrelations between groups working towards solutions, as well as on ownership and empowerment of those communities. Part of this involves co-ordinating activity, developing discourse, and mobilising resources, and indicates some of the ways in which Grassroots Innovations, as movements, interact with the

broader systems of which they are part. This thesis aims to contribute to this direction, by placing emphasis on and furthering understanding of the networked relations in which community food initiatives are embedded.

Recent work on Grassroots Innovation Movements not only constitutes a shift in analytical scale, but also emphasises the value of local production of ideas, meaning and knowledge. Smith *et al.* (2017, p. 17) draw on Eyerman and Jamison (1991) to highlight the role of social movements as producers of knowledge that draw ideas from their situated contexts and transform them into action. They are also presented as reflexive “social actors that learn by doing”, and engage in “experimentation for new ideas, forms of organization, and knowledge” (Smith *et al.*, 2017, p. 17). As will be explored in the next section, the language used here resonates with understandings generated through a communities of practice approach. This connection will be developed further throughout the thesis as a part of a framework for examining the dynamics of social learning within and between grassroots innovations.

In light of recent developments towards more plural and nuanced understandings of grassroots innovations and the ways in which they interact as part of broader networks and systems, there have been calls for more practice based approaches that facilitate understanding of processes and dynamics (e.g. Hargreaves, Longhurst and Seyfang, 2013). Seyfang and Haxeltine (2012, p. 381) for instance, call for developing understanding through “a fuller appreciation of the importance of internal niche processes, by understanding the important role of identity and group formation, and by resolving how social practices change in grassroots innovations”. This call is echoed by Maye (2016, p. 16) and by Firth, Maye and Pearson (2011) who highlight the potential of communities of practice approach specifically, to further understanding of the role of capacity building, identity and learning in community food initiatives. Bradbury and Middlemiss (2015) also explore the potential of a communities of practice approach for understanding learning in sustainable communities. The next section outlines how I engage with and develop a communities of practice approach to address the calls made for more nuanced, practiced based understandings of grassroots innovation, that focuses on social learning and the ways in which it (re)configures practice.

2.4. Framework Development II: Bringing in a Communities of Practice approach

Introduction

Having outlined current understanding and areas for further research in community food and Grassroots Innovation literature, this section turns towards the benefits and challenges of a communities of practice approach. It begins by introducing the theory and its background and development, before examining the ways it has been used to conceptualise innovation in the literature so far. The final part of the chapter then draws out key concepts that will be employed as part of a framework for analysing innovation in the context of grassroots, community food initiatives.

Background

The concept of communities of practice was first introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) as part of a theory of learning in which learning is considered fundamentally social and situated in practice. Here, the community provides the context for 'legitimate peripheral participation', which describes the processes of social learning through which newcomers progress towards full membership of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). They define a community of practice as "a system of relationships between people, activities, and the world; developing with time, and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Wenger (1998) later developed the concept further, moving away from focus on individual progression towards collective processes and the mutual constitution of practice and community. According to (Wenger, 2006, p. 1): "Communities of Practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour,[...] who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly".

Wenger (1998) identifies three dimensions through which practice acts as a source of coherence for Community: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Mutual engagement describes the process of working together within a community, negotiating meaning, and drawing upon what we and others, know (Wenger, 1998, p. 76). Building on mutual engagement, a community's joint enterprise is the "negotiated response to their situation", towards which they work together (Wenger, 1998, p. 77). Finally, shared repertoire describes the broad ranging resources, histories, meanings that have developed throughout the existence of the community and which are embedded in its practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). Being part of a community of practice, therefore, requires engagement with that community through direct participation, towards collectively negotiated goals to which members are accountable,

whilst drawing upon and developing a shared set of resources (including language, artefacts, tools and histories). These dimensions will be reviewed further in the framework section of the chapter and will be drawn upon throughout the empirical analysis.

Central to Wenger's theory is the negotiation of meaning¹¹ within communities of practice, through which our engagement with the world is rendered meaningful. For Wenger (1998, p. 52), "practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life" and the "the social production of meaning is the relevant level of analysis for talking about practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 49). Delving into this concept further, for Wenger 'meaning' is located in a process of ongoing negotiation between two constituent processes which he calls *Participation* and *Reification*. Participation describes the active social formation of our experiences within the world, whereas reification is "the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into "thingness"". The interaction of these two processes creates "points of focus around which negotiation of meaning becomes organized" (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). Through this, over time communities of practice develop shared histories, and trajectories of learning, which form part of the "historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do" (Wenger, 1998, p. 47).

While participation and reification are sources of continuity around which meaning can be negotiated, they also create discontinuity and boundaries excluding those outside from engaging in this process of negotiation. Whereas some boundaries may be reified- for example by having formal membership, others exist as more subtle barriers to participation- for example engagement being prevented by lack of familiarity with shared language or history. The community of practice is therefore "the source of its own boundaries through all three dimensions" of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998; 113).

Competence is defined within the community of practice and in relation to the identities of individual members as they are engaged to different extents, have different roles, and different trajectories moving within and between communities of practice over time. Competence is not about gaining formal knowledge, but is about the embodied ability to participate as a member of the community, and be 'encultured' in practice (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989). Put

¹¹ Wenger (1998, p. 53) uses the term 'negotiation of meaning' to "characterize the process by which we experience the world and our engagement in it as meaningful". Meaning "is not pre-existing but neither is it simply made up. Negotiated meaning is at once both historical and dynamic, contextual and unique" (1998, p. 54).

succinctly by Brown and Duguid (1991, p. 48), “the central issue in learning is becoming a practitioner not learning about practice”.

While work on communities of practice has been criticised for its tendency to focus on processes within single communities of practice, recent work re-focuses on the interrelation of communities of practice at the landscape level (Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2015). As Wenger (1998, p. 103) himself points out “communities of practice cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the world, or understood independently of other practices. Their various enterprises are closely interconnected. Their members and their artefacts are not theirs alone. Their histories are not just internal; they are histories of articulation with the rest of the world.” A key theme that will be developed in the framework section and throughout the thesis therefore, is the ways in which innovation can be understood in relation to interaction at the landscape level.

Theories of Social Practice

Before going on to examine the potential of communities of practice theory for understanding innovation, I turn briefly to social practice theory more broadly. An established critique of work on communities of practice is that it has focused predominantly on ‘community’ over ‘practice’ (Duguid, 2005; Fuller, 2007)¹². Principles of social practice theory provided an important starting point for the thesis, and by maintaining an awareness of the turn to practice as an epistemological approach, it attempts to avoid reproducing this imbalance. While there is not scope to give an exhaustive or even representative review of the literature on practice theory, this section gives a brief background into some of the key ideas and principles that have informed and provided a background for the thesis. It also comments on some of the intersections between communities of practice theory and understanding of social practice more broadly.

The diversity of theoretical positions within theories of social practice is brought to light in Schatzki *et al.*'s (2001) seminal collection of essays entitled '*The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*'. Although Schatzki (2001, p. 11) highlights that there may be “no unified practice approach”, Reckwitz (2002, p. 244) attempts to characterise an “ideal type of practice theory”, by identifying common features from across the different theoretical standpoints. He broadly describes practices as being formed of the following common, interconnected elements: “forms

¹² To the extent that Gherardi calls for a move from ‘Communities of Practice’ to ‘Practices of a Community’, in order to reflect wider understanding of its position within practice-based studies (Gherardi, 2009a, p. 514).

of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). These elements are brought together in individual 'performances' of practice, which carried out across time and space, form a practice- as- entity.

Practice Theory offers an understanding of the social as embedded in everyday life, understood through routinised forms of behaviour (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 244), and in "embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 3). While stability and routine, are common focuses of practice theory, Feldman and Orlikowski (2011, pp. 5, 10) contend that "practice theory enables scholars to theorize the dynamic constitution of dualities", and that stability and change are therefore "different outcomes of the same dynamic rather than different dynamics". They develop this further to say that "change [...] may be engaged in order to promote stability, and stability may be essential to bringing about change" (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011, p. 10).

The analytical distinction between practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance is echoed in organisational studies by Brown and Duguid (1991), who differentiate between canonical espoused practice, and non-canonical actual practice as negotiated by communities of practice. This differentiation between entity and performance is useful in understanding how 'novel combinations' of elements are enacted and reproduced (Pantzar and Shove, 2010; Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). Cox (2012, p. 181) also draws parallels to communities of practice theory in recognising that by "participating in a practice, it can be renegotiated or changed" and that "adoption of a practice in a new context involves its reinvention".

Cox (2012, p. 180) attempts to situate communities of practice within the broader 'turn to practice', highlighting that Wenger's (1998) approach is "consistent with the practice approach in general, yet writing of 'communities' immediately focuses on the social group that can form through common active participation in a practice." He cites Wenger (1998, p. 47) directly, stating that practice is "doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do". He also highlights that whereas learning is rarely mentioned in practice theory in general, for Wenger it is a driving force of practice, being "situated, negotiated, emergent and embedded" (Gherardi, 2009b, p. 357).

Gherardi (2009a) although adding to the call for a greater focus on 'practice' over 'community', argues that communities of practice theory has been instrumental in the 'turn to practice' in organisational studies, introducing key ideas around 'the situatedness and sociality of practices; the central importance of practical know-how for work; the existence of collective identities;

[and] the importance of learning processes within a community of practitioners' (Gherardi, 2009a, p. 267). Nicolini *et al.*, (2003) also comment on the use of practice based approaches in organisational studies, echoing Schatzki (2001) in recognising that although there is commonality in focus on 'being' and 'doing', there is no uniform practice-based approach. Despite being widely cited in communities of practice literature, Corradi, Gherardi and Verzelloni (2008, p. 18) argue that references to the 'practice turn' are related to a tendency towards joining what they term 'the practice band-wagon', highlighting that Schatzki's framing "somewhat neglected the activity of practitioners within a context of interaction". Despite sharing common themes and language, communities of practice is therefore distinct in terms of its focus on situated interaction and experience, and its focus on the mutual constitution of community and practice.

Communities of Practice and Innovation

Having given a brief introduction to communities of practice and social practice theory more broadly, I now turn to the conceptualisation of innovation within the communities of practice literature. So far, although having been broadly applied, focus on innovation has largely been in organisational and managerial contexts, with communities of practice having been used both analytically, and as a tool for knowledge management within organisations (Hildreth and Kimble, 2004; Amin and Roberts, 2008). Although Wenger *et al.* (2002) point to the potential for utilisation of a communities of practice approach to meet societal challenges within the civil society arena, there appears to have been minimal engagement with the theory in the context of grassroots social innovation. This section critically examines some of the key insights into innovation in the literature, before moving onto developing a framework for analysing innovation in the context of community food initiatives.

A key contribution of communities of practice theory to organisational studies has been through the development of understanding and tools to promote knowledge sharing and innovation within the context of organisations (Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson, 2002, p. 477). Justesen (2004, p. 82) goes as far as to claim that communities of practice are a "natural unit of analysis for a better understanding of innovation and innovative practice within organizations". Through looking at the relationship between learning and innovation, Hildreth and Kimble (2004) examine some of the processes through which this potential has become apparent. In the diagram (Fig. 4) below, Justesen (2004) differentiates between learning practice, which occurs on the individual level within the community and within an established domain of competence; and innovation practice which effects the regime of competence. Here innovation means generating a recognisable influence beyond the community of practice, through second order

learning which creates or transforms regimes of competence. The diagram also illustrates the interconnected process between learning within the regime and innovation transforming the regime.

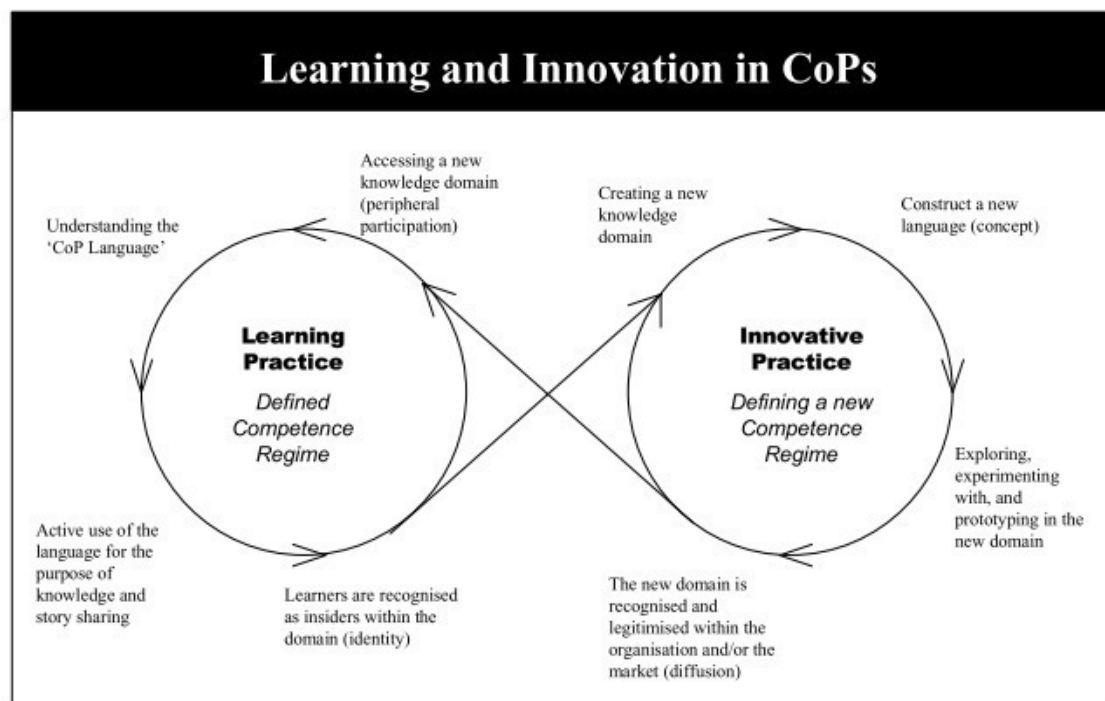


Fig. 4: 'Learning and Innovation in Communities of Practice (Justesen, 2004, p. 84)

Implicit within the concept of Innovation is not only the potential for generating new ideas, but the ability of those ideas to lead to a change in practice, or as Justesen (2004) describes it, the 'successful exploitation and diffusion' of learning. The extent to which learning has the potential to lead to innovation varies. Brown and Duguid (1991, p. 53) describe how "innovating and learning in daily activity lie at one end of a continuum of innovating practices that stretches to radical innovation cultivated [...] at the far end". They describe how innovation is about the development of new 'conceptual lenses' with which to view the world, and through which to make sense of your own place in it. For them, innovation is about re-evaluating, re-adjusting, re-framing and creating new meaning. The process of negotiation within communities of practice is 'inherently innovative' as changing membership and changing environment create potential sources of innovation: "as newcomers replace old timers and as the demands of practice force the community to revise its relationship to its environment" (Brown and Duguid, 2011, p. 112). Innovation is part of adaptation and evolution, through "the reiteration of [...] 'doing' within a social context of interaction" practices are reproduced "to generate a dynamic of innovation in repetition" (Corradi, Gherardi and Verzelloni, 2008, p. 19).

Roberts (2006, p. 629) and others (Amin and Roberts, 2006) however contend that "while communities of practice may support the accumulation of incremental knowledge

developments, they may reduce the scope for radical innovation". He makes an important contribution in warning against positive assumptions of progressive learning and argues that communities of practice can equally be static, rejecting knowledge that challenges the identity and practices of the community, and reinforcing preferences and path-dependence. Communities of practice can therefore, as Wenger (1998) himself points out, be resistant to change and prohibitive of innovation. Justesen (2004, p. 84) distinguishes between incremental innovation- where "the competence regime of the domain is [...] redefined and renegotiated"; and radical innovation- "when a completely new knowledge domain is created [...], followed by the social construction of a new competence regime". Innovation is not only built on learning, but creates a need for it as well, meaning that "the construction of new knowledge domains (innovation) should therefore be illustrated as an iterative process between the practice of innovation and the practice of learning" (Justesen, 2004, p. 84).

For some, the focus on incremental innovation within communities overlooks the more radical potential created by interaction between communities across boundaries. Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson (2002, p. 477) argue that "radical innovations frequently occur at the interstices across communities of practice". They support Wenger (1998) in claiming that *boundaries* simultaneously facilitate and constrain innovation and provide important sites of learning through exposure to new regimes of competence and practices (Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson, 2002). Maye (2016) also highlights the innovative potential of boundaries through his study the permaculture movement as a radical niche innovation, highlighting the challenges of balancing internal negotiation and identity with work across boundaries.

While recognition of innovative potential has led to development of understanding of learning and innovation within organisational setting, it has also lead to critiques that communities of practice theory has departed from its original theoretical underpinnings and intentions. Language in relation to communities of practice in this body of work often focuses on how communities can be exploited, managed, cultivated or structured by the organisations within which the communities are a part. Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson (2002) argue that for many, understanding of communities of practice is instrumental with predominant focus on control and management, overlooking the original conceptions and potential of communities as informal, spontaneous and autonomous. Amin and Roberts, (2008, p. 354) describe the desire in management to "exploit the potential for creativity and innovation offered by [communities of practice], ever wishful of articulating and harnessing the intangible, the tacit, and the practiced" and argue against formulaic use of communities of practice theory.

However, in the context of grassroots community initiatives, is an instrumental and managerial view of innovation that moves away from the organic and informal nature of community of practice, potentially restricting understanding of innovation? Following (Brown and Duguid, 1991, 2001) potential for innovation arises out of the emergent, unbounded and fluid nature of community, and the ways in which people are engaged in diverse ways. They are “continuously doing, forging their own and their community’s identity in their own terms so that they can break out of the restrictive hold of formal descriptions of practice” (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p. 52). How then does conception of innovation within a grassroots setting differ to that in more formal organisations on which much of the literature is based.

As discussed earlier in relation to community food and grassroots innovation literature, the concept of diversity plays a key role in the development of innovative potential. Justesen (2004, p. 79) introduces the term ‘Innoversity’ in a communities of practice approach, to describe the role of diversity in fostering innovation within the organisational work setting. She draws on Wenger (1998) who claims that “what makes engagement in practice possible and productive is as much a matter of diversity as it is a matter of homogeneity” (Wenger, 1998, p. 75). Justesen claims that most studies (at least in formal organisational settings) have so far have focused on homogenous (but coherent) communities, and that increasing diversity (and thus risking compromising coherence) within communities can increase innovative potential. What role then does diversity in play within the context of grassroots communities, and in what ways does diversity of membership promote (or limit) innovation?

Implicit in much of the discussion of innovation above is the capacity of communities of practice to facilitate change in practice, not just within but beyond the context of the community. Diffusion of knowledge in communities of practice theory is often considered within the organisational context, looking at how communities of practice, through local insight and experimentation, develop, legitimise, and disseminate practice at the inter- and intra-organisational levels (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson, 2002). Drawing on Wenger (1998), the processes and conceptual tools for understand how practice and elements of it can travel across boundaries will be discussed further in the framework section (2.5) of the Chapter.

Limitations and Challenges

While communities of practice theory clearly has potential for facilitating understanding of innovation, its limitations have been well explored and well documented (Roberts, 2006). Kerno (2008) argues that overwhelming focus on successful examples of communities of practice has led to problematisation of the term ‘community’ as generating overly positive connotations.

Related to its broad application and development, there is also criticism that the term communities of practice is too loose and vaguely applied. Some call for redefinition or categorisation of the concept, arguing that its ambiguity, with all manner of communities assembled under a single homogenous term, limits its usefulness as analytical tool (Handley *et al.*, 2006; Amin and Roberts, 2008).

Another key critique of communities of practice theory has been a lack of focus, or apparent lack of capacity to deal with issues of power (Roberts, 2006) both within communities of practice and in terms of the broader structures through which power imbalances can be (re)produced. Wenger (2010) however claims that considerations of power are inherent to social learning, through the ways in which identities and claims to competence are negotiated within and between communities of practice. Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson (2002) highlight that particularly in instrumental uses of the theory within organisations, power in relation to the hierarchical structure of organisations can be overlooked, shifting control towards top-down management of communities of practice that are generated from the bottom-up.

As has been noted, lessons about innovation from a formal organisation context might apply in different ways, or fail to account for challenges presented in the grassroots civil society arena. This however provides an opportunity to critically contribute to understanding in the field of communities of practice, through examining the potential and challenges that arise through application in grassroots community food initiatives.

Turning to Landscapes of Practice

There has been a recent shift in work on Communities of Practice towards a focus on learning in complex landscapes of practice (Wenger, 2010; Omidvar and Kislov, 2014). Although the idea of landscapes of practice are introduced in Wenger (1998), in their most recent book Wenger-Trayner *et al.* (2015) present a more in-depth and extensive examination of 'Learning in landscapes of practice'. They define a 'Landscape of Practice' as a "complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them", which "constitute[s] a complex social body of knowledge" (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015a, pp. 13, 15). The landscape is dynamic, as communities of practice "arise and disappear, evolve, merge, split, compete with or complement each other, ignore or engage the other" (2015a, p. 15). Individuals are viewed as multi-members and negotiate their identities accordingly. Boundary processes and challenges of working across communities of practice are central to learning and part of negotiation of meaning and practice from one community to the next (Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2015, p. 82).

Individuals are conceptualised as navigating the landscape, and engaging and identifying with multiple communities of practice in different ways. The boundaries between communities represent discontinuity between perceived competence, values and meaning (all of which are locally negotiated), making them places of potential conflict and misunderstanding, but at the same time places of learning and innovation. The concept of 'knowledgeability' is introduced to describe the ability to identify with a multiplicity of practices across the landscape (without needing to be competent or accountable to those practices) (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015a). The landscape is also political, with "no guarantee that a successful claim to competence inside a community will translate into a claim to 'knowledge' beyond the community where it is effective" (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015a, p. 15). Ability to define competence therefore depends on the power relations between communities of practice and how these relations are negotiated in practice. Through incorporating understanding of this landscape dynamic, the thesis aims to add a further dimension to understanding of grassroots innovations and the way in which they work to connect across and reconfigure landscapes of practice.

In developing their concept of landscapes of practice, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015b, p. 97) introduce 'system conveners' to describe those who "act to reconfigure the landscape by forging new learning partnerships across traditional boundaries". Taking the concept a step further, they describe how systems conveners "cultivate [...] communities of practice – not in the simple sense of having the same practices, but in the more complex sense of forming heterogeneous learning partnerships to transform existing practices or create new practices" (2015b, p. 97).

While there is clear potential presented by system convening at the landscape level, there are obvious challenges, not least in bringing together communities with (potentially competing) practices, regimes of competencies, repertoires, and histories. There are likely to be power inequalities at multiple levels and struggles to define and control what counts as competence, and how that translates to institutions and structures. There are also challenges in attempting to navigate and negotiate shared enterprise in an ever-shifting landscape. Systems conveners must strike a balance, with "the art of system convening [being] to sustain a consistent trajectory for a complex endeavour amidst all these changing and unpredictable circumstances" (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015b, p. 105).

With an increasing focus on collaboration and networking within the community food sector, the concept of systems conveners provides a useful tool for analysing how these networks can be built and how relations between communities of practice are negotiated on an inter-personal

level. For Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015b, p. 112) convenors are “social innovators paving the way for solving complex problems, driven by a certainty that much can be achieved if they can just bring the right combination of people to the table”. Through engagement with the case study organisations identified and their broader networks, the thesis will interrogate this concept further, providing insight into its application within the grassroots civil-society sector.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

Introduction

This section will outline the conceptual tools that a communities of practice approach provides, and how these can be used in understanding innovation in the context of grassroots community food initiatives. It draws predominantly on Wenger (1998) for understanding of processes around practice and identity within communities; and on more recent works including Wenger-Trayner *et al* (2015), for conceptualising processes of interaction at the landscape level. The section highlights key concepts that will be critically employed and further developed through analysis and discussion in the empirical chapters. I give a basic description of each, providing a reference point for empirical discussion which will draw on and develop the framework further. The concepts are grouped into 5 key themes: dimensions of practice; identities and competencies; trajectories and shared histories; boundaries; and landscape, each of which are explored further below.

1. Dimensions of Practice

The three dimensions through which practice is a property and source of coherence of community form a central part of the analysis. They are distinct but mutually constitutive and should therefore be viewed as a whole rather than as separate parts of a community of practice.

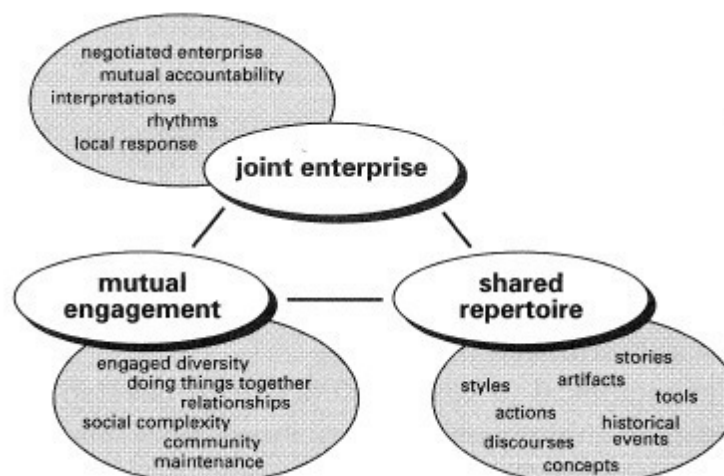


Fig. 5: *Dimensions of practice as the property of a community (Wenger 1998, p. 73)*

1.) Mutual Engagement

“Practice resides in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement by which they can do whatever they do. [...] Membership in a community of practice is therefore a matter of mutual engagement. That is what defines the community” (Wenger, 1998, p. 73).

Mutual Engagement involves people coming together in ways that are ‘complex and diverse’, reflecting the ‘full complexity of doing things together’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 77). It is as likely to be characterised by “disagreement, challenges and competition” as with more idealised “connotations of peaceful coexistence, mutual support, or personal allegiance” (Wenger 1998, p. 77). Providing avenues to enable mutual engagement is crucial for the development and maintenance of a community of practice, and within Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester this happens in a number of ways, in different spaces and to different ends as will be explored throughout the analysis.

2.) Joint Enterprise

Joint Enterprise provides the collectively negotiated focus of the community through which cohesion is generated. Wenger (1998, p. 77) describes how joint enterprise arises as “their negotiated response to their situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control” (1998, p. 77). It requires an alignment and co-ordination of perspectives, but does not necessarily mean agreement, harmony or unity. It goes beyond a “stated aim” and underlies daily practice as a “complex, collectively negotiated response to what they understand to be their situation” (Wenger, 1998, p. 78). As such, it is shaped (but not determined) by external forces, and provides a space for conceptualising creativity and inventiveness as communities find ways of working within institutional and structural constraints.

3.) Shared Repertoire

“The repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice.” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83)

The shared repertoire describes the set of communal resources belonging to the community of practice, developed overtime as part of practice. It is part of an ongoing history, being constantly reinvented and reimaged as part of future aspirations. It includes the discourse and styles through which identity and membership of the community of practice are expressed. Repertoire

reflects the history of mutual engagement, and creates shared reference points within the community of practice through which histories of meaning are constructed. Importantly, the meaning attached to shared repertoire is also subject to ongoing reinterpretation and can be “re-engaged in new situations” and (re-)utilised in the “production of new meanings” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83).

2. *Identities and Competencies*

This section examines two key interrelated themes that enable analysis of the role of *individuals* within the community of practice, and the ways in which they constitute the collective innovative capacity of the community.

1.) **Identity**

Identity is central to Wenger’s (1998) conceptualisation of communities of practice, extending the framework to enable both a narrowing of focus to the individual (while maintaining a social standpoint); and expansion beyond the community through focus on broader processes of identification that function across time and space. The principal tools that will be used to reflect on and analyse the role of identity are:

1. Three ‘Modes of belonging’

The three modes of belonging described by Wenger (1998) function inside and across communities of practice and describe the ways in which individuals identify with communities of practice:

- *Engagement*, describes how individuals identify in relation to direct participation and experience of practice.
- *Imagination*, describes the process of constructing images of the world as a way of identifying with practice and our belonging to it. Wenger (2010) illustrates this with an example of how we are able to imagine ourselves belonging to a nation, or how we are able to imagine the world as round, without depending necessarily on direct experience or engagement of it.
- *Alignment*, describes a sense of co-ordination with and as part of broader perspectives, or structures. This provides a tool through which local action can align with broader goals (also requiring imagination), in envisaging oneself as part of broader movement. (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2010)

2. Multi-membership

Multi-membership is used to envisage how as part of everyday life, individuals are simultaneously members of multiple communities of practice. They develop facets of their identity in relation to their various memberships, and modulate these identities as part of their everyday experience. Through participation in multiple communities of practice, individuals build up a range of competencies and are able to translate meaning from one community to the next.

2.) **Competencies**

Competence is defined within the community of practice, with each developing their own 'regimes of competence' as part of practice. Although each member brings with them their own particular skills, experiences, and identities, which become 'interlocked and articulated with one another' (Wenger, 1998; p. 76), competence relies on the ability to act as a member of the community of practice and is therefore fundamentally linked to identity. Competencies within a community of practice may be partial, with members bringing with them skills and experiences that are complementary or overlapping, contributing to the collective capacity of the community. This partiality "is as much a resource as it is a limitation", leading to various ways of relating, engaging and drawing from one another (Wenger, 1998, p. 76).

3. Trajectories and Shared Histories

Wenger (1998, pp. 86, 88) highlights that practice must be understood in its temporal dimension and that "communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning". This part of the framework is central to analysis, in examining the historical trajectories of the case studies in question. In order to conceptualise the process through which history is produced and reproduced, he turns to the inter-twinned processes of participation and reification, both of which are sources of 'remembering and forgetting':

"We are connected to our histories through the forms of artefacts that are produced, preserved, weathered, re-appropriated, and modified through the ages, and also through our experience of participation as our identities are formed, inherited, rejected, interlocked, and transformed through mutual engagement in practice from generation to generation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 89).

Analysis examines the unfolding of shared history through various stories and accounts, using trajectory as a tool to examine the ongoing negotiation of practice. It picks up on key points in history and tracks ideas as they develop over time, in relation to changing membership and dynamic landscape in which the community of practice is situated. The concept of trajectory will

also be explored in the methodology (Chapter 3), as a way to conceptualise the unfolding of my own role as part of the communities of practice I am studying.

4. Boundaries

The boundaries between communities of practice are highlighted as areas for potential risk, as knowledge and competences may not translate from one community to the next; but also as areas with high potential for innovation. A key focus of engagement with the case studies will be on examining boundaries encounters, and the co-production of practice across those boundaries. As highlighted in the first part of the chapter, there appears to be a general trend towards collaborative working in the community food sector, and the concept of boundaries has the potential to enable further understanding of how innovation is co-produced through interaction between communities of practice.

While mutual engagement (ME), joint enterprise (JE), and shared repertoire (SR) constitute the dimensions through which practice is a source of coherence for community, they are simultaneously the means through which shared practice is also the source of its own boundaries, as described by Wenger (1998, p. 113) below:

- “1) [ME:] Participants form close relationships and develop idiosyncratic ways of engaging with one another, which outsiders cannot easily enter.
- 2) [JE:] They have detailed and complex understandings of their enterprise as they define it, which outsiders may not share.
- 3) [SR:] They have developed a repertoire for which outsiders miss shared references.”

1.) Boundary Encounters and Boundary Connections

Wenger distinguishes between boundary encounters and boundary connections. *Boundary Encounters* are short-term connections between multiple communities of practice which can occur in diverse ways, presenting various opportunities and challenges. Where boundary encounters occur over a prolonged period of time, they can develop histories of their own, forming more stable *boundary connections* that can become part of the enterprises of the original communities of practice, or even the basis for formation of new communities of practice.

2.) Continuity across boundaries

Wenger (1998) identifies two key sources of continuity of practice across boundaries: ‘boundary objects’ that reify aspects of practice, and ‘brokers’, who carry practice from one community to another through their participation. Despite the ‘fundamental locality’ of participation, through these sources of continuity it is possible for practice to spread beyond the constraints of the

community, travelling across time and space (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015a, p. 16). Without being attached to participation however, inherently ambiguous objects, ideas and documents risk being misinterpreted in different contexts and being given new meanings. While this can create problems or create barriers, there is potential for practice to develop in new and unpredictable ways, as the world has become increasingly well connected through various channels.

5. Landscapes of Practice

The concept of landscapes of practice has been introduced in the previous section, describing the broader configuration as communities of practice as they form complex bodies of knowledge. Within the context of the study, a landscape of practice perspective enables analysis of the ways in which community food initiatives relate to one another, and how they attempt to define competence and colonise particular areas of the knowledge landscape. Through engaging this conceptual tool, the thesis aims to contribute to furthering understanding of the increasing interconnected networks through which grassroots innovations operate, and through which they can work to reconfigure complex landscapes of practice.

Systems Convenors

The concept of system convenors is relatively new and describes the role of individuals in brokering connections at the landscape level, through working across diverse communities of practice. It will be used in the context of this research as a tool to analysis the role of key individuals in reconfigure the social landscape of practice, by facilitating connections and work across boundaries between communities of practice.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of key literature surrounding community food initiatives in the context of grassroots innovations, highlighting key areas where the thesis aims to contribute to furthering understanding in these field. It has highlighted the ways in which a communities of practice framework can provide a novel approach to addressing some of the shortfalls that have been identified, and answer calls for a more practice-based approach to understanding dynamics within grassroots innovations and community food initiatives specifically.

The final section highlighted key concepts that will provide a framework for empirical analysis in Chapters 4-7. Although perhaps appearing rather abstract in the context of this chapter, engagement and discussion in relation to the empirical data will illuminate the concepts, as part of a critical evaluation of both innovation within community food initiatives, and of the

usefulness of a communities of practice approach. The purpose of this framework therefore is to provide a novel approach to conceptualising grassroots innovation that incorporates both internal dynamics of negotiation within communities of practice; and the ways in which these processes influence innovative potential at the landscape level.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that underlies the thesis. It begins by setting out the research questions in response to the literature review and conceptual framework outlined in the previous chapter. It then outlines how these research questions are addressed through an ethnographic approach, underpinned by a social practice theory perspective. The research design is discussed, including engagement with the two key cases studies organisations introduced in Chapter 1, Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester. The chapter then moves on to describe the chosen methods of data collection and analysis that are drawn upon. Finally, it reflects on how the research process unfolded through empirical investigation, reflecting on some of the limitations and challenges faced.

3.2. Research Questions

The previous chapter discussed major developments in the relevant literature and outlined some of the key areas to which this thesis aims to contribute. This will be achieved by employing a communities of practice approach to addressing the three research questions below. Each question is qualified with a short description of how it will be approached, by drawing on the conceptual tools outlined in the framework at the end of the previous chapter.

1.) How are the trajectories of community food initiatives negotiated over time in relation to the opportunities and challenges they face?

The first research question focuses on the historical trajectories of the organisations, and asks how they are collectively negotiated over time. According to Wenger (2010, p. 2) practice is “produced over time by those who engage in it” and therefore belongs in a fundamental way to practitioners as their negotiated response to their situation. Whilst there may be external forces and structures which seek to shape or direct practice, “in the end it reflects the meanings arrived at by those engaged in it” and it “reflects their own engagement with their situation” (Wenger, 2010, p. 2). Within this context, the question seeks to explore the processes and dynamics through which the case study initiatives have developed over time both in terms of negotiation within the community of practice, and how this is shaped by broader external factors and framings. Chapter 4 begins to address this by examining the formation of the communities of practice, and developing understanding of the ways in which competencies and identities are

assembled as part of shared practice, framed within the context a jointly negotiated enterprise. Chapter 5 builds on this to examine the negotiation of key turning points in the trajectories of the organisations, as they draw on the shared histories and competencies that have been developed over time.

2.) What constitutes innovative capacity, and how do community food initiatives innovate across boundaries?

The second research question relates to the ways in which the processes of negotiation highlighted through research question 1, relate to innovation and innovative capacity within community food initiatives. It is addressed principally in Chapter 6, through in-depth analysis of the ways in which the case study organisations facilitate cross-boundary learning, casting innovation as co-produced through engagement across boundaries. This question also seeks to evaluate the utility of a community of practice approach for understanding innovation, by exploring how processes of learning within initiatives relate to innovation. It also asks how the capacity for innovation is internally assembled within the community of practice, and how elements of innovative practice transcend the boundaries of the community to catalyse broader change in practices.

3.) How are community food initiatives influenced by, and how do they influence broader landscapes of practice?

The third research question extends the scope of the analysis beyond focus on single communities of practice, examining how they function as part of broader *landscapes* of practice. Through this novel approach which draws on recent developments in communities of practice and grassroots innovation literature, the thesis will explore how innovation and innovative capacity is negotiated at a broader scale of analysis. Through this, the thesis contributes not only to understanding of internal dynamics within community food initiatives, but to how those dynamics influence the landscape of which they are part, thus contributing to broader scale change.

Through addressing these three research questions the thesis aims to examine in-depth the innovative potential of community food initiatives. It also examines the utility of a communities of practice approach for exploring the dynamics and complexities involved in processes of innovation both within initiatives, and beyond them as they seek to develop innovative practices beyond their boundaries. As well as drawing on a communities of practice approach to inform the conceptual framework of the thesis, as will be discussed throughout this chapter, it also informs the methodology and supports the research design of the thesis.

3.3. Research Design

In outlining the research design, I begin by highlighting how communities of practice theory informs the approach to the research questions outlined above, including drawing from its theoretical underpinnings and positioning. I then outline an ethnographic approach, describing the basic assumptions and theoretical positioning of the thesis, before going on to describe and justify the chosen case study approach and timescale. Having outlined the background and general approach, the next section goes on to examine the methods of data collection and analysis used, before examining the research process and some of the challenges faced in more depth.

Drawing from a Communities of Practice Approach

As this thesis draws upon and develops a communities of practice approach to understanding grassroots innovation, it is necessary to first outline the theoretical assumptions and positioning of the theory, before going on to describe how this influences my methodological approach. Ethnography has long been used in studies of communities of practice and in the development of theories of situated learning more broadly¹³. It provides a way to engage with and understand the relations and complexity that constitutes situated practice and learning within it. I begin by outlining the theoretical positioning on which Wenger's communities of practice theory is based, before going on to outline the specific position and approach of this thesis which draws heavily on a practice-based approach.

As discussed in the previous chapter, communities of practice is a theory that broadly examines learning as a social phenomenon that is situated in social practice. A key principle of this thesis is to critically apply this theory to grassroots innovation in the context of community food initiatives, guided by the research questions outlined above. Before further exploring the research design developed, it is first necessary therefore to examine the theoretical positioning and underpinnings of the theory and how this influences my approach. The figure below illustrates how Wenger (1998) positions his theoretical approach to social learning.

¹³ For example, Lave's (1991) ethnographic examination of apprenticeship underpinning the theory of legitimate peripheral participation; or Wenger's (1998) ongoing reference to his ethnography of insurance claims processors that illuminates his development of communities of practice theory.

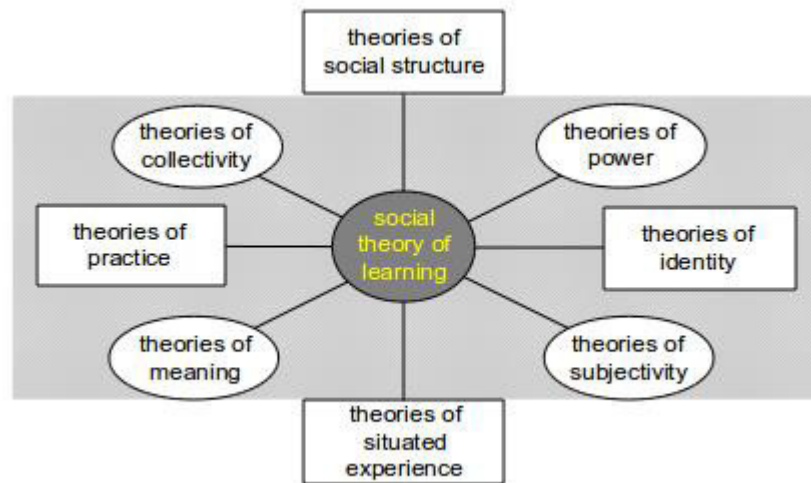


Fig. 6: *Intersection of relevant intellectual traditions outlined in Wenger (1998, p. 14)*

The figure above describes the broad intellectual traditions that influence a communities of practice approach, and which are weaved together in situating communities of practice as a theory of social learning. The vertical and horizontal axes provide the principal structure for this positioning, with the diagonal axes adding further refinement. The vertical axis is described as providing the backdrop for the theory, with a social theory of learning situated between theories of social structure and theories of situated experience. Within this, learning is both situated in participation, engagement, interaction and experience; and embedded in broader structures such as culture, history and discourses (Wenger, 1998, p. 12). The horizontal axis provides the focus of the communities of practice approach (as highlighted by the shaded area on the diagram), in the interaction between social practice and the social formation of identity. This demonstrates that central to a communities of practice approach is understanding of the relationship between the formation of identity and practice. In addition to these two main axes, the diagonal axes between collectivity and subjectivity (highlighting the connection between the social and the individual); and power and meaning (highlighting the connection between power relations and the construction of meaning) further refine the positioning and highlight key themes of the theory. By placing communities of practice as a social theory of learning at the centre of these intersections, Wenger highlights its position within social theory (rather than attempting synthesis or resolution of debate), emphasising the fundamental role of learning to social order.

This research also draws heavily on Lave’s (1991) conceptualisation of ‘situated social practice’. This creates a starting point through which the world is understood as socially constructed, and knowledge of the world as socially-mediated. Situated social practice, and situated theories of learning claim that “learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people engaged in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world” (Lave, 1991, p. 67).

Going a step further, the generation of this world “takes place in dialectical relations between the social world and persons engaged in activity; together these produce and re-produce both world and persons in activity.” This study therefore aims to place the *relations* of learning, thinking and knowing at the centre of analysis of innovation, through examining how members of the community of practice engage in activities and negotiate their practice in relation to the broader social world.

Further to this, according to Lave (1991, p. 67), the “idea of situatedness in theories of practice [... insists] that cognition and communication, in and with the social world, are situated in the historical development of ongoing activity.” The temporal nature of practice thus underpins the approach to research which examines the unfolding of social history over time, as negotiated by those that form it. As will be elaborated on throughout the chapter, this not only implicates the researched but includes the role of the researcher and therefore constitutes a critical theory “because the social scientist's practice must be analysed in the same historical, situated terms as any other practice under investigation” (Lave, 1991, p. 67). The underlying assumptions that are made therefore both underpin the approach to the researched, and the position and role of the researcher as part of that social world. The implications of this assumption will be discussed throughout the following sections.

Outlining an Ethnographic Approach

Having briefly described the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis informed by a communities of practice approach, this section outlines the ethnographic approach used to address the research questions. Ethnography is described by Corradi, Gherardi and Verzelloni (2008, p. 23) as “the key methodology with which to observe social and situated practices and simultaneously to participate in them”. Ethnography has long been drawn upon in the study of communities of practice, and is a principal qualitative method through which meanings and social practices can be investigated (Iphofen, 2013). It can be understood both as method and methodology (Brewer, 2004), providing a set of tools for inquiry as well as a perspective on or approach to the research (Wolcott, 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This section aims to position and justify my approach, as well as outlining the implications of it, in relation to what is a broadly- and long-contested field.

There are as many broad ranging definitions of ethnography, as there are approaches to it. Whitehead (2004) highlights the difficulty of forming a unified definition and instead discusses a list of what he considers key attributes of an ethnographic approach (though not exhaustive). Those attributes identified as most pertinent to this study include: a holistic approach to “the study of socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings within cultural systems”; dependency

on fieldwork (and field notes) drawing on a range of methods and a flexible and creative approach to research design; an iterative and “open-ended emergent learning process”; and emphasis on interpretive, reflexive, and constructivist processes (Whitehead, 2004, p. 5). These key attributes will be discussed throughout the chapter.

Ethnography is used within the context of this study to explore how meanings are negotiated through interrelations within and between communities, placing focus on the analysis of meanings and knowledge as socially constructions. The research is also interested in ways in which different framings are generated to give action meaning, and through which communities of practice position themselves in the broader landscape and systems of practice. Understanding innovation in this context requires understanding how shared practice (and competence in that practice) is produced and reproduced by those communally engaging in it.

Further to this, I draw particularly on ethnographic work that employs a specifically practice-based perspective (Lave and Wenger, 1991; O’Reilly, 2012b). Ethnography provides a methodology highly relevant to study of social practice by providing a way to investigate the performance of practice *in situ*. To this end, O’Reilly outlines four key ways in which an ethnographic approach is informed by a social practice perspective that:

- “understands social life as the outcome of the interaction of structure and agency through the practice of everyday life;
- examines social life as it unfolds, including looking at how people feel, in the context of their communities, and with some analysis of wider structures, over time;
- also examines, reflexively, one’s own role in the construction of social life as ethnography unfolds; and
- determines the methods to draw on and how to apply them as part of the ongoing, reflexive practice of ethnography”.

(O’Reilly, 2012b, p. 6)

These principles both inform and underpin my approach in a number of ways. The first two principles are interconnected, framing engagement in situated practice in relation to structure and agency, and examining how the social life ‘unfolds’ over time. This framing resonates with theoretical positioning of a communities of practice outlined in the previous section (in reference to Wenger (1998)). O’Reilly (2012a, p. 257) draws on this to describe communities of practice as “meso-level structures – the constantly shaped and reshaped communities within which wider structures are enacted and embodied”. Focus is therefore both on the production and reproduction of practice as negotiated by members of the community of practice, and the ways in which this relates to and constitutes broader structures and landscapes of practice.

Building on Comaroff and Comaroff (2003, p. 169) who call for an “ethnography that, once orientated to particular sites and grounded issues, is pursued on multiple dimensions and scales”, the approach described here extends analysis both in the temporal and spatial dimensions. It does this by examining how the *trajectories* of communities of practice unfold over time, as well as examining interaction across space, as practitioners and elements of practice engage in processes of learning beyond the site of the community of practice. Cox (2012, p. 183) highlights that “ethnography has only begun to develop methods that work or capture processes of cross-community knowledge sharing”. Through incorporating recent developments in communities of practice theory that address interactions at the landscape level, this thesis aims to contribute to developing a communities of practice approach for understanding knowledge sharing and the role it plays in innovation.

The third principle highlighted by O’Reilly (2012b, p. 6) relates to the role of the researcher, in reflexively examining “one’s own role in the construction of social life as ethnography unfolds”. Two key points are highlighted here: the importance of recognising the role of the researcher as *part of* the community of practice being studied; and the way that role develops over time. Elaborating on the first point, a communities of practice approach provides a route through which my influence as part of the community and my role in contributing to negotiation of meaning as part of practice can be included in the analysis. This provides a unique angle for reflexivity that incorporates, as part of the theoretical framework, the influence of my own identity and multi-membership. In regards to the second point, it also provides a route through which I can conceptualise the way in which my role changes over time as my own competencies and identities develop through my trajectory within the communities of practice of which I become part.

The final point, in which a practice approach “determines the methods to draw on and how to apply them as part of the ongoing, reflexive practice of ethnography” highlights the flexible and evolving nature of research design (O’Reilly, 2012b, p. 6). The methods drawn upon are discussed in more detail below, but the way they are applied is part of what O’Reilly (2009, p. 9) calls “iterative-inductive research [that] evolves in design through the study”. Rather than progressing in a linear fashion, the research process proceeds as a ‘progressive spiral’, gradually moving forwards by moving between data collection and analysis with ongoing reflection at each stage. The ways in which the research design unfolded on the ground will be discussed further in sections 3.4 and 3.5 in examining research methods and reflecting on the processes of research.

Building on this further, my approach also draws on Lave's (2011, p. 2) 'critical ethnography practice' in recognising that learning during the course of the fieldwork takes place in terms of both empirical and theoretical unfolding. This recognises that learning not only takes place within the community, but that the researcher's journey is directed by their own learning in relation to this, and through examining and analysing the interrelations between theory and practice. This also involves an "ongoing commitment to re-thinking and re-doing one's work as an ethnographer and activist" (Lave, 2011, p. 2). This informs the research approach by bringing in a critical aspect that enables me to use my position and knowledge with the communities of practice to facilitate shared learning within and between the case studies. As will be explored later in the chapter, this aspect informs the later parts of the research period as I draw on a participatory action research approach.

Case Study Approach and Timescales of Engagement

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the research questions are addressed through ethnographic engagement with the two key case study organisations, Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester. This section briefly examines the impetus behind this approach and the choice of case studies. It also looks at the levels of engagement with each of these case studies and sets out the timescale of the research process. The nature of engagement with the case studies and unfolding of the investigation is elaborated on further in section 3.5 as I reflect on the research process.

A case study approach is useful in facilitating in-depth exploration of real life and complex processes at work within a particular context (Yin, 1994). Flyvbjerg (2011, p. 301) side-steps contended and often conflicting sociological definitions, instead drawing on a straightforward dictionary-based definition of a case study as "an intensive analysis of an individual unit (as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to environment" (Merriam-Webster's dictionary, 2009). He unpacks four key aspects of this to include: (1) a chosen and bounded unit of analysis (Stake, 2008); (2) 'intensive analysis' with "detail, richness, completeness, and variance" constituting 'depth'; (3) developmental factors describing unfolding of processes over time; and (4) relation to the context in which the case is situated. While the in-depth and unfolding nature of the case studies is addressed through the ethnographic approach described in this chapter, I consider my relation to the boundaries and contexts of the case studies below, and in section 3.5 examining the research processes.

The case studies were chosen as examples of community-based, sustainable-food-focused initiatives working at different scales of engagement. While they are reified by the titles through which they are identified, the boundaries of what constitutes each of the initiatives when viewed

through a communities of practice lens are fluid and dynamic rather than concrete. As communities of practice are not always reified as such and don't require formal membership, they can be difficult to define (Roberts, 2006). As such, while the named organisation provides a focus, the membership of those who constitute the community of practice is viewed as dynamic and changing. Furthermore, whilst Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester provided the foci for the study, my engagement in the field transcended what might be considered boundaries of the communities of practice, as I followed up various connections and visited field sites tangentially linked to the initiatives themselves. I also examined the way in which individuals (myself included) and elements of practice travel beyond the community in various ways, enabling practice to transcend boundaries. This flexible approach recognises the fluidity of communities of practice, and follows Wenger's (1998) assertion that they should not be viewed in isolation but exist as part of and in relation to the contexts in which they are situated.

Grow Sheffield was chosen as the principal case study and was identified in the early stages of the research design as the collaborative partner for the project (in accordance with the ESRC collaborative award scheme). I decided that in order to facilitate ongoing and in depth engagement over a long time period, that the principal case study should be located in relative proximity to my intended residence. This had a number of advantages, enabling me to become more deeply involved in the organisation, and importantly in the broader sustainable food landscape in Sheffield. This was significant to the development of the research design, as the connections that emerged between Grow Sheffield and other organisations (some of which were facilitated by my own multi-membership) became key to the theoretical development of the study, generating data on which some of the key findings of the thesis are based.

From the outset, a number of food related organisations in Sheffield were considered, with some preliminary meetings held. I decided to pursue collaboration with Grow Sheffield for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are well-established and well-recognised in the city, being one of the most active food organisations (particularly at the time of enquiry in 2013, having received a large grant to fund their work). They were facing a number of interesting upcoming challenges that would coincide with my research time scale, thus providing a relevant framing for the research. The ways of working, practices, and structure of the organisation were also identified as enabling my engagement in diverse sets practices, across multiple projects. This, together with their agreed participation which enabled access to the community of practice provided a good starting point on which the investigation would be based.

Feeding Manchester was selected later (in 2014) as a complementary case study. The aim of this was to extend the scope of the research by examining processes occurring in a different type of

community of practice working at a broader scale. Feeding Manchester had been successful in mobilising an active, regional scale network of community food initiatives that have worked together in promoting and supporting a sustainable food system from the grassroots. This contrasted with food landscape in Sheffield, which was characterised by much more separate, informal or often inactive connections between different food actors. Feeding Manchester was therefore chosen as a case in which networking could be examined in relation to landscape level interaction¹⁴. The nature of the initiative, with less frequent possibilities for engagement and narrower scope meant that my engagement was more peripheral and less intensive than with Grow Sheffield. The close proximity of the cities was identified as useful both in practical terms, as well as opening up the possibility or exploring connections working across a regional level, with some level of interaction between activities in the two cities. As will be discussed in the following section, this idea involved into action research, aiming to foster engagement and shared learning between the two organisations and cities.

Timescale

The research design uses an integrated and flexible approach which moves away from distinct research phases, towards an iterative and ongoing cycle of data collection and analysis. This, together with a focus on *trajectories* of communities of practice as they unfold over time meant that a key characteristic of the research design is the relatively long time-span covered by data collection and analysis. As will be further discussed in the research process section, data collection began in the early stages of the research, through a 'scoping study' in the first year of the research project (). Data collection and analysis continued (in varying degrees of intensity) from this starting point over the course of 3-4 years. The qualitative, longitudinal approach described enables in depth analysis of social processes, social change and of the social life as it unfolds, following the "temporal rhythms of lived lives" (McLeod and Thomson, 2009, p. 6). This is particularly relevant when working with organisations focusing on food and growing, whose activities and practices are shaped by the natural calendar and growing seasons.

While the period of research was relatively long, the intensity and focus of data collection and analysis varied over this time-span. This approach can be characterised by what (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004) might term a 'selective intermittent time-mode', with a flexible frequency of interaction over a relatively long period of time. The extent and intensity of interaction depends

¹⁴ I decided to concentrate on Feeding Manchester rather than the broader organisation of the Kindling Trust because I wanted to focus explicitly on its role as a network facilitating connections from across the food landscape. I felt focusing on the Kindling Trust more generally would have been too broad to fulfil this purpose, although I do incorporate elements of some its other connected projects as outlined in the introduction.

on the researcher selecting particular contexts and foci as the research develops over time as part of a process of 'progressive focusing' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), which will be discussed further in the analysis section. This approach enables flexible relationships between empirical engagement and analysis and gives the researcher the opportunity to pursue interesting empirical or analytical avenues that emerge.

Conducting research over long time periods according to some authors can also be helpful in 'doing' or operationalising reflexivity by providing 'time, distance and hindsight' (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; O'Reilly, 2012a). O'Reilly (2012a, p. 523) draws on Davies (1999) to highlight how reflexivity "has a sense of circularity to it, a sense of to-and-from, and therefore of return; it recognizes that (limited) knowledge of the social world is best achieved by balancing 'some connection with that being researched and ... some degree of separation from it' (Davies, 1999: 10)". By moving between perspectives, and developing relations of both connection and separation, the development of analytical perspective is enabled. According to Mauthner and Doucet (2003, p. 425) developing "emotional and intellectual distance" helps to facilitate a "deepening understanding of reflexivity" in relation to "the range of personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences on our research". They also however point to the limitations of reflexivity, and to our abilities to be fully aware of the range of influences and indeed our own perspectives on the researched.

As well as engaging with the case studies across a long timescale, the research also extends the time-span further through analysis of historical and archival documents; and through drawing on accounts of shared histories from members of the communities of practice. This adds an extra dimension to the research approach, through analysing the ways in which histories are articulated and inform future trajectories through being incorporated into negotiation of the present. My induction into these histories and becoming part of them through ongoing engagement enabled me to develop my position within the communities of practice, and gain insight into the subtle ways in which the past influences the present and future trajectories of practice.

From Ethnography to Action Research

Enabled by the flexibility of the research design, towards the end of the research project I developed a short action research project in collaboration with members of each of the case study organisations. This involved drawing on key principles and learning generated throughout the empirical study and using them to negotiate the development of shared learning in practice. The project included initiating, planning, carrying out and following up a jointly organised event that would bring together key actors and facilitate the sharing of learning. The event brought

together actors from across Sheffield's sustainable food sector, together with representatives of Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester, providing a platform for discussion of how to develop a cohesive network to support the development of a sustainable food system in Sheffield. While the focus here is on elaborating on the theoretical underpinning and approach to this piece of study, the dynamics and empirical outcomes of the event (including processes involved in the planning and follow up) are discussed further in Chapter 7.

According to Reason and Bradbury (2006, p. 6), "good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process". While the research project did not set out with an action research agenda, the underpinnings of the idea developed over time along with my role within the communities of practice to which I became part. While acknowledging that knowledge is a social construction, action research involves asking "how we can act in intelligent and informed ways in a socially constructed world" (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 2). As I became part of the trajectories and negotiations of the organisations, I was able to identify opportunities arising out of my own growing network of connections and the insights gathered from the research. Engaging with a cycle of action and reflection, I was able to use this position to work collaboratively towards a goal not just of generating knowledge, but in helping to build the capacity of individuals and the community through which knowledge is generated (Reason, 2004).

One of the basic principles of action research is that it is "only possible *with, for and by* persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sense-making that informs the research, *and* in the action which is its focus" (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p. 2). While the scope of the action research was limited and fairly time constrained limiting the extent of broad engagement, I attempted to work with others in a mutually beneficial way by incorporating the event into an ongoing project. Through drawing on connections and facilitating the exchange of knowledge, the aim was to both provide an opportunity for learning, but also to empower people to be able to develop processes of learning further (beyond the scope of the research) by facilitating networking with a collectively developed and emerging focus.

3.4. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This section describes the principal methods of data collection used, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis. The methods are employed in a complementary way and in relation to an ongoing iterative process of analysis, through which the focus of data collection was continually reflected on and refined. While this section describes

the methods through which large amounts of data were collected and analysed over a relatively long time period, section 3.5 goes on to explore in greater depth the unfolding of the research process on the ground and some of the key challenges faced.

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 3) “ethnography usually involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts - in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry”. Following this approach, I describe the methods used as part of a flexible research design which enables a range of approaches to data collection to be employed, in response to developments in the field and the themes emerging from ongoing analysis. This open-ended approach was shaped by engagement in the field and following opportunities as they unfold creates data that is unstructured yet systematic (Brewer, 2004).

The ethnographic methods employed also stress the importance of fieldwork to the research inquiry. Gupta and Ferguson (1997, p. 36) highlight the way in which ethnographic “fieldwork’s stress on taken-for-granted social routine, informal knowledge, and embodied practices can yield understanding that cannot be obtained through standardized social science research methods”. In addition to the centrality of fieldwork, others have focused on the role of ethnographic writing in the process of reifying the experience of the ethnographer into the written account (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011). The duality of this process is expressed by Blaikie (1993, p. 96) who describes how “the social researcher enters the everyday social world in order to grasp the socially constructed meanings, and then reconstructs these meanings into social scientific language”. Within this process the researcher selects, interprets, and reconstructs meaning creating a partial and account of social life.

The table below gives a brief overview of the key methods (each of which is discussed further in the following sections) and the ways they were applied in each of the two case studies. Engagement within Grow Sheffield was far more in-depth and extensive than with Feeding Manchester which is reflected in the description of each of the methods. However, both are important in constructing a broad and complementary account.

Method	Grow Sheffield	Feeding Manchester
Participant Observation	Meetings (staff and core team) Activities - e.g. volunteer events, workshops Project work – ongoing participation in key projects Social events Site visits Broader network events	Feeding Manchester Conferences Steering group meetings Site visits Events connected to broader projects
Semi-structured interviews	Staff team Core Team Key volunteers/members	Coordinators Steering Group
Content Analysis	Website and media materials Minutes Publications Funding reports, email correspondence.	Meeting notes and records Website and media materials Presentations Surveys and data collected by Feeding Manchester

Table 3: Overview of Methods

Participant Observation

Participant observation formed the central method of data collection for the research, and included diverse ways of engaging with the case studies that developed over time. A key aim of participant observation is to generate rich and in-depth data, uncovering tacit knowledge of social processes through engagement within the case studies (Schutt, 2012). Engagement in practice enables the generation of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) that attempts to capture the complexities of everyday practices and experiences. However, the accounts produced through participation demonstrate the partiality of selection and interpretation, calling for a reflexive approach to the role of the researcher. In this section I briefly describe my approach, with the *process* being discussed in greater detail in section 3.5.

According to O'Reilly (2009, p. 158) participant observation involves a continuous tension of attempting “to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange”. Underlying this tension is a broad and ongoing discussion of the role of the researcher in relation to the roles of participation versus observation, and positioning on the insider/outsider continuum. As will be discussed in the following section which reflects on the unfolding of the research process, I view my role within the case studies as dynamic and changing. I conceptualise this changing role though a

communities of practice lens, examining my own trajectory as my identities and competencies develop in relation to the communities of practice of which I become part.

Smith *et al* (2017) outline how drawing on both 'insider' and 'outsider' ontologies (Smith and Stirling, 2007) enables them to broaden their perspective on grassroots innovation movements. By "recognizing [their] positions as analysts of the movements" they are able to both engage with the 'broader contexts' of grassroots innovation movements in relation to the literature; and "describe as faithfully as possible how the movements themselves see and describe their contexts, thus employing an 'insider's' ontology" (Smith *et al.*, 2017, p. 16). This widening of perspective reflects an interest that focuses not only on the groups under study, but the broader networks of which they are part. My approach also reflects this, by maintaining a broad perspective in relation to context and 'landscape' and the generation of opportunities and challenges in this sphere, as well as examining and describing the view from inside and how they frame and respond to such contexts.

Participant observation and managing the various and changing positioning of the researcher requires reflexivity in order to "reflect on the contingencies that bore upon and helped to 'create' the data as a partial account" (Brewer, 2004, p. 319). However, while recognising the importance of being aware of position and partiality of perspective, Rose (1997, p. 311) highlights the difficulties in achieving such 'transparent' reflexivity, acknowledging the "impossibility of such a quest to know fully both self and context". While recognising the limitations and the partiality of the accounts produced, I attempt to maintain an awareness of reflexivity by maintaining a degree of 'connection' and 'separation', through engaging with, but maintaining analytical distance from the researched (O'Reilly, 2012a). This is achieved by through "a sense of to-and-fro" and "circularity" in the process of constructing data and analysis, revising field notes and concepts developed as my role and position evolves. I also maintain a sense of transparency throughout the research process, with the aims of facilitating a sense of "trustworthiness" (Monk and Bedford, 2005, p. 73) and "accountability to [the researcher's] perspective and position" (Mansvelt and Berg, 2005, p. 260).

In terms of engagement with each of the case study organisations, I attempted to participate in a range of activities and practices and in a variety of settings. Within Grow Sheffield, this included both private meetings focusing on strategic discussion and negotiation of practice, and included the public activities of the organisation as negotiation played out in practice. The strategy was somewhat emulated with Feeding Manchester (although with a far lower level of engagement), as I participated both in the public events and networking that forms the bases of

the initiative, and in the planning and strategising about how these practices should be configured. My role and engagement as it unfolded is discussed further in section 3.5.

Semi-structured Interviews

While participant observation was the main method of data collection used, a small number of semi-structured interviews were also carried out at different points throughout the data collection period. The purpose of this was to complement other types of data collection used and provide a further analytical angle through which to interrogate data at different stages of the project. While the number of interviews conducted was small, with 15 in total (usually lasting between 1-2 hours, although on occasion continuing longer in a conversational style), they played an important role in complementing data gathered through other methods for a number of reasons (Spradley, 1979). Firstly, they facilitated more in-depth exploration of key themes, in a distinct setting from normal engagement. They enabled me to systematically delve deeper into emergent topics and themes. They also provided deeper conversational exploration of individuals' perspectives on a one-to-one basis, outside of the normal groups setting of meetings, activities and events. Also, particularly in later interviews in which my position had developed to that of a familiar insider, this approach gave me the opportunity to engage with participants in a more formal manner.

Interviews where possible were conducted in relevant field locations, giving a further observational aspect to the data collected. Some of these occurred in the respective offices of the organisations, giving a flavour of the nature and comings and goings of co-working spaces they inhabit. Others were at community growing sites that participants were engaged with in addition to their membership of the case study organisation. These members were keen to invite me into their projects, as I toured the sites, met the participants, and talked about the nature of the projects and the challenges they faced. Outside of this, interviews were conducted in local cafes, which also unexpectedly revealed details and personal connections that shape participants' lives. This method of interviewing led to useful interruptions and introductions to other characters that provided another layer of analysis. Further to this, I took an 'active interview' approach, recognising the interviewer and the interviewee as partners in co-constructing knowledge through the interview process (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995).

I purposefully chose to limit the number of interviews, in response to recognition of the limited capacity of the organisations and individuals participating. Participants, interview settings and timing were carefully chosen. Interviews were audio-recorded with the agreement of the participants, and fully transcribed. They were also complemented by and conducted in the context of ongoing participant observation, which enabled follow-up informally through

conversation and ongoing discussion. While the interviews were limited in number, they were highly effective in producing high quality and relevant data that forms a central aspect of the thesis.

Content Analysis

The study was complemented by content analysis of wide-ranging documentation connected with each of the two case studies. In the initial stages of the research content analysis was useful in providing background information and context around the histories and development of the organisations. Later on, much of the documentation was revisited as part of an iterative process of analysis, examining how it contributes to and reflects the shared histories and repertoires of the organisations in question.

Within Feeding Manchester, archival information from each of the conferences (including programmes, minutes and notes) played an important part of the analysis, giving an insight into the progression of the initiative over time. In Grow Sheffield, minutes of meetings, funding documents, as well as various media (such as webpages), provided a means through which their history of development, and the stories produced around this could be accessed. While these accounts are partial, focusing on the positive aspects of particular projects, they nevertheless give some level of historical background of projects as well as how broader aims have evolved. Additionally, content analysis focused on how stories are produced, reflecting on and used to represent practice as part of ongoing negotiation of meaning.

Analysis of Data

This section briefly describes the processes of analysis drawn upon and developed over the time-span of the research, which will be elaborated on further as they unfold in the research process section below. As already mentioned, the research design took a flexible approach which unfolded over the course of the project, generating large volumes of data over a long period of data collection. Rather than separating data collection and analysis, analysis took place through an iterative-inductive approach, enabling reflexivity in responding to developments in the field throughout the research process (O'Reilly, 2009; Chambliss and Schutt, 2012).

In order to manage large amount of in-depth data, I used methods of analysis that enabled me to gradually focus and refine my approach, whilst continuing to explore developments in the field. O'Reilly (2009, p. 107) draws upon Shank (2006) to describe a process in which ongoing analysis leads to new lines of enquiry in what they term a 'progressive spiral'. This captures the idea of 'progressive focusing' in which the line of inquiry is refined through ongoing analysis and

subsequent readjustment of data collection (Chambliss and Schutt, 2012) whilst recognising the 'to-ing' and 'fro-ing' and constant readjustment that is part of the process. As O'Reilly describes: "the very broad straightforward progression, from initial interest, recording, analysis, and writing up, is constantly interspersed with periods where we turn back on ourselves, retrace our steps and, and mix one stage with another (Ezzy, 2002)" (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 15). Through ongoing engagement and analysis with the case studies, emergent themes are identified and pursued, and the focus of the research is gradually refined.

In working with the data generated through this process, Gobo and Molle (2017, p. 212) draw on Strauss and Corbin (1990) to describe a three stage process of coding and analysis, including 'deconstruction', 'construction' and 'confirmation'. The first step characterises the initial exploratory phase of the research, in which observation is broad ranging and with open interpretation of concepts emerging. Constructive analysis then concentrates on building of concepts and focusing and narrowing of enquiry. The third step is more selective in refining and testing theory in the field. The steps are distinguished analytically and in reality progress is made iteratively, moving backwards and forwards with a general momentum that relates back to the concept of 'progressive spiralling'.

Field notes, transcripts and documents were collated and coded used the qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo. The data collected was unstructured with themes being generated out of data analysis rather than built into data collection (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Initial coding was therefore inductive, evolving towards more thematic coding as the theoretical approach developed. Through ongoing iteration, revisiting the data, refining the theory and redirecting engagement in the field, the theoretical approach through which the final analysis was framed developed.

3.5. Reflecting on the Research Process

While the previous sections have discussed the research approach and design, this section focuses on the research process as it unfolded through empirical engagement on the ground. It focuses on some of the key steps in the trajectory of data collection and analysis, as well as challenges that arose along the way. Gobo and Molle (2017, p. 212) describe how processes of deconstruction, construction and confirmation relate to work in the field, with data collection focusing initially on uncovering interactions, before moving towards engagement that facilitates the building of theory, and finally engagement that qualifies that theory. Although the reality of fieldwork is less straight forward, these three guiding concepts shape the progression of the research as it unfolds.

Initial Contact and Access to Grow Sheffield

Accessing the field is often described as one of the initial challenges in ethnographic research, both in terms of *'getting in'* and *'getting on'* (Gobo, 2008, p. 119). Initial contact was made with Grow Sheffield during the planning stages of the research project in late 2012, and they were included in the initial research proposal as a collaborative partner (as part of an ESRC CASE award). Due to the openness of the organisation, early talks and meetings with members of the organisation were formative in shaping the initial approach and research design, based around challenges and barriers faced. During this initial engagement, I established a relationship with a key *'gatekeeper'* who was a member of the staff-team, and who negotiated on my behalf with the committee of the organisation to agree their role as part of a collaborative project. Gaining initial access was relatively straight forward, with the advantage of working with an organisation that was keen to participate in the research.

Contact with Feeding Manchester was made at a later stage in Spring 2014 (after the scoping study with Grow Sheffield outlined below which took place from late 2013 onwards). It was selected as a complementary case study, in order to expand the scope of the research and examine dynamics working at a broader scale through a city-wide network of sustainable food practitioners. Making contact and forming an initial relationship with the coordinators of the initiative was challenging due to the relative distance, and busyness of the coordinators. After several phone calls and emails, I managed to arrange an informal meeting. I also attended a Feeding Manchester gathering (June 2014) which gave me an opportunity to talk to participants, introduce myself as well as get an initial insight into the practices of the initiative.

Scoping Study

Prior to the main period of data collection, a scoping study was conducted with Grow Sheffield. It was initially planned over a period of around 6 months (between January and June 2014), but was later extended to continue until Autumn covering the main growing and harvesting season. There were two key aims of the scoping study - firstly to familiarise myself with the field, develop my position in it, and scope out the practices of the organisation (Jeffrey and Troman, 2004); and secondly to coincide with a key period of transition in the organisation's development as a major period of funding came to an end. During this time, I got to know many of the key members of the organisation and proceeding from the stage of *'getting in'* to *'getting on'*. I was also able to interview members of staff whose contracts were about to expire. The data generated in these interviews has been revisited throughout the research process and gives a key insight into some of the dynamics occurring during that time period.

It was clear from initial engagement that the limited capacity of the organisation would shape the progress of the research, both theoretically (framing a key challenge that is embedded in their negotiation of practice), and in terms of my own role and engagement with the community of practice. This meant that there were limits to the extent of collaboration, with less direct input from the organisation than I had originally intended because of the severely limited time and resources available. It also meant that my role would be more participative, aiming to support and add capacity, and avoiding over-burdening of the organisation or individuals whilst still capturing their inputs and ideas. At this stage of the research, as a relative newcomer to the organisation, I lacked the competence to make any significant contribution organisationally, although engaged where possible as a volunteer (an experience that once again provided valuable data). This part of the data collection helped in forming some of the key themes that would be explored further during later stages of the research design.

Main Period of Data Collection

Having developed a sense familiarity and established my position within Grow Sheffield, during the main period of data collection I was able to select which aspects of practice and which arising themes to focus on, as well as develop my own skills and ways of contributing in relation to the community of practice. I gradually moved from being a principal observer of meetings, to being able to contribute in relation to some of the key practices and projects I was engaged in as a volunteer. As my role developed, my note-taking during meetings was put to use (and to some extent legitimised) as I took on the role of recording minutes of meetings. This point marked a key transition in my role towards becoming an 'insider' as my familiarity in relation the contexts and practices which I was asked to record was recognised as a form of competence.

During this period I also started building my own network of connections in the city through various interests, many of which were in some way related to the practices or members of Grow Sheffield¹⁵. Within the context of Grow Sheffield, this was advantageous in creating new avenues for participation between different groups. For example, I was able to use my connections at the university to broker relations with Grow Sheffield, facilitating the planning of workshops with students, and highlighting Grow Sheffield as a potential partner. This aspect of multi-membership contributed to my developing competence within the organisation. My position also formalised during this time, as I was asked to join the core team as a co-opted member, and

¹⁵ Some of the activities that I made connections through included becoming a member of a student based community allotment group, becoming a member of Sheffield beekeeping association and attending their courses, as well as more attendance at various one-off food or sustainability related events in the city, at which I often recognised familiar faces.

later as a full core team member (or director) of the organisation. This marks another key period in the transition of my position from outsider to insider and in the development of trust and perceived competence. It also demonstrates the broader sense in which my role developed, as I became settled and increasingly connected both academically and in relation to growing and food within the city.

During this period (and indeed throughout the research), engagement with Feeding Manchester was more intermittent and sporadic. One of the main focuses of data collection was at Feeding Manchester conferences, which are (usually) whole or half day events focusing on networking around a particular theme or topic. Although these are aimed to be held 3 times per year, during the period of the research they were much more intermittent with only 4 being held over a period of 3 years. I extended the scope of engagement by attending events connected to the network, and in particular to the Kindling Trust. I also attended informal meetings, and steering group meetings although these too were sporadic. This shaped the focus of the case study to some extent, enabling me to follow connections and elements of innovative practice as they emerged and evolved beyond the initiative itself.

Within both case studies, data collection involved not only participation in meetings or as part of formal business - but incorporated aspects of social life as well. Rather than being confined to the board room, encounters occurred in pubs, cafes, community centres, with members sharing different facets of their own identities and personalities. It is here in particular where care was required, both in terms of sensitivity in collecting data and in maintaining analytically distance without losing the texture of the context.

During this period of the research large amounts of data were collected, and through ongoing analysis key themes were developed and refined in relation to each of the case study organisations.

Later Stages and Action Research

During later stages of the research process, I began to target my engagement more carefully in order to focus in on the key themes that had emerged and begin to develop them in greater depth. It was at this point that I decided to conduct formal interviews with key members of Grow Sheffield (2015-2016). The informal style of interviewing and familiarity with the interviewees helped to further develop ideas but also to discuss the concepts emerging from analysis and gain reflection and insight from the members of the community of practice. This helped to reassure my interpretations and analyses and also test some of the limitations of my approach.

Towards the end of the research project, I helped to facilitate a joint event between Grow Sheffield, Feeding Manchester, and the broader network of food actors in Sheffield (held in October 2016). The idea emerged as I began to think about ‘dissemination’ of research findings and how to share key aspects of learning with participating organisations. I decided to use my position and contacts (and in support of an ongoing project) to hold an event which would provide a platform through which knowledge could be shared and exchanged, but also put into practice through action-focused discussion. This led to an ongoing series of networking events, and connection and ongoing engagement between the two cities. It also provided me with an opportunity to reflect on the operationalisation of a communities of practice approach and of key learning from the research, which is discussed in Chapter 7.

A key challenge in the final stages of the research was in ‘leaving the field’ (O’Reilly, 2009). While the scope of this thesis is bounded, the case study organisations on which it is based continue to evolve and innovate, and the communities of which I am now part continue to develop their practices.

Key Challenges and Ethical Considerations

The final section of the chapter concludes by highlighting some of the key challenges faced. It begins by discussing the ethics procedures followed, before going on to highlight more implicit challenges that arose throughout the research process. As Iphofen (2013, p. 16) comments, “what may have seemed straightforward and morally uncomplicated at the outset may turn out to be fraught with difficulty once a project is underway”. This section reflects on some of the difficulties faced and comments on how they were managed.

The research design and process outlined in this chapter complied with the University of Sheffield’s ethics guidelines and received ethical approval from the ethics committee. Formal ethics procedures were followed in gaining informed consent from the participants of the study. For the purpose of conducting interviews, participants were given consent forms to sign, along with an information sheet about the project, their role in it, any implications it might have, as well as their right to withdraw at any point during the research process. Informed consent was also obtained from leading representatives of both organisations in respect of participating in various meetings and activities, and in accessing and using archival data.

Beyond this, explicitly gaining consent of all participants engaged with activities open to the public was neither possible nor conducive to the purpose of the research. I therefore made sure that I was as far as possible transparent about my role and intentions as a researcher. Often at the beginning of formal activities and events, opportunity is provided to introduce oneself to

the group, which often enabled me to introduce myself both as a researcher and in my evolving capacities as a member of Grow Sheffield. I also often talked about my role informally through conversations with other participants in activities. Where photographs were taken, I verbally requested permission of participants, and explained what the purpose and use of the photographs would be.

As part of the process of informed consent, all named participants were informed that while data would be anonymised (through the use of pseudonyms) they may be identifiable due to the small scale of the organisations and familiarity within them. The extent of anonymisation is particularly limited for those that play key roles and are mentioned throughout the discussion section of the thesis. This was not only a challenge for participants, but for those who individuals who did participate but are referred to in accounts (and where it was not possible to gain consent). Although in some instances the data used is from publically available sources, much of the way they are referred to in accounts is often on a personal and private basis. I therefore used pseudonyms to protect anonymity of both participants and those who are referred to, while acknowledging the limitations of this approach in cases where the individual might want to be recognised. I also took care to avoid including any personal or sensitive information, or viewpoints that might cause particular conflict or offence. This was particularly challenging in relation to both gathering data and writing about *conflict* within and between communities of practice. As my role, particularly within Grow Sheffield, was characterised by familiarity and trust, I was obligated to omit any data that might create a negative impact on the organisation or on individuals. Further to this, as part of my role, I always attempted to maintain neutrality both in relation to individuals within the organisation, and outside of it in relation to the broader food landscape. This contributed to maintaining analytical distance and avoiding 'over-report', by being aware of and attempting to avoid becoming involved in or reproducing conflict.

A broader challenge faced related to managing the various facets of my evolving identities within the communities of which I became part. Particularly in the early stages of the research, my identity as a researcher brought certain expectations and perceptions. There was a pre-existing sense of research fatigue in both organisations, and view of academics as observers who come to watch and study, take notes, and leave after a short time without contributing much back. I overcame this barrier through emphasising participation and long term engagement, and contributing to the organisations where possible. I build into the research an awareness of capacity, and tried to reduce the amount of capacity I absorbed and make a net contribution

(Iphofen, 2013, p. 11)¹⁶. However, there are limitations to the extent this was possible, particularly in relation to requesting interviews or meetings.

As my role progressed and I became more engaged, my influence on the organisations being studied (particularly Grow Sheffield) became more apparent. I incorporated this influence into the data collected and approached it with a sense of reflexivity, whilst recognising the limitations of this. The ways in which I tried to contribute (and was often asked to contribute) to the practice of the organisation, through my own trajectory of learning in becoming research-practitioner became an important part of the data.

Another challenge faced was in working within a rapidly changing and somewhat unpredictable field (both empirically and to some extent theoretically). The context of the research is one of continuous insecurity, with future existence being constantly negotiated. As such, it was uncertain from the outset, whether the organisations would continue to exist throughout the time-span of the research. Again, this highlights the critical importance of a flexible approach. In addition to changes in the field, the research also evolved in line with rapidly developing theory - particularly in light of recent trends in both communities of practice and work on grassroots innovation, towards landscape level interactions and connections. This coupled with increasing focus on collaboration within and across the community food sector also influenced the progression of the research.

A final personal challenge, was in developing the theoretical aspects of the thesis in a way that contributes relevant meaning to the communities of practice of which I became part. Whilst I was able to some extent make a practical contribution, it was difficult to balance the obligation of producing an academic thesis with making a knowledge contribution to the case studies. Within Grow Sheffield this was to some extent addressed through the development of my role as a director, which gave me opportunity to feed into the processes of negotiation and share insight from the research. It also pushed me to draw on my connections and capacities as a researcher to engage in the action research project described earlier (and discussed in Chapter 7), providing a platform for knowledge production that engaged both of the case studies and the broader food landscape in Sheffield.

¹⁶ Interestingly one of the contributions I was often asked to make was to deal with other academics that approached the organisations. I had a sense this was both to share knowledge being generated though a shared academic language, but also of often to avoid taking up time and capacity of the organisation.

Chapter 4

Sowing the Seeds: Examining the Emergence of Communities of Practice

4.1. Introduction

The first of four empirical chapters lays the foundation for analysis by exploring the emergence and early establishment of the two case study organisations as communities of practice. This provides an important starting point, examining the characteristics of social formation and early negotiations on which the communities of practice are built, and laying the foundations on which their shared histories and trajectories of learning are developed. Exploring the historical narratives reveals both tensions and conflicts, and opportunities that arise, as individuals come together to form the collective enterprise and identity of the community of practice. The shared histories and stories that are generated and on which analysis is based, themselves become part of the practices and shared repertoires of the communities of practice in question.

Through drawing on the framework outlined in Chapter 2, this chapter analyses the initial development of the two case studies through negotiation of joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire¹⁷. The coming together of key individuals from diverse backgrounds contributes to the constitution of collective identity and development of collective competencies and capacity that underpin the community of practice. By examining initial negotiations and social formation as part of trajectories of learning, the chapter begins to address the 'temporal dimension' of communities of practice (Wenger 1998, p. 86), framing a broader question of how practices evolve over time and laying the foundation for analysis in following chapters. Furthermore, through comparison of contrasting case studies with distinct social configurations, the chapter begins to critically evaluate and develop a communities of practice approach that is useful for understanding community food initiatives at different levels of analysis.

The chapter also begins to investigate the inherently innovative nature of the community food initiatives as communities of practice. The framework developed facilitates understanding of how internal negotiations within the community of practice relate to both local context and

¹⁷ Wenger's (1998) dimensions through which practice is a property of community, see conceptual framework section (2.5)

broader societal issues and trajectories. Initiatives can be framed¹⁸ (and indeed frame themselves) as solutions to challenges at a range of scales, with the development of innovative practices forming a central part of their joint enterprise, and with the tools and resources created becoming part of practice as shared repertoire. Examining the emergence of initiatives reveals how they identify and colonise niche spaces - aligning with broad societal challenges and national and international movements, but also positioning themselves in relation to and as part of local landscapes of practice (a theme that will be developed further in chapter 7). This chapter contextualises innovation as *inherent* to community food initiatives, providing a starting point for further interrogation of the potential that a communities of practice approach offers to understanding of grassroots innovation in following chapters.

Analysis focuses predominantly on Grow Sheffield, examining the context of its emergence, and the coming together of key characters in the formation of the community of practice. As outlined in the methodology (Chapter 3), in-depth ethnographic engagement with Grow Sheffield and the richness of the data that has been produced provides insight into the stories and shared history of the organisation. Such stories are partial and variously told but contribute to the collective narrative of the organisation. They reflect shared memory, but they also reflect the tensions and conflicts that are inevitable as people negotiate their own identities and values in relation to one another. Feeding Manchester is presented as a contrasting case study as an example of a community of practice that aims to intervene at the landscape level. This provides a useful counterpoint, allowing examination of the utility of a communities of practice framework in different contexts and enabling development of the approach to facilitate understanding of landscape level interactions.

The chapter concludes by drawing together key themes and reflecting on the conceptualisation of each case study through a communities of practice lens. Key questions and areas for further empirical analysis and conceptual development are identified for investigation in the following chapters. Analysis of the trajectories of communities of practice will continue in Chapter 5, looking at the key points in the history of the initiatives beyond their emergence, and examining how they respond to opportunities and challenges to generate momentum and maintain long-term sustainability. Chapter 6 will examine in greater depth processes of innovation, moving beyond focus on internal negotiation of practice to look at how initiatives work beyond their

¹⁸ Smith et al (2017) emphasis *framing* of innovative niches as a key part of their analytical framework for understanding grassroots innovation movements. Framing helps develop cohesion and produce local knowledge and meaning. The language and approach used resonates with a communities of practice approach and will be developed through the empirical section of the thesis.

boundaries. Finally, landscape level processes come into focus in Chapter 7, looking in greater depth at how the initiatives position themselves as part of broader landscapes of practice with interaction across a range scales.

4.2. Grow Sheffield

The formation of Grow Sheffield as a community of practice began in 2007, well before the formal constitution of the organisation. It was initiated with the introduction of various characters to one another, as part of a broader informal network of people interested in organic growing. This section examines how through mutual engagement and the coming together of ideas, experiences and skills, the joint enterprise of Grow Sheffield as an arts and growing organisation would emerge. It goes on to examine the initial 'launch' event, and early development and establishment of practice. It will draw primarily on historical accounts given by long standing members, as well as accounts presented by Grow Sheffield through various media. Through in-depth analysis of the history and stories of the organisation, the section aims to uncover key themes surrounding the formation and foundation of the community of practice.

Introducing the Key 'Characters'

Most accounts of early Grow Sheffield begin with a small number of individuals, who initially met and became engaged with each other through a shared interest in the practice of organic food growing. Stories of long-standing members give different perspectives, and describe different journeys into the community of practice, with participants coming from various backgrounds and fields. A small number of individuals emerge as having an instrumental role in shaping the early engagement and enterprise of the organisation.

Official accounts on the Grow Sheffield website ("our story so far", Grow Sheffield website, accessed 2016) point to the role of a single 'founder' (referred as Amy¹⁹) as being the key driving force behind the formation of Grow Sheffield, forming part of a well told story that has become part of the repertoire of the organisation. Whilst Amy played a critical role in sparking the vision of Grow Sheffield and catalysing early engagement, informal accounts from interview data highlight the role of interaction between several key characters. This section will look at different accounts of initial engagement with Grow Sheffield, both formal and informal, and will focus on the various stories of how individuals identify with and relate to each other, developing the beginnings of the shared enterprise that would form the basis of the community of practice.

¹⁹ For the sake of anonymity all named participants are identified by pseudonyms, as discussed in Chapter 3.

In the interview extracts below, Mark, who played a central role to the early development of Grow Sheffield, shares his account of how events unfolded. He builds a narrative, describing each of the three key 'characters', and the ways in which their paths crossed. Through talking about each of their roles and the coming together of their collective experience and expertise on growing, arts and community organisation, he begins to build a story of how the foundations of the organisation would be developed. Below is the first of three interview extracts, in which he begins by introducing himself and his first encounter with Paul:

“So before saying my role in Grow Sheffield, I have to introduce two other characters and introduce myself. So myself, I've been growing food in Sheffield for 12 years now on allotments and I got into it largely through, just kind of, by accident or by chance when I was trying to decide what I wanted to do, and I found a natural gift in growing and interest in medicinal edible food, and found it enormously beneficial for my health, as well as spiritual, mental, psychological health, not just the physical, it was very a holistic subject. And then, I was getting interested in permaculture and larger aspects of the kind of not just growing food on allotments but what's the bigger picture kind of thing, and I read a book called plants for the future, and that led me to meeting a character called Paul, who had advertised himself on the Sheffield green food map²⁰ to be a seed saver teaching biodynamics, permaculture and organics.”

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

The way Mark presents his story is well formulated, with a sequential unfolding of events around who he describes as key “characters”. He introduces his own personal learning trajectory as part of the story, describing how his path led him to become engaged in the practice of food growing and connecting with his mentor, Paul. For Mark, growing is not just a hobby but a way of life - supported by the way he talks about the “holistic” benefits, not just of physical, but “spiritual, mental, psychological health” as well. This lifestyle underpins what he calls the “larger aspects” or “bigger picture”, building a line of thought that transcends allotment growing to connect with broader philosophical and ideological themes relating to “biodynamics, permaculture and organics”. Part of Mark and Paul’s shared practice is therefore not just an interest in the physical process of food growing, but a shared outlook and life perspective. Meaning is attributed to the practice that goes beyond immediate and physical actions of growing, but which form a key part of *lifestyle* and what Mark later refers to as *organic culture*²¹. Mark goes on to describe his relationship with Paul in more depth:

²⁰ The ‘green food map’ would later evolve to become the Sheffield Food Network, one of Grow Sheffield main projects.

²¹ Mark and Paul also developed their own initiative called Ediculture aiming to educate people about organic culture. Furthermore, Chapter 6 examines in greater depth the ways in which Grow Sheffield attempt to promote sustainable practice through promoting sustainable food ‘culture’.

“.. and my relationship with him began in 2003, and I basically began working with him and going on his food growing courses, like an apprentice, one day a week, helping out on his courses and getting on his courses for free, and he was my university. And he'd been researching and practicing organic food growing as his vocation for 20 years pretty much at the point I met him. He was a very kind of radical character who didn't want to sell his produce and didn't want to be part of the organic growing movement²² but wanted to be doing small scale participatory stuff on allotments and urban food growing and really trying to raise awareness and spread a message in the city about the importance of this and doing it as an alternative lifestyle, a drop out lifestyle.”

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Mark describes how with the aid of Paul as his “university”, he was inducted into the world of organic growing. Knowledge, skills and experience are presented as central aspects of their identities, with emphasis placed on the years of practice and their relationship as teacher and “apprentice”. The language used by Mark in charting his journey into the world of organics resonates with Lave (1991) and Wenger (1998) in their analysis of learning trajectories of individuals within communities of practice. Paul provides a pathway for Mark to become a competent practitioner, and in a similar way their combined skills and experience go on to provide a foundation for others to connect and ultimately form a community of practice around growing. As will be illustrated later in the chapter, this forms part of the shared history of learning of the organisation, and gives a sense of how the community emerged from pre-existing practices and connections between practitioners.

Through Paul's experience of participatory work with communities, along with ‘research and practice’ over the years, Mark gives a sense of the uniqueness and character of the type of practice that they shared. Rather than trying to be part of the broader commercial organic movement, his focus was on the small scale and local, and “trying to raise awareness and spread a message in the city”. This “message” and the ideas and meanings that contribute their shared practice of growing go on to form a key part of the enterprise of Grow Sheffield. Mark turns next to the third character in his story:

“..And then Amy who is the third character in the mix is an environmental artist and activist who had been doing research for about 3 or 4 years before, into GM. and she was one of the main researchers in the UK, following, tracking the movement, the genetically modifying movement. And she was moving from Edinburgh and she didn't know quite where she was going to go. But she kind of settled upon Sheffield for one reason or another as a place to live for a couple of years and set up some projects before moving on. She had a friend or two in Sheffield who she kind of networked with, and her friend said oh you need to meet Mark and in the process of meeting me, she got to know Paul,

²² Here Marks reference to Paul not wanting to be part of the organic movement connects to him not wanting to ‘sell his produce’ or to be part of an existing network of small scale *commercial* growers in the city. For Mark, Paul was more interested in the educational, community and voluntary aspects of food growing.

so I took her up to Paul's allotment and she was like - oh wow these two know lots about growing!"
Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Amy is introduced into "the mix" as an artist and activist, with a connection to food primarily through her role as a researcher, and who crucially having moved to Sheffield to start a project related to growing and green spaces, is led to meeting with Mark and Paul. Their experience and understanding of growing forms a key part of their perceived competence and identity - which facilitated by Amy's personal network of connections is what ultimately brings them together. From a communities of practice perspective, a number of insights emerge from the unfolding of events. Firstly, characters are described in relation to their identities and competencies, coming together as part of the "mix" that would constitute the early community of practice. Furthermore, with their various skills and experiences forming part of their identities, they are recognisable within a city-wide network. To some extent the formation of Grow Sheffield was enabled by this pre-existing interconnected landscape of practice and an underlying network of connections of those interested in community food and growing. However, it also required the drive of an individual to facilitate initial mutual engagement between those key characters, and catalyse the initial formation of the community of practice. Paul's allotment emerges as a key location for networking and meeting of people, which is also supported in the accounts by Susan and Carol²³ below:

"I can remember exactly, I had just moved to Sheffield it was January 2007, [...] I was asking somebody locally about allotments. I found an allotment and asked somebody where the association chair person might be at, I didn't know too much about things then. And they said oh that will probably be Paul, so I found Paul on his plot, it turned out that that person was *Paul*, [...]who had six allotments on the Crookes quarry site, which was part of SOFI, which was Sheffield, it still exists, Sheffield Organic Food Initiative which was a charity which he run, and Paul was arguably one of the two organic grower experts in Sheffield and very much an eccentric man, but at the time, was supporting a young women called Amy, who had also fairly recently moved to Sheffield, not living in Crookes, but an environmentalist and an artist."
Interview GS (19/7/2016)

Susan describes her introduction as a relative newcomer, stating "I didn't know too much about things then". Here 'not knowing' doesn't just refer to lack of knowledge or experience about growing, but about local connections configuring local practices *around* growing. In attempting to find a route in, she encounters Paul, who is once again identified through his reputation within the network as a competent and well-connected practitioner, one of the main 'expert' growers

²³ Susan and Carol are long-standing members of Grow Sheffield that have been involved at the core of the organisation since the early days.

in the city²⁴. Emphasis is placed not only on 'know-how', but on 'know-who', demonstrating the importance of being able to connect with key individuals who are identified through their perceived competence and can act as gate-keepers to practice (Edwards, Lunt and Stamou, 2010; Kubiak *et al.*, 2015). In seeking to connect with the local practice of growing, key characters converge, with Richard's allotment providing the space for both learning and connecting with others.

Susan's account gives a sense of familiarity and closeness within the local growing network. This is further demonstrated by Carol below, who as a grower also finds herself becoming part of the network:

"so I think it was 2006, and I started here²⁵ in May 2005, erm, so I reckon, I reckon it was through that network that I was getting to be a part of, yeah and through Paul and other projects, and, yeah I bet it was Amy I made contact with.. yeah I mean that's the nice thing about food growing, that kind of informal network, because Paul was that focused because he'd got that site and a drop in facility, ... so yeah, that was certainly where I met Susan, she found her way up there and I think she'd just finished with [her previous role at an international charity] and erm.. "

Interview GS (15/7/2016)

In saying "that's the nice thing about food growing", Carol attributes the informal network that she was "getting to be a part of" as being a direct part of the practice. The way Susan is described as "[finding] her way up there" adds to the feeling of interconnectedness within the growing network, almost giving a sense of inevitability those interested in the practice will end up connected in some way. Paul's drop-in community allotment facility provides a key initial space for mutual engagement for the developing network. This highlights the importance of both spaces for participation in learning and the local production of knowledge, as well as the development of conceptual and ideological spaces with different understandings, rules and norms (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Healy and Morgan, 2012; Smith *et al.*, 2017)

As the various stories of initial meetings come together, they illuminate how the shared practice of growing (to which members had varying degrees of competence) forms the backdrop for the development of relations between key individuals. Newcomers become part of an informal network of growers, with the opportunity to participate in shared learning and development of meaning around practice. An open space (in the form of Paul's allotment) provides an arena for participation, in which newcomers and experienced members can engage in shared learning and

²⁴ The other 'expert' identified as one of the main organic growers in the city also has connections with Grow Sheffield, being initially a co-opted member, and later an 'advisor'.

²⁵ 'here' refers to Carol's own community allotment project, which is where the interview took place.

practice. While competence was defined within this network largely in relation to knowledge and understanding of organic growing (and to some extent participatory approaches to engaging people with this practice), those involved inevitably carried a range of different skills and experiences. The next section examines how the potentially fertile ground of engagement in practice leads to the development of the joint enterprise that would form the basis of Grow Sheffield.

Developing a Shared Vision - the Fusion of Arts and Growing

Having already touched on the role of identity and competence, this section will explore how the mutual engagement of people with different skills and experience but with a shared interest in growing, helped to stimulate the development of a shared vision that would underpin the enterprise of Grow Sheffield. According to Wenger (1998, p. 149), “the formation of a community of practice is also the negotiation of identities”. As competence in practice is defined by the community, being able to function/identify as a member within a community of practice translates into a form of competence (Wenger, 1998, p. 153). In this way, identity and competence are deeply interconnected. Competent members know how to behave, are familiar with ways of working and shared vision, and can participate in negotiating along the three dimensions outlined by Wenger²⁶. How then did members come together to develop the shared enterprise of Grow Sheffield, and how does this contribute to the collective identity of the organisation?

It is as part of this negotiation where Amy, who is described by various key members as artist, activist, environmentalist, sustainability campaigner, and permaculturalist plays a key role, to the extent that she is often referred to as ‘founder’ of Grow Sheffield (e.g., Grow Sheffield website, accessed 2015). Central to this is her ‘vision’ which is referred to in multiple accounts, including the following extracts:

“She had this vision of turning a city like ours into what she has always described as an urban growing landscape.”

Interview GS (19/7/2016)

“So the vision of it was really sparked off by meeting me and Paul but even if she hadn’t met me and Paul she probably would have set something up anyway. Because what she wanted to do was she wanted to explore the city in regards to of access to green space, whether that be parks or whether that be like little back gardens or verges, any green space within a city, and rethinking green space. She was thinking along those lines way back in 2006 and she moved to Sheffield in 2007 and within a few months Grow Sheffield was born as a project.”

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

²⁶ Mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, see theoretical framework (2.5).

Here, it is Amy's "vision" that stands out as central to the development of enterprise. The statements above give an indication of a clear focus on developing an urban growing landscape within the city, an idea that resonated within the network of organic growers that Amy and other key members were getting to be a part of. While the ultimate aims of Grow Sheffield would be developed collectively, Amy is presented as the driving force behind the ideas on which these are based. This is emphasised when Mark, although acknowledging the role he and Paul played, points out that "she probably would have set something up anyway", eluding to her personal drive to develop a community-based initiative in the city²⁷. Susan also describes Amy's vision as being intended for "a city like ours", which again gives the impression that she was the driving force, and that the idea might also resonate in other similar contexts.

The idea of "vision" and visioning can be usefully explored through a communities of practice approach. Wenger (1998) conceptualises three 'modes of belonging' through which members of a community of practice identify with, and as part of, the wider world. As well as 'engagement' which describes direct and bounded involvement in practice, Wenger offers 'imagination' through which members create images of world of their place in it, and 'alignment' which enables connection to broader enterprises across space and time (see framework, section 2.5). Through a combination of these modes of belonging, practice is both anchored in the local (i.e. through direct engagement), but also connected to global (through imagination and alignment). While imagination and alignment create the ability to frame actions as part of a broader picture of the world (thus contextualising the change in practice they wish to promote), the way in which visions are enacted is mediated through negotiation as part of direct *engagement* in practice. This presents an important conceptual step in understanding how community food initiatives (and grassroots innovations more broadly) produce local knowledge that is contextualised in relation to broader societal issues and connected to broader social movements across space and time.

However, as Wenger (1998, p. 229) points out, "one can design visions, but one cannot design the allegiance necessary to align energies behind those visions." Although Amy was clearly a key driving force behind the vision, it is in the process of negotiation that the enterprise of Grow Sheffield was developed, with the community of practice providing fertile ground and an active network of practitioners to transform that vision into practice. Each member of the community

²⁷ This is further supported by the fact that after leaving Sheffield in 2009, Amy went on to set up a number of projects in different locations around the UK. Amy's personal homepage is testament to her mission to "initiate, catalyse, design and deliver creative and environmental arts projects, events and happenings", detailing around 20 projects that she has been involved with (Amy's personal website, accessed 2015).

of practice brings with them their own unique set of skills, gathered from a lifetime of experience and the continuous navigation of the landscapes of practice that form everyday life. As with Amy, many other individuals have entered and left the organisation at a particular points in its development (and in their own life trajectories), contributing to the joint enterprise with their various skills and experiences before moving on²⁸. The trajectory of Grow Sheffield as a community of practice therefore depends on the ongoing negotiation of the various trajectories of its members, whose identities and competencies both influence and are influenced by their engagement in it. In this way, the uniqueness of Grow Sheffield therefore reflects the diversity of those that constitute the community of practice.

The following extract from an interview with Mark helps to shed light on the negotiation of multiple perspectives into a joint enterprise through mutual engagement. He describes the connection of the artistic and growing, and his role as a broker of the two, negotiating between the two distinct competencies through which he defines the main 'characters':

"Paul was very much - I do horticulture, I do organics, I do permaculture. Amy was like, I'm an artist, I don't understand horticulture. *And I do both*. because I've been doing art ever since I was a kid, I'm a sculptor and I am a musician. They are my main disciplines. People think of me as a food grower but I'm not. Food growing has taken over from sculpture and music but I was able to some degree be this kind of erm.. you know bridge the gap between the horticultural world and the artistic world. So I could understand where Amy was coming from and where Paul was coming from. So I'm probably quite an important part of the picture in that respect, cause Paul did have some artistic sense but it wasn't his focus, he was very much like growing is the way forward. And Amy was you know aware of the importance of arts but didn't understand how growing worked."
Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Mark paints a picture of three distinct characters, each with distinct roles and skills, interests, and histories of connection with the broader world. Amy brings participatory arts and vision of the bigger picture; Paul brings knowledge of organic growing and grassroots community projects; and Mark, being both an artist and a grower plays the role of the "in-betweener" bridging the gap between the two. Mark sees his role as important in articulating the various skills and identities of the other two characters (in terms of arts and growing) with one another. In terms of communities of practice - this is a key aspect of developing mutual engagement towards a shared enterprise, as competencies become "interlocked and articulated with one another" (Wenger, 1998, p. 76). A synergy exists between competencies that are in Wenger's (1998) terms 'complementary' (with each party bringing different skills) and those that are

²⁸ Grow Sheffield has been successful at attracting a range of highly skilled individuals, which have included graphic designers, artists, specialists in funding, marketing, web design, management, community development and human resources.

'overlapping' (with similarities enabling understanding and communication). This 'partiality' of engagement enables development of a shared practice, as according to Wenger (1998, p. 76) being able to "connect meaningfully [...] to the contributions and knowledge of others", is as important as being able to employ one's own competence. Mark elaborates further on the development of arts and growing as central to Grow Sheffield's enterprise in the extract below:

"And the fusion of GS and how it worked well was all born because it had the artistic and the knowledge; it had the kind of ability to connect with people and make something beautiful and public and raise awareness, while at the same time it wasn't just raising awareness about a load of gobbledy-gook, it was genuine real depth of knowledge and experience that was coming through. So it was like, in a sense the art was the channel and the knowledge was the water."

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Mark articulates clearly the mutual constitution of a collective identity unique to Grow Sheffield. It is based both on depth of knowledge and experience of growing, and the power of the arts to connect and engage people with that knowledge. Captured in the visual description of 'the arts as a channel and the knowledge as the water' is an inherent sense of transferring or passing on knowledge, and generating learning that is inspired by translating meaning associated with growing into "something beautiful". Mark's description is further supported by the official 'story' presented on the Grow Sheffield website:

"Grow Sheffield was designed to connect people to each other, to their environment and the seasons using food and food growing. Grow Sheffield was designed to be inclusive, celebratory and risk taking and to create a future vision of the city which was more in touch with its food systems and was adaptive, dynamic and collaborative.

Art and creativity were at the heart of this aim with the belief that art has a key role to play in facilitating cultural shift and 'creating new stories for us to live by'."

Grow Sheffield website, 'Our Story So Far' (accessed 2016)

Once again focus is on creating "future vision" and "new stories for us to live by" that emphasise facilitating a "cultural shift" towards new understandings and ways of participating in practices around food and growing. The collective identity created through the articulation of various identities and competencies with one another, is cemented practices of the organisation through such stories, as well as through artefacts, histories, and ways of doing that become part of shared repertoire. The way in which roles and identities of key individuals are reified through their description as 'characters' by Mark, reasserts their position as part of shared history and shared stories of community.

While a few key individuals might have been instrumental in founding the enterprise, the existence of the community of practice over time relies on members (both existing and new)

being able to identify and engage with its enterprise. They bring with them their own understandings, perspectives and competencies, contributing to the dynamic negotiation of meaning. In this way enterprise isn't static but evolves over time, both in relation to negotiation of a changing membership, and in relation to changing contexts surrounding the initiative. The role of arts has changed significantly over the years, but has maintained its position as a core tenant of Grow Sheffield enterprise. This will be explored further in following chapters, exposing tension as key characters comes and go, and different opportunities and challenges arise.

Although Mark's captures the essence of Grow Sheffield's enterprise through what is likely to be an over-simplistic view, other characters do fall into 'the mix' bringing with them their own skills, competencies and ideas. Susan, for example, is identified specifically for her expertise in the charity sector, having recently retired from work with a major international NGO:

Susan

"And when I got chatting to him, when I said that I worked for [national charity], I don't think he thought any further than, oh, [...] that means that this women knows about fundraising. I'm going to introduce you to Amy who is wanting to do some stuff and will need some funds, so that's how I got involved and introduced to Amy. And I met her a couple of times up at Pauls allotment which in those days used to be a lovely place [...] and we got chatting. This was before grow Sheffield got set up. "

Interview GS (19/7/2016)

Rather than focusing on the vision, Susan presents her role as a practical one in which she could contribute her expertise to the development of the organisation. This helps to demonstrate the coming together of a range of capacities united by a focus on a single joint enterprise. Each person is seen as competent in a particular way, and this competence helps to define their identity in relation to the community of practice. At the same time, each person contributes in a unique way to the collective negotiation of how the shared vision plays out in practice, influencing which ideas are carried forward into action and which are left behind. Susan goes into more depth on the role Amy played in facilitating networking:

"Amy was very very good. Two things that she was good at, she was very good at a lot of things. She was very very good at quietly introducing people to people, so she was doing the network thing but sort of in the background, somebody, an artist friend of hers who has been on the core team, committee, [...described how...] .. she *burrowed*. So you know on one side you could call it quite manipulative, you could call it *benign* manipulation. She would sort of say to people, oh, I know so and so, I think it might be nice for you to talk to them, that sort of thing, so she was very good at doing that.

Interview GS (19/7/2016)

Susan explains the way in which Amy worked to engage people with each other, describing a distinctive style of 'burrowing' or "benign manipulation". This demonstrates once again the

centrality of mutual engagement, with the work of bringing people with the right sets of skills and experiences together being recognised as a key form of competence in the formation of the community of practice. It also reasserts the critical and sometimes instrumental role that key individuals can play. Martiskainen (2017) highlights the importance of community leaders in terms of their tacit knowledge and practical skills for nurturing grassroots innovations, and points to a gap in the literature in terms of understanding the roles they play. In terms of communities of practice, Wenger (1998, p. 109) offers the concept of 'brokering' to describe those who "make new connections across communities of practice, enable coordination, and [...] open new possibilities for meaning", a concept which might go some way to helping to address this gap. Brokering involves "processes of translations, coordination, and alignment between perspectives", and it derives in part through multi-membership, as competent individuals can "introduce elements of one practice into another" (Wenger, 1998, pp. 109, 105). Furthermore, brokers "produce, enable, and facilitate movement, and they themselves are in movement, [...moving] back and forth between different social worlds" (Meyer, 2010, p. 123). This concept will be illustrated further in the next section in relation to broader trajectories, and will be developed throughout the empirical discussion.

Defining a Niche

Having given a sense of the collective beginnings of Grow Sheffield, with the coming together of individuals with various skills and competences around a shared vision, it is necessary to look at the influence of the broader context within which the community of practice emerged. Wenger (1998) emphasises that communities of practice exist not in isolation but develop in relation to and as part of the contexts in which they are situated, with connections between communities of practice and navigation of individuals across the landscape. This has been touched upon in relation to development of identities through individual trajectories, with members bringing with them experience and skills developed over a lifetime through membership of multiple communities of practice through everyday life. This section will examine how within the landscape, Grow Sheffield begins to define its boundaries around a particular niche. Mark in particular focuses on where the idea for Grow Sheffield came from, and how it was informed by knowledge of the broader local food landscape:

"And also, [Amy had] not only been tracking GM, she'd been kind of making notes of all of the other kind of grassroots food growing initiatives that had been popping up around the world so the different like urban and activism in food growing in America, in New York and in other cities. And so she was like, why's there nothing going on in Sheffield? We should set something up. And 'cause she had this deep knowledge and perspective of the bigger picture as well as a skill in participatory arts, erm, she was able to kind of fuse her participatory arts with the world of organics and growing and create Grow Sheffield."

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Mark describes how Amy's exposure through her research to the wider world of grassroots initiatives around food growing meant that she could identify a gap in Sheffield, which Grow Sheffield would aim to fill. Furthermore, ideas underlying Grow Sheffield are to some extent drawn from a broader movement around community food growing (even if they are put into practice in a locally specific way). As will be explored later in the chapter, the content of Grow Sheffield's official launch event also reflected this - with international films and speakers setting the scene for discussion of how to develop a local community of practice in Sheffield. This illustrates that as well as drawing on a pre-existing network of connections, the formation of the community of practice also involved drawing on pre-existing ideas, negotiating them in a local context. Grow Sheffield trajectory doesn't just start and end with the community of practice itself, but the coming together of elements from across time and space as part of broader trajectories

Amy's ability to effectively articulate and align her understanding of 'the bigger picture' with participatory arts and the "world" of growing within a local context, was fundamental to developing the joint enterprise of early Grow Sheffield. Again this resonates with the idea of brokering, and bringing together elements of different practices to create new locally situated meanings. However, also key was the existence of an audience that would be receptive to ideas and ready to engage with others in pursuit of them, as is implied in the interview extract below:

"It developed... very rapidly, almost as if it was the right idea at the right time,"
Interview GS (3/3/2015)

This adds to a sense of trajectory, with the ideas being presented by Amy resonating as part of broader trends towards food growing as a solution to various environmental and social problems. The ideas presented are not unprecedented, but are taken from different contexts in time and space and collectively reimagined through discussion of how they could play out locally. Viewed from a Grassroots Innovation perspective, the movement surrounding the burgeoning of community food initiatives could be considered an innovative niche that is opening up new discursive and conceptual spaces, framings and strategies that resonate with local audiences (Smith *et al.*, 2017, pp. 181, 185). In terms of formation of community of practice, there is a sense of *alignment* with this broader movement, and *imagination* of how it could influence future trajectories of learning. Adding to this sense of trajectory, Mark identifies how, others were developing projects along similar lines:

"And really, in retrospect Grow Sheffield was the prequel or anticipation of the transition town movement because she was setting up Grow Sheffield when Rob Hopkins was

having his ideas of the Transition Towns movement. erm and then a year or two later, transition towns began in Sheffield kind of just trying to repeat what she'd already done.”
Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Mark gives the impression that the Transition Town model was less effective in Sheffield than it was in other cities, precisely because the niche it aimed to fill was already occupied by Grow Sheffield. It also supports the idea that there was a broader general trend in which people (such as Rob Hopkins with transition towns) were developing a certain type of innovative community approach to perceived environmental and social problems. Although the idea of community growing and urban agriculture was already reified and legitimised as a solution to various ecological and social problems (with part of the launch focused on showing examples from the UK and beyond) - the way it translated to Sheffield specifically was unique and context specific. Below Mark describes the way in which Grow Sheffield fitted into a pre-existing network, but also how it attempted to connect various different disciplines to generate a 'culture' around food:

“The sense of being part of a larger network was already there with GS because of pretty much Amy and her work as a networker across different cities and different disciplines. I mean one of the key phrases that kept coming up in the early GS blurb was 'joined up thinking'. So she was already trying to link the different disciplines within a kind of erm... a culture, really, together, so whether its lie the disciplines of geography, science, maths, the more formal academic things, but also the less formal like organic food growing and music, and the arts, and drama and performance and things. And yeah, her focus was food because of largely what she'd been discovering, the worrying facts she'd been discovering around GM.”

Interview GS (3/3/15)

This echoes an extract earlier in the chapter from Grow Sheffield's 'story so far' (Grow Sheffield website, accessed 2016), around facilitating a 'cultural shift', which in this instance is enabled through a network of connections in space and across disciplines. The concept of "joined-up thinking" highlighted by Mark reoccurs through engagement with both case study organisations, and with the broader landscape of practice²⁹. Central to this is connecting to broader landscape level enterprises and repertoires that extend beyond communities of practice, providing continuity across the landscape. Being able to engage with this repertoire and join-up with broader enterprises is part of what constitutes Grow Sheffield's collective competence, and ways in which it connects to wider movements.

²⁹ It will arise in following empirical chapters, particularly in relation to Feeding Manchester conferences, national level initiatives such as Sustainable Food cities, as well as at academic/practitioner focused events.

Establishing the Community of Practice - Launch and Early Development

Having explored the initial coming together of characters and ideas as part of the emergence of a new community of practice, this section will move on to look at the official launch and establishment of Grow Sheffield as an organisation. The event is referred to in several interviews with reasonably detailed accounts (especially considering the event was almost ten years ago), and is also mentioned in the 'our story so far' section of the website, making it stand out as a milestone and early key success. The extract below from an interview with Carol, a core team member, gives a sense of the initial momentum and enthusiasm for the project that the launch helped to generate:

"I think it must have been through what have now become Abundance³⁰ activities. And the thing that I really remember is the event we held in the showroom, when Andy Goldring facilitated, a room absolutely full of people. It must have been a good, I don't know, we probably got all of the historical information. But it must have been 60 people, at least, and we broke into groups and. And I just, what I remember is the real swell of *enthusiasm* and *energy*, and the Abundance message was really so simple and so obvious, and the fact that there was something starting in Sheffield that was kind of running with that. It created such a, such a dynamic, so when it was coming towards the end of the harvesting season and all of that excitement, and locating places and giving stuff out and, it, I think we all felt quite bereft in terms of well what happens now."
Interview GS (15/7/2016)

Carol emphasises the "enthusiasm and energy", as well as the "dynamic" generated by the event. She also talks about the "simple" and "obvious" "Abundance message" which forms a key aspect of grow Sheffield's enterprise. As mentioned in the previous section, this gives the impression that part of what helped to make Grow Sheffield successful in attracting people to participate was that the ideas underpinning it resonated well and could be understood easily by those it sought to engage. Carol also gives a sense of the momentum that was created, with those engaged feeling "bereft" at the prospect of the shared practice they were participating in coming to end. The language used ("what happens now", "where do we go forward") carries an inherent sense of trajectory, giving a feeling of obligation for the shared endeavour to be carried forward, even if the exact direction was at that point still unclear³¹. Susan shares her experience of the launch:

"it was a very very successful meeting, it was sort of like a big group, she had [...] the CEO of the permaculture association [...]...and he facilitated that and then we broke into small

³⁰ Abundance is a project of Grow Sheffield which centres around the practice of urban fruit harvesting.

³¹ While examining trajectory retrospectively enables analysis of the dynamics of negotiation within communities of practice, the uncertainty exhibited at any given point in time should not be overlooked. It also emphasises that the trajectory is open to multiple 'pathways' (Smith et al, 2017) and it is through collective decision making that a way forward is negotiated.

groups. And you know, she was a great community engagement, she *is* a great community engagement person, had all the right ideas, so really her idea for that day was just to see what interest there was in something like Grow Sheffield and what to do about it. So the feedback she got was, you know, in addition to, oh Abundance, that's a great idea, that Grow Sheffield as encouraging people to grow and harvest their own.. food, fruit and vegetables (organic preferably), erm had legs on it, to use a familiar expression. And from there we.. sort of sprouted the group."

Interview GS (19/7/2016)

Susan echoes Carol in talking about the Abundance idea as a central part of early Grow Sheffield enterprise, but also emphasises the aspect of "encouraging people to grow and harvest" organic food. She refers to Amy's community engagement skills, and presents the event as a way to test if her idea "had legs", concluding (again in agreement with Carol) that it did in fact resonate successfully with those that attended. Susan describes how from this initial launch of an enterprise, a group "sprouted" to work together developing these ideas and putting them into practice. Mark elaborates further on some of the events happening around the time of the launch:

"It developed... very rapidly, almost as if it was the right idea at the right time, and by that I mean that within a few months over 200 people had signed up to the GS mailing list through doing the opening events, the opening event being the one at the showroom where they showed the power of community film, 'How Cuba Survived Peak Oil', Where they also did an open space talking strategy and lots of amazing speakers there, Andy Goldring from the permaculture association. Amy within less than 6 months had set up allotment soup, Abundance which she did with me, the outline of a potential community growers. There were other projects as well, oh yeah, Guerrilla gardening projects as well. Anyhow there were a whole bunch, maybe like half a dozen projects which all had people connected to them. So she was like this glue that glued all these people together around a central focus."

Interview GS (3/3/15)

The timing of a whole series of events adds further to the sense of momentum, with a rapidly growing network of people, connected through activities co-ordinated by Amy. During this time, a core group of volunteers developed, as well as a wider circle of individuals with a more peripheral level of engagement. The broad ranging activities that were organised reflected the capacities of those involved as well as attracting new participants with their own specific sets of interests and skills. Marks gives a visual description of a central focus, around which various projects were organised, held together by Amy whose vision is once again underscored as a key driving force and "glue" holding together the initial community of practice.

Beyond the Launch: Developing Ways of Working

Following the accounts given above, the launch event was successful in inviting a broader audience to explore the ideas underpinning the community of practice by offering various

avenues of participation. But how did it develop from a seasonal set of activities and a key event and capitalise on the build-up of interest and energy from a growing membership? How did it move from being a personal protect of a few key individuals, to becoming a functioning community of practice? The story is told in part on the Grow Sheffield website:

“A group of us decided to meet and develop the ideas and themes that had emerged during the open space event and we went on to grow as a community group meeting regularly at gatherings in people’s houses which included talks and creative activities (films, poetry readings) and practical workshops. It was around this time that we decided to constitute as a voluntary group.”

Grow Sheffield website, ‘our story so far’ (accessed 2015)

This short account gives an initial sense of the emergence of a community of practice - focused around a *joint enterprise* of building on ideas discussed at the launch event, developing avenues of *mutual engagement* by organising regular meetings at members’ houses, and developing a *shared repertoire* of creative, informative and skills based activities. However, whilst this account gives a sense of collective beginnings of Grow Sheffield, it does not tell us about the processes of negotiation involved in shaping the community of practice. Susan gives a practical account of some of the challenges that called for increasing formalisation and establishment of the organisation:

“I don’t know whether it was the same time, oh that’s right, she was doing stuff from her own house. You know the other side of the city, Sharrow, can’t remember exactly where, Heeley that sort of area, and it got a bit untenable. And like myself as you know, if you do a lot of stuff people actually don’t know exactly how much you doing, you know, because you can see it being done, you forget how long it takes. So she found herself doing sort of three or four days a week sort of being in touch with people and organising events, and we sort of met in peoples’ houses and had socials, there were lots of people around who since have sort of moved on, sometimes we had speakers, sometimes we just got together and had shared kitchen and that sort of thing. Erm so, it was about a, she was doing a lot more than she wanted to because you know, she needed to earn a living, erm and secondly, that if you’re going to do more stuff then funds would be required..”

Interview GS (19/7/2016)

Susan describes the informal and often social nature of early ways of working, from Amy “doing stuff from her own house” to “meeting in peoples’ houses” and getting together around “shared kitchen”. While this time is often looked back on fondly and is associated not just with informality, but with a sense of getting stuff done, Susan’s narrative gives a sense of natural progression towards more formal working structures. She provides a rationale for change - the overburdening of Amy with responsibility and the limited capacity³² she had to carry the organisation alone; and that funding would be required to support continued growth. Susan

³² Both in terms of time and personal finance: ‘she needed to earn a living’.

goes on to describe how these factors lead to the formalisation and eventual constitution of the organisation:

"... So we were offered a desk and a computer and a telephone line in Sharrow Old Junior School, by the director of the forum there, who again since has moved on. and we were supposed to be paying something ridiculous like £400 a year. I don't think we actually ever paid it. Erm because as far as he was concerned, he was interested, his main agenda then was to get people in to show that the forum was thriving, he wanted people in there and we shared an open plan office with a community develop workers and that sort of thing, there were lots of networking opportunities we used to advertise things, The Sharrow Today, the local newspaper that they do. And at some stage it was *reluctantly* agreed that in order to apply even for small funds, we needed to be a community, erm, a voluntary community organisation, constituted with a bank account. And that's what we did. And I got involved quite heavily in that because throughout my career I've done all sorts of things, and one of the things I did know about was committees, constitutions stuff like that, so I actually did the background and the paper work and that sort of thing, so that's when we became constituted in 2008."

Interview GS (19/7/2016)

The first point in the formalisation of Grow Sheffield that is referred to by Susan is moving into a shared office, which brought with it various networking and publicity opportunities as part of what was becoming a "thriving" forum. At this point in time, Grow Sheffield took advantage of an opportunity that was made available, likely as a result of personal connections and/or growing reputation of the organisation, making it a desirable member of the forum. While the merits of having an office have been increasingly contested as funds have become limited³³, at the time having a physical office presence, along with the opportunities that came with it would have been a large step forward in making Grow Sheffield recognisable as an organisation. Furthermore the opportunities available contributed to the sense of forward momentum that was already apparent. The next step was to formally constitute as an organisation with a bank account. Interestingly, while it is accepted that funding was necessary for Grow Sheffield to progress as an organisation, Susan emphasises a *reluctance* to take what would likely have been perceived as the bureaucratic and time-consuming step of formally constituting. This is supported by the description of the role she played in this, bringing in the necessary skills and knowledge from her professional career. Here a tension arises between the growing will and energy to engage in the practices identified around arts and growing, and the formalisation and official structures that are required to co-ordinate such activities at a larger scale. This tension will be explored further in Chapter 5, which examines the broader trajectory and changing

³³ Recently Grow Sheffield decided to give up its office at the Old Junior school and return to kitchen meetings. While this is always a debated issue, it was seen by some as a positive return to an informal, yet effective style of working.

dynamics of the organisation as Grow Sheffield responds to various challenges and opportunities that arise.

4.3. Feeding Manchester

Having explored the processes of formation of Grow Sheffield in depth, I now turn to Feeding Manchester in order to interrogate some of the key concepts identified in a different setting and on a broader scale. Feeding Manchester is a “network of sustainable food practitioners from across Greater Manchester” which was set up by the Kindling Trust in 2009³⁴, and has been supported by it ever since (Kindling Trust website, accessed 2016). As will be discussed throughout this chapter and the empirical section of the thesis, Feeding Manchester is approached as a case study initiative that attempts to work at the level of landscape of practice, by seeking to connect practitioners from across the sustainable food sector within Greater Manchester, intersecting with other actors and systems of practice. This section begins by examining this theoretical framing, and the way in which Feeding Manchester positions itself in relation to and as part of the broader landscapes of practice.

Framing at the Landscape Level

Unlike Grow Sheffield, which evolved organically through mutual engagement brokered by key individuals, Feeding Manchester was initially designed and shaped by the directors of its host organisation, the Kindling Trust. Although the dynamics of its emergence and initial development differ from those of Grow Sheffield, similar themes do emerge. Interviews with directors of the Kindling Trust Rob and Lisa reveal the impetus and some of the context surrounding the emergence of Feeding Manchester. The extracts below give a sense of the initial framing of a problem, and the presentation of Feeding Manchester as a solution:

“So, it well, was when we were setting up Kindling I think. And we were looking at what projects we were going to run, initially, because we were aware that we were wanting to set up a farm, but we didn’t have any experience of running any food projects. And there was this pot of money called Making Food... Local Food Fund... so we started talking to people about what they were putting bids in for because we didn’t want to tread on anyone’s toes as we were relatively new, and we discovered that, people were telling us what they were putting bids in for, but they were telling us, don’t tell so and so, or, and then erm, it just became really obvious that, yeah. this big pot of money, meant people were talking *less* to each other and being less strategic and working *less* together. That maybe changed a bit when people got funding from the local food fund, but right at the start everyone was just being really cagey about what they were doing. And didn’t really want to work with other people. so we said well look, why don’t we go away and try to confront that. From what I remember that’s why we started Feeding Manchester.”

Interview FM1 (2015)

³⁴ The Kindling Trust was established in 2007, and uses food as a vehicle to address a range of issues surrounding sustainability, catalysing action around social change.

“and how that started was.. ermm.. by.. when we were very first setting Kindling up, and at the same time, was a similar time to when the Local Food Fund was out. And we, we were kind of hearing from lots of different groups what they were applying for funding for but they were all kind of going, on no, don’t tell... keep that to yourselves because we aren’t telling anyone else and it was, so that was all going on, and we were just like - wow this is mad and people should actually be joining up and doing this, or at least talking to each other..”

Interview FM2 (2015)

Both accounts address the emergence of Feeding Manchester by outlining perceived problems relating to the Local Food Fund, particularly the development of an atmosphere of secrecy and competition amongst groups working across the local/sustainable community food landscape in Manchester. Whilst the funding, dedicated solely to initiatives focusing on local food, offered potential for a step-change in the capacity of local organisations across the city, the extracts above also demonstrate how it had an influence on changing the dynamics between various community groups. It is within this context that Feeding Manchester emerged, to “confront” the perceived disconnect by facilitating communication between and “joining up” of different groups and their enterprises. Rob notes how as a result of the large funding grant, groups were becoming less “strategic”, and “talking less” with each other - giving an initial indication that Feeding Manchester was aiming to work strategically at a broader scale through connecting different actors.

The theme of ‘joined-up thinking’ as already touched upon, is one that arises in the development of both case studies as they seek to bring individuals from different backgrounds and expertise together. In the case of Feeding Manchester, this extends to an explicit aim of bringing together representatives of different communities of practice across the region, to work together towards mutually identified and shared goals. A key difference between the two case studies then is that scope of the shared enterprise that is developed and the scope engagement between diverse actors, with Grow Sheffield focusing on developing local food practices, and Feeding Manchester emphasising strategy towards system level working. This is a theme that will be explored further throughout the empirical section of the thesis.

Rob positions the Kindling Trust, as being a ‘relatively new’ actor within the local food landscape. This perhaps highlights similarities with Grow Sheffield’s emergence in terms of formation being catalysed by a key individual (or individuals) entering the landscape with a fresh perspective, without the constraints of being tied in to established relationships and ways of working (and in the case of Feeding Manchester, without being considered a threat in terms of competition for resources). They are able to bring in a vision, which aligns with the local context and is reimagined and negotiated by local actors. In terms of a communities of practice approach, this

can be conceptualised as connecting ideas and bringing knowledge from one knowledge domain into another, with work across boundaries being well recognised for innovative potential (Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson, 2002; Justesen, 2004; Maye, 2016). Exposure to new forms of knowledge and practice, and the skills and capacity of a competent practitioner who is able to navigate the landscape, as will be explored, creates potential for developing innovative communities of practice.

Rob indicates a need for awareness of the shape of the food landscape when he talks about ‘not wanting to tread on anyone else’s toes’. This gives a sense of not wanting to create an enterprise that encroaches of the knowledge domain of other existing groups, and as with Grow Sheffield, highlights the need to find a niche within which to develop. In forming a new community of practice, awareness of positionality within the pre-existing landscape, as well as knowledge of the network of relations that already exists, is therefore critical. Lisa elaborates further on their position within the local food landscape:

“..and we kind of had a history I suppose of having set up [various sustainability hubs and enterprises in the region] and all of those different things so people sort of knew us from that but also I think didn’t really see us as a threat in terms of competition for the funding because we were always planning leave and set up the farm³⁵, so people were telling us so when we first set up we were doing it with quite a small focused group of people in a sense.”

Interview FM2 (2015)

Lisa’s account gives a sense of the familiarity arising from the pre-existing network of actors associated with projects focusing on sustainability³⁶. At the same time, she describes their position as being one of non-competition, giving them a unique opportunity to confront the problem identified whilst avoiding potential conflict. The ability of Rob and Lisa to identify this particular niche arises from their familiarity, awareness of and connections to the local landscape of practice in Greater Manchester. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015, p. 13) describes this form of competence as ‘knowledgeability’, which “manifests in a person’s relations to a multiplicity of practices across the landscape”. Whilst in the case of Grow Sheffield, knowledgeability about the local landscape of growers and artists helped facilitate the coming together of a single community of practice, within Feeding Manchester knowledgeability was fundamental in convening representatives of multiple communities of practice.

³⁵ This refers to Kindling Trust’s long-term aim of buying a farm in the region, to develop as a learning centre for organic growing and sustainable living.

³⁶ While her and Rob were relatively new in relation to practices around food specifically, they were well-known for their work on sustainability more broadly.

This leads to the second key point, which relates to how Lisa identifies hers and Rob's roles within the landscape, and her explanation of why they were well-positioned to initiate the network. The fact that they are known in Manchester, and have developed a reputation based on previous work in setting up various sustainability related enterprises, conveys a joint sense of trust and acknowledgement of capacity. This is also reflected in Grow Sheffield's emergence, as Mark and particularly Paul were recognised for their work, although the extent to which this plays a role is unclear³⁷. The history described by Lisa likely reflects not only their work in developing different projects - but a history of connections and relationships that led to them being identified as people (/an organisation) who can be trusted and whose competence is legitimised through experience.

Although not featuring heavily in Wenger (1998), the concept of 'trust' is explored in later works, particularly those concerning digital communities in which "commitment to domain and practice acts as a key source of trust among members" (Wenger, White and Smith, 2009, p. 8). In (Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2015) trust comes to the fore, playing a central role in 'brokering' at the landscape level. Kubiak *et al* (2015, p. 84) highlight the importance of creating a 'micro-climate of trust', with trust developing over time "out of relationships with some shared history [...] in which individuals build a stake in maintaining a reputation for honesty and reliability". Trust is therefore connected to the reputations established by Rob and Lisa and is a key capacity that they draw upon to establish the initial engagement (between spatially distributed communities) on which Feeding Manchester is based.

'Framing' also plays a key role in the analytical framework developed by Smith et al (2017) in their recent work on Grassroots Innovation Movements³⁸ (as has been touched upon in exploring the role of visioning in the emergence of Grow Sheffield). Framing is understood to help generate cohesion, as movements are "held together by a collective production of ideas and meaning that creates bonds of solidarity between actors and informs theory coordinated action" (Smith et al, 2017, pp. 22-23). The language used clearly resonates with a communities of practice approach, acknowledging the "complex process of knowledge production" that is inherent to framing of grassroots innovation (Smith et al, 2017, p. 23). This overlap is useful in

³⁷ Mark notes for example that Paul had "been researching and practicing organic food growing as his vocation for 20 years", teaching various courses and (quite literally) seeding projects around the city (Interview GS, 3/3/2015).

³⁸ They engage with framing empirically by exploring: "what motivated the movements origins, how movements problematize mainstream models for innovation and development, what alternative visions and aims they develop and promote and how these change over time - through negotiation, or due to changing opportunities and resources, for example" (Smith et al, 2017, pp. 23-24).

pointing towards how a communities of practice framework might be utilised in the context of grassroots innovation. It also highlights the potential for a communities of practice approach to contribute to understanding of the dynamics of knowledge production and learning in grassroots innovation, an area to which this thesis contributes.

Launching the Initiative

This section analyses documents and write-ups from the launch event, as well as interview data, to further examine the framing of the formation of the initial community of practice generated as part of Feeding Manchester. As described by Lisa in the extract below, the first meeting of the network was a practitioner-focused event with a selected group of participants. It was held in a workshop style, inviting attendees to participate in discussion, which would set the precedent for further ‘conferences’ over the coming years:

“So for the first Feeding Manchester we kind of did, it was a bit of an invite only one, which seemed a bit.. I don’t know, we were a bit torn about doing it but it kind of felt almost like it was seeing whether it would work. And it was also about erm, focusing on practitioners, so what we were saying was this is kind of a working network, its not just a kind of anyone can come thing, its sort of about saying who, people who are working on it, get together and look at how to work together better and solve the obstacles that we’ve identified, or that they’ve identified.”

Interview FM2 (2015)

Having identified the gap that they wanted Feeding Manchester to fill (i.e. to bring various groups together to collaborate rather than compete), Lisa describes how the initial meeting was an “invite only” practitioner focused event, designed to initiate the creation of network for *practitioners*. A certain level of competence, experience and connection is required to gain access to the forum. This contrasts to Grow Sheffield’s launch (an open public meeting inviting participation), but reflects the specific enterprise of FM to connect groups already working on food and growing issues. Although Lisa describes being “torn” about the decision to limit attendance in this way, she justifies this by emphasising the almost experimental nature of the event in that “it kind of felt almost like it was seeing whether it would work”. This fits in with concepts of creating niche space for grassroots innovation, in which different rules and norm provide a protective space for experimentation with new ideas and practices (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2017)³⁹. Lisa elaborates further on the development of a joint enterprise at the initial meeting:

³⁹ The idea of experimentation within such niches spaces as part of the innovative process will be returned to in chapter 6.

“the beginning was like looking at what do we mean by a sustainable food system, and what do we want to do, when we did the visioning of what we thought a sustainable Manchester, greater Manchester, would look like,”
Interview FM2 (2015)

By asking “what do we mean by a sustainable food system” Lisa points towards the collective negotiation of meaning that helped shape the formation of the enterprise of the emerging community of practice. Participants were invited to contribute to a process of shared “visioning” of what a more sustainable city/region would look like. This relates once again to the importance of ‘vision’ and as similarly highlighted in analysis of Grow Sheffield’s formation - the role of imagination and alignment of perspectives and understandings in developing potential future trajectories. Once again, imagining possible futures and using them as a tool for negotiation within the community of practice proves to be a useful way of directing trajectories of learning, and developing practices that align with shared vision. The aims of the event are elaborated in the extract from event programme below:

“Purpose of the Event:

The event is for a relatively small number of individuals and groups and focused on partnership working and practical solutions. We hope this is the start of a series of events that aim to:

- 1) Bring together the growing number of enterprises & groups in Greater Manchester who are working on, providing and/or interested in local food issues.
- 2) Identify obstacles to people sourcing/providing local sustainable food, and solutions to those obstacles.
- 3) Develop a strategic way to increase the sourcing, provision of, & access to local sustainable food.
- 4) Define some practical ways to work towards this strategy, and steps to move forward.”

FM1-Programme (2009)

As will be elaborated throughout the empirical section, there is a clear trajectory presented in these aims - from generating mutual engagement between actors, to collectively identifying problems and solutions (with these first two aims forming the basis of the first event). Later focus moves towards developing strategy and defining practical ways to work towards that strategy. Examining the write-up from the first event reveals tools and ways of working that are developed and form the basis of future ways of working in Feeding Manchester. Fig. 7 (an image from FM1) illustrates the format of typical conference style-events, includes workshop based discussion and local and national speakers. This represents the kind of open space discussion that is exhibited throughout many of following Feeding Manchester events and demonstrates a way of working common in the community sector. Table 4 uses data derived from the programme and write-up notes to summarise the agenda and key points of negotiation of the event, with the right column highlighting key learning points that have arisen through analysis.



Fig. 7: Photograph of workshop style format of FM1 (Feeding Manchester website, accessed 2015)

Programme	Content	Analysis: Key learning points identified
Introductions	Self-introduction of participants (including their roles and the organisations they represent), and of the agenda and aims of the meeting	Increasing knowledgeability about who is engaging, and enables identification and possible connection between members. Gives shared sense of purpose and creates mutual starting point for the day.
Session 1	“Setting the scene - Manchester’s unsustainable food system” exploring ‘obstacles’ facing the local sustainable food sector	Focus on obstacles and challenges, outlining the shared problem to be addressed. Focus on local context.
Session 2	“Food pioneers - Introducing proven local solutions” - presentations from sustainable food projects in Manchester	Introducing local, pre-existing solutions. Generating a shared awareness of what already exists in the landscape.
Session 3	“National inspiration – best practice from around the country” “Presentations from inspiring projects– talking about how they overcome some of the obstacles that you have identified”	Examples of success from different contexts. ‘Inspiration’ introducing new ideas and concepts that might be applied to local problems.

Session 4 (workshops)	“Delivering sustainable food – stepping up to the challenges.” Workshops on following barriers: “1. Increasing produce available & local growers. 2. Sharing information of what exists & improving our marketing. 3. Public expectations.””	Working out how to apply knowledge and ideas in local context. Working on tackling specific obstacles identified. Participants of varying expertise able to focus in area of interest - building connections between those working on and facing issues.
Workshop Feedback	“Workshop groups to feed back and pull out main actions to be worked on.”	Consolidating and articulating learning within the group, and prioritising actions.
Next Steps	Looking at the practical ideas for moving forward and our role as a Greater Manchester 'local food movement' in putting these ideas into practice	Translating learning into short-term practical steps to be taken. Discussion of formalising the network.
End time	Network continuing at local pub	Informal and social gathering, enabling reflection and building on connections made.

Table 4: Programme contents from FM event and summary of key learning points derived from my own analysis.

The structure of the day described above represents a fairly typical format for Feeding Manchester events, and one that seems to function well in terms of generating learning and outcomes. It demonstrates a distinct learning trajectory throughout the day, as participants work together to develop their own knowledge, as well as the collective knowledge of the group through mutual engagement. The first part of the day focuses on bringing all participants up to the same level of contextual understanding, with information being presented about the problems, local existing solutions, and national ‘best practice’ that could inspire solutions in Manchester. Having been provided with context, ideas and knowledge, the second part of the day is discussion based, with participants breaking into small, topic-focused groups. Participants are able to contribute in their particular area of expertise, working with others to form solutions and actions. In the final part of the session, groups come together and articulate key points from each of their discussions to one another. These are then collectively prioritised by the group, consolidating learning into manageable steps, including short-term steps to be taken. A final step, reflecting on the role of Feeding Manchester as a network in delivering these actions, points towards the formalisation and reification of group. There is also an important social and informal aspect to the event, with emphasis placed on developing connections and relations

within the group of participants through interaction. Breaks and networking opportunities over lunch enable reflection and ongoing discussion, which is continued after the event in the informal environment of the local pub. The launch event was considered a success as reflected by the feedback noted in the minutes:

“The feedback since the event has been very positive, with a real feeling of excitement for moving forward (some people have done their tasks already!), and an almost tangible sense of relief that a meeting of such like-minded projects and people has started.”
Notes from FM1, Feeding Manchester website (accessed 2015).

As with GS, a sense of momentum and “moving forward” was generated by the initial event. As well as signalling the successful filling of a niche through identification of a purposeful shared enterprise, the generation of enough energy for it to carry it forward seems to be a key step in initiating grassroots communities of practice. The “sense of relief” that is generated echoes the sense of it being the ‘right idea at the right time’ from the Grow Sheffield case study, and also demonstrates the conceptual and ideological space that the enterprise fills resonates with the initial audience. However, as Chapter 5 will explore further, a key challenge remains in sustaining the community and momentum generated beyond the initial stages.

Beyond the Launch: Establishing a Community of Practice

Building on the first event which was described as almost an ‘experiment’, following events begin to cement Feeding Manchester as a continuous endeavour, with establishment of ways of work and negotiation of shared enterprise developing over time. As commented on in analysis in the previous section, the structure and format of the first conference style event was relatively representative of later events (although with exceptions). This section will reflect on the nature of development of community of practice in early follow-up events, and the extent to which communities of practice approach can provide a useful framework for conceptualising the broad-scale community that develops.

Following a successful launch event, a second Feeding Manchester conference was held fourth month after the first (in October 2009) and it “continued planning practical ways of making Greater Manchester’s food system more sustainable” (FM2, Feeding Manchester website, accessed 2016). Figure 8 below illustrates the similar format of event, with an open space for discussion and workshops, as well as presentations. In the centre of room are notes and documents from the previous meeting, demonstrating the carrying forward, and building on learning from the previous session. According to the write-up from the event, the day began with updates from the previous meeting (FM2 programme), again demonstrating a sense of continuity and progression with the collective development of ideas over time. This was followed by a similar format of presentations and workshops, identifying existing local examples, and best practice inspiration from around the UK.



Fig. 8: Photograph of FM2 showing similar conference style format (Feeding Manchester website, accessed 2015)

As well as a sense of learning trajectory, the ‘updates’ and ‘next steps’ that typically open and close meetings indicate that while engagement of the group is limited to periodic meetings (typically three per year), action is ongoing. It is here where a distinct type of community of practice begins to emerge. As a network of practitioners, engagement in shared practice around the newly establishing enterprise occurs not only at meetings, but as part of the enterprises of the communities and organisations that participants represent. Collaborations and partnerships form, and individuals incorporate work into their own activities and ongoing practices. In this sense, Feeding Manchester can be conceptualised as a meta-community of practice, linking into, complementing, and aligning pre-existing networks and practices that constitute the network.

Wenger (1998) highlights that the concept of communities of practice is flexible enough to fit diverse communities, with varying levels of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. He also however, warns against over-stretching the concept, particular where important discontinuities may be overlooked. The concept of ‘constellations’ of practices is introduced to describe configurations of interconnected practices that are too broad or diverse and lack coherence to be considered communities of practice. While this is too diffuse to usefully describe Feeding Manchester, it may be useful to describe the broader landscape of actors (i.e., pre-dating or outside of Feeding Manchester network; or in the more loosely connected Sheffield network). Community and sustainable food actors may be aware of each other, encounter each other through related enterprises, face similar challenges and opportunities, and have some degree of shared language, tools and understandings, but not be directly engaged in a shared enterprise. This will be explored further in Chapter 7.

While Feeding Manchester in many ways aligns with the core dimensions of practice as a source of cohesion for community (joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire), there are also useful distinctions that can be made to what might be considered typical communities of practice. On the one hand, it has defined spaces and modes of engagement (even if these are infrequent and spread over a relatively long timescale). It has a clear and collective enterprise formed around mutually negotiated aims based on development and support of a sustainable food system. It uses collectively developed, languages, resources and ways of working. As will be explored in the following chapter it has continuity over time that constitutes a trajectory of learning. However, as summarised in Table 5, it also functions simultaneously at the meta-level. It provides an arena whereby members of pre-existing communities of practice with similar aims from around the region can work together. It formalises a space where they can work across their boundaries, fostering a positive, collaborative atmosphere, as opposed to one of competition and conflict. While engagement through meetings may be infrequent, members are continuously engaged in practices that underlie the network, and each have the potential to act as brokers to bring elements of Feeding Manchester’s collective enterprise and repertoire back into their own local practice⁴⁰.

	How Feeding Manchester intervenes at the meta-level
Joint Enterprise	<p>Connects enterprises of multiple communities of practice into a collective joint enterprise</p> <p>Works to influence landscape level context by addressing collective challenges and creating mutual opportunities.</p> <p>Formation of ‘community’, ‘movement’ or tangible ‘network’, generating a sense of collective.</p>
Mutual Engagement	<p>Creates space and opportunity for engagement for diverse communities of practice.</p> <p>Enables partnership building and mutually beneficial collaborations outside of the Feeding Manchester space.</p>
Shared Repertoire	<p>Collectively creates a bank of shared resources that can be utilised outside of Feeding Manchester.</p> <p>Creates a shared language and definitions that can be used to engage a variety of actors (e.g. councils, funders).</p>

Table 5: Feeding Manchester as a meta-level community of practice

As a meta-community of practice, the joint enterprise of Feeding Manchester appears to be two-fold. Firstly, it provides a platform for sustainable food practitioners to come together and feel

⁴⁰ This once again explains the emphasis on inviting practitioners only to participate in events.

part of a network, or movement, or *community* and develop that community through ongoing interaction and support. Secondly, it provides a platform where the network of practitioners can work towards developing their practice and influencing change - through improving their own projects, forging new projects and partnerships, creating new tools and language or by attempting to shift the landscape creating new opportunities (for example by influencing or engaging local authorities, creating new structures of provision, or bring in new resources). The two sides of Feeding Manchester's joint enterprise are interrelated - it is a space where members work together to build and be part of a community, and a platform where sustainable food practitioners, can develop, move forward and align their practices.

Feeding Manchester builds on the continuities that already exist between communities of practice that are part of the sustainable food landscape in Greater Manchester, providing opportunity for mutual engagement and development of joint enterprise and shared repertoire as described above. The initiatives can be understood as a landscape level intervention which demonstrates principles of a community of practice but at a meta-level of analysis. This concept will be tested and developed further throughout the empirical section of the thesis. Chapter 5 examines the challenges associated with maintaining long-term trajectory and continuing to generate momentum despite infrequent opportunities for engagement, limited resources, and a changing landscape of challenges. Chapter 6 examines the potential for innovation that arises from the configuration of the initiative; and Chapter 7 examines the dynamics of interaction at a broader landscape or system level of analysis.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the emergence of the two case study organisations as communities of practice. This final section will summarise some of the key themes arising from each of the two case studies, highlighting key points of comparison, and outlining questions arising for further empirical engagement in the following chapters.

The early negotiations of joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire were central in laying the foundations and guiding principles on which both initiatives have established and continue to develop. Table 6 below illustrates some of the key contrasts between the case studies in terms of these three dimensions. While there are similarities in the dynamics of negotiation (as will be highlighted below), there are important distinctions in the ways in which they are conceptualised through a communities of practice approach. Whereas Grow Sheffield forms around a cohesive group of core members that regularly interact, Feeding Manchester is formed as a network of practitioners, each of whom are part of their own

communities of practices working in different geographical and conceptual areas of community and sustainable food. Whilst Grow Sheffield demonstrates the levels of engagement, familiarity and social cohesion that might be expected in a more typical community of practice, Feeding Manchester works at the meta-level, not relying on direct engagement, but uniting practitioners by enabling them to align their practices as part of a broader joint enterprise, underpinned by creation of a collective shared vision.

	Grow Sheffield	Feeding Manchester
Joint Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - focus on growing and the arts - community based participatory approach to organic growing -developing 'culture' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - focus on sustainable food <i>systems</i>. - mutual support and collective intervention - aligns with broader collective practices of its members
Mutual Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informal cohesive group - development of interpersonal relations - open invitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practitioners and those engaged with sustainable food practices - infrequent participation through workshop/conference, but ongoing participation in sustainable food practices
Shared Repertoire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - informal ways of working - shared understanding and <i>vision</i> around growing and art. - community engagement through arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - development of shared definitions and language - visions of a sustainable food system -shared history and connection

Table 6: Comparing the dimensions by which practice is a property of community (Wenger, 1998) in the emergence of each of the two case studies

In terms exploring the dynamics of negotiations, the chapter initially focused on Grow Sheffield with an in-depth analysis of its formation, through which a number of key themes emerged. First, the mutual engagement of key characters and their diverse competencies and identities was instrumental in the formation of a collective identity and joint enterprise centred around growing and the arts. The shared practice of growing provides an initial avenue of engagement, with a pre-existing network of growers contributing to the coming together of members interested in a shared practice. While there is a collective negotiation of enterprise, one key member is identified as playing a catalysing role. As a knowledgeable newcomer to the local landscape of community growing, Amy was able to identify a niche space and define a vision that would become a key tool for negotiation and alignment, bringing together key members and creating cohesion that would form the basis of the community of practice. She also played a key role in stimulating mutual engagement, using her skills as a 'broker' to bring people

together with competencies and capacities that align with the joint enterprise of the organisation. Following a successful launch, the sense of momentum generated leads to the establishment of the community of practice, with development of ways of working and eventual formalisation as the scale of activities grows.

A number of similarities emerge through comparison with Feeding Manchester. Firstly, the existence of a pre-existing landscape of practice is key. Once again, key individuals play an instrumental role, using their knowledgeability of the landscape to connect competent members and engage them through participation in the initial Feeding Manchester conference. In this case, those individuals are at once newcomers to the specific landscape of sustainable food practices (being knowledgeable but not yet practitioners), and at the same identified through relations of trust (being familiar as well know sustainability activists and entrepreneurs). This position gives them the legitimacy and connections to be able 'convene' the initial conference effectively, overstepping the sense of competitive to stimulate collaboration.

As in the case of Grow Sheffield, a specific niche is identified and developed by Feeding Manchester, providing the "right idea at the right time" (Interview GS, 3/3/2015) and resonating with the intended audience. Unlike Grow Sheffield, Feeding Manchester is designed as a network exclusively for competent practitioners (on an invite only basis), creating a protected space where they can work on their specific practice-based enterprise. In both cases, the framing of the community of practice as a collective solution to a range of jointly identified local and societal challenges, demonstrates the inherent innovative nature of the initiatives, a theme that will underpin discussion in the following chapters.

In both cases, visioning plays a key role in helping to develop the joint enterprise that occupies the niche identified. Whereas in Grow Sheffield the vision is developed by a key founding member who has the drive to catalyse engagement around it, in Feeding Manchester the exercise of collective visioning is part of what helps generate cohesion. In both cases, vision became part of repertoire of the community of practice and a tool for negotiation of enterprise. Through this, the communities of practice are once again framed as innovative solutions, through imagination and alignment with broader challenges or movements. As will be explored in the following chapter, vision plays a key role in the development of trajectories as imagination of the future possibilities influences negotiation of practice in the present.

The chapter began to examine the establishment of ways of working in each of the two case studies. In both cases, while individuals were key in brokering initial engagement and in developing ideas and visions on which the communities of practice are formed around,

successful launch events were instrumental in generating the initial energy and momentum that enabled establishment of shared practice. The challenges and opportunities that arise in the trajectories of the communities of practice as they continue to develop and attempt to sustain momentum will be explored further in chapter 5.

As described by Wenger (1998, p. 154), the trajectory of a community of practice is “not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion- one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present and the future.” The following chapters will draw on insights of the past gathered from analysis of shared histories in this chapter, to give insight into the development of negotiations and of future trajectories, both in relation to negotiations within the communities of practice, and their broader field of influences as they navigate the landscape of challenges and opportunities they face.

Chapter 5

Negotiating Trajectories

5.1. Introduction

Building on the previous chapter, which analysed the formation of the case study organisations as communities of practice, Chapter 5 examines the historical trajectories of the initiatives as they have negotiated various challenges and opportunities they have faced. It will pick up on key themes that have arisen, including the development of collective identities, shared histories and niche spaces, looking at how these contribute to processes of negotiation. It will also examine the ways in which different capacities are assembled, through bringing together different people, skills, structures, strategies, tools and resources to be able to identify and respond to opportunities and challenges over time. The chapter highlights the centrality of the underlying challenge of survival, and points towards the role of innovation, as framed in terms of collectively developed responses to problems, and specific to the community in question - drawing on their unique sets of knowledge, experience and capacities.

Returning once again to the communities of practice framework set out in Chapter 3, this chapter builds on understanding of trajectory to examine the ways in which joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire evolve over time as part of shared histories of learning. Trajectory is understood as “not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion - one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present and the future” (Wenger, 1998, p. 154). This chapter will examine key points in the histories of the case study organisations, and how trajectory is negotiated in relation to internal dynamics, momentum and capacity; as well as in relation to the broader ‘field of influences’ including the various challenges and opportunities that arise. It also aims to connect to a sense of continuity through time as learning, history, and the tools and resources that are developed through practice become part of the repertoire that informs future negotiation, connecting the ‘past, present and future’ of the communities of practice in question.

According to Wenger (1998, p. 80), “it is only as negotiated by the community that conditions, resources, and demands shape practice”. While the assemblage of capacity, negotiation of enterprise and broader ‘field of influences’ work to shape the direction of the community of practice, trajectory develops as the community’s *response* to those factors. Wenger (1998, p. 77) elaborates on this further, describing how joint enterprise is “defined by the participants in

the very process of pursuing it”, as their “negotiated response to their situation”, and through which it “belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control”. In relation to the aims and vision that were discussed in the previous chapter to which members are accountable, when mobilised in negotiation it is interpretation of that vision that evolves as part of practice (Wenger 1998, p. 81). Furthermore, rather than being static, joint enterprise itself evolves to incorporate less tangible aspects that are equally important to development of practice and maintenance of the community. It is building on this premise that the trajectories of the organisations are analysed, as communities of practice evolve in relation to interconnected internal dynamics and external forces.

By examining how trajectories unfold over time, this chapter aims to uncover the dynamics of innovation in how communities of practice develop their practice in *response* to a range of influential factors. Through this, the links between innovation and long-term sustainability of the community of practice will be explored, as various factors critical to their survival (such as maintaining capacity, purpose and impact) are rolled into practice as part of collectively negotiated joint enterprise. Surviving and maintaining capacity in a resource restricted environment are highlighted as key challenges, which connects to a need for ongoing momentum and development of purpose and impact. Understanding developed in this chapter will inform Chapter 6, which focuses more closely on processes of innovation within the case study organisations.

Analysis begins once again with focus on Grow Sheffield, and some of the key transitions that have been negotiated within the organisation over the course of its history. Negotiations are based around the availability of resources, and the interrelated issue of capacity as people enter and depart the community of practice. Resources do not only influence the capacity available but also the dynamics within the group as different structures and ways of working evolve underpinning the practices that developed. This section also examines the extent to which a communities of practice framework proves useful in conceptualising these changing dynamics, as the organisation responds to changing field of influences in both scaling up and scaling down.

Feeding Manchester once again offers useful contrast and insight into the dynamics working at the meta-level across a practitioner based network. Resources, whilst limited, have not been as instrumental in shaping the development of the initiative. However, resource scarcity at the landscape level does influence the capacity of member organisations and communities to engage with one another and develop their joint enterprise. At the same time as providing a network of support, Feeding Manchester depends on maintaining momentum and relevance at

the landscape level in relation to the broad range of organisations that are involved, and in a climate of limited resources.

5.2. Grow Sheffield in Transition

As discussed in the previous chapter, Grow Sheffield began as a small but vibrant community organisation, generating a broad base of interest through a range of seasonal activities based around growing and the arts. Having detailed the emergence and early establishment of the community of practice, this section will take a broader look at some of the key points in the organisation’s trajectory. Grow Sheffield’s history has been shaped to a large extent by periods of funding, which as well as providing resources and capacity, has shaped the focus of negotiations in line with the enterprise of the funder. By examining the way in which the enterprise of Grow Sheffield has developed in line with both capacity and an evolving direction and purpose, this section highlights the role of innovation in responding to challenges and opportunities faced and in ensuring survival and long term sustainability of the organisation.

Table 7 highlights some of the key transitions which mark turning points in Grow Sheffield’s history, most of which are based around significant fluctuation in funding and subsequent changes in the levels of capacity within the organisation. This section begins by looking at the processes and dynamics involved with scaling up as a result of a significant funding grant awarded as part of the Local Food Fund. It then turns to periods of scaling down (a topic that has so far received less attention in the literature), focusing on attempts to maintain capacity whilst managing reduced resources following the period of the Local Food Fund. As illustrated in the table, while the funding available reduces over time, major projects continue in some form and some new projects also develop. The final section looks more broadly at issues around funding and capacity, and novel ways in which the organisation has responded to those challenges. The chapter then turns to Feeding Manchester and how challenges and dynamics differ in the context of a meta-community of practice working at the landscape level.

Time Period	Major funding	Main projects
2007	Small grants	Abundance, small scale community arts and growing
2010-2013	Big Lottery: Local Food Fund (LFF) <i>Significant increase in funding</i>	‘Grow Project’ - Abundance, Community Growers, Sheffield Food Network
2013-2015	Green Fund: Sheffield on a Plate (Soap) <i>Decrease in funding</i>	Abundance, Sheffield Food Network, student based growing projects and workshops.

		Fruit Tree Project pilot
2015+	Small grants and donations (Awards for all, seedbed trust) Decrease in funding	Abundance, Sheffield Food Network, seeds for suppers (partnership based growing and harvesting projects), Fruit tree project.

Table 7: Key transitions in Grow Sheffield's history

Scaling up: the Local Food Fund

The central aim of the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund was "to make locally grown food accessible and affordable to local communities" (Kirwan et al, 2014). Grow Sheffield approached this through their 'Grow' project, which included three main strands - Community Growers, Abundance and the Sheffield Food Network. Grow Sheffield was successful in securing a significant funding grant (in the order of a quarter of a million pounds spread over 3 years), which enabled them to employ a small team of part time staff to facilitate the delivery of operations. The funding created a step-change in the capacity of the organisation enabling it to scale up significantly. While gaining capacity and scaling up are perceived as positive trajectories (especially in terms of grassroots innovation), they also bring with them challenges, not least in terms of changing group dynamics and ways of working. This section examines some of the challenges of scaling up that arose from the Local Food Fund, as well as examining the ways in which capacities brought in by new members were negotiated and assembled.

Formalisation and Changing Dynamics

Following its initial formation, Grow Sheffield was successful in generating a strong volunteer ethos and broad base of volunteers - leading to what was an engaged and motivated community of practice. However, the transition from an informal largely voluntary group or what was described essentially as a "bunch of mates" (Interview GS, 3/3/2015), to a legally constituted organisation that would apply for and gain a large funding grant brought with it significant challenges. This presents an example of how conflict (as well as collaboration) can shape the enterprise of a community of practice, and the way the responding to opportunity creates a challenge in terms of aligning perspectives of the group. This section examines that transition, including how it came about and how it changed the dynamics of the community of practice. The interview extract below describes how Grow Sheffield's progression towards a 'more legal structure' happens in tandem with the opening of the Local Food Fund:

"By about March 2008, already the big lottery food funding money had become available to apply for and Grow Sheffield was thinking about becoming a legally constituted group, and so it moved from essentially being a bunch of mates gathered around Amy to being something of a more legal structure, and because the Local Food Fund money was only

on offer for a few years, and it was offering grants for up to 330K, it was like well why don't we apply for this?"

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Here, the funding available is presented as an opportunity (within a limited time-frame) that coincided with Grow Sheffield's natural progression towards more established ways of working. The decision to take the step towards a large funding grant is presented with a sense of serendipity, as a timely opportunity to move forward; but also with a sense of logic, as momentum manifests in the advancement and expansion of Grow Sheffield as an organisation. As described in the previous chapter, the energy and enthusiasm generated by early activities creates a need for a degree of organisational structure and management⁴¹. In the case of Grow Sheffield, this structure took the form of a 'core team', who would become the directors of a Grow Sheffield as a company limited by guarantee⁴². While formalisation brings with it a number of benefits in establishing the community of practice as an official organisation⁴³, the extract below demonstrates how gaining funding leads to a change of dynamics within the group:

"It wasn't just Paul who fell out with the board of directors. It was a whole series of people, who all, once it became too structured...well because the thing is once you go into the big funding you have to create quite rigid you know structures, for how the organisation was run."

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Tension around the shift towards more "rigid" structures and ways of working that is necessitated by the acquirement "big funding" crystallises in the form of a rift within the group in the form of conflict between key members. As the modes of engagement became necessarily more "rigid" and "structured", focus moves toward developing a more formal repertoire around the funding bid and constitution, which would eventually contribute to some of the key members leaving the organisation altogether. With a clear vision and aims already established - negotiation was at this point centred on developing organisational structures necessary to work with large grants. While members were able to initially unite around creating a shared enterprise, this shift brought with it conflict that between some members which was ultimately unresolvable.

⁴¹ With the increasing burden of work and responsibility falling on one key member.

⁴² This status as a limited company provided the necessary structure and legal framework through which Grow Sheffield and its members were able to receive and manage the funds allocated by the LFF. This format creates a formal sense of accountability, as the organisation has an official responsibility to its members, its constitution, and to company's house.

⁴³ Benefits such as increased eligibility for funding, availability of a bank account, accountability of formal constitution, and increased legitimacy of as an official organisation (Field notes, 2014).

Wenger makes clear that communities of practice are sites of conflict as much as co-operation, and that “shared practice does not itself imply harmony or collaboration” (1998, p.85). Despite this, it is noted that conflict is often neglected in communities of practice studies, with focus more often on co-operation and collectivity (Cumming, 2008). Cumming (2008) calls for a more critical view of communities of practice, acknowledging that conflict is a “part and parcel of the developmental process” (2008, p. 7). Building on this further, he highlights the need to view conflict not just at the individual level between personalities involved, but in relation to the broader range of individuals, organisations and structures with which they are connected, and which may themselves constitute sites of conflict. Whilst the diversity of engagement was cast in a positive light in the previous chapter - with a fusion of different perspectives articulated with one another, this instance illustrates how it can also be a potential source of conflict. Working through and resolving this conflict is an essential part of negotiation of shared practice.

Although conflict is inherent to communities of practice and can be productive (i.e. through the successful negotiation of diverse knowledge and perspectives into a collective enterprise), it can also be damaging, particularly in instances where disagreement is unresolvable. As individuals are often coming together from diverse backgrounds and regimes of competence, they bring with them different assumptions, based on their past experience and accumulated knowledge, about what might be the ‘right’ way forward for the group. As competence and therefore power within a community of practice is defined and articulated in relation to other members, giving some more control over negotiation than others. In such cases, conflict can be personal, embroiled in emotion, and damaging to relationships (or as in this case leading to ending engagement between certain members altogether). A tendency to focus on the positive and on instances of success means that conflict is often overlooked, both within communities of practice and grassroots innovation literature⁴⁴, despite having a fundamental role in processes and outcomes of negotiations.

Observing Grow Sheffield’s trajectory reveals the way in which conflict can mark key turning points in its history, both in terms of engagement and joint enterprise, as the coming and going of individuals shapes the vision and direction of the organisation. This is illustrated when Amy, the founder and catalyst of the community of practice, leaves the organisation - at the key point

⁴⁴ As discussed in the methodology chapter, there are also significant empirical challenges in dealing with conflict. For example when talking about conflict, comments such as “let’s not go there!”, “I don’t want to get into that here” are common, with certain topics being kept “off the record” (Field notes, 09/10/15). There are also ethical challenges around collecting data from a position of trust, talking about often sensitive/emotional issues, and the importance of avoiding adding to or reproducing conflict.

in which it is formalising and developing its constitution. This creates a void, both in terms of vision and organisational capacity, which remaining members must negotiate how to fill. Mark describes part of this challenging and conflictual period in Grow Sheffield's history further below:

"'cause he was so ...clear with his vision he wouldn't bend it for anyone else, and he wanted to, when Amy left he wanted to take hold of Grow Sheffield and steer it in his direction which he felt was the right thing and that I would essentially back him up in this. And the other kind of people steering Grow Sheffield, as Amy was the real figure head of it, the vision of it, were Susan and Phil. Phil is someone who has done a lot of research into local food. He lives in Sheffield he worked for [a national sustainability organisation], and he's not a practical grower though, not like I mean he does a bit of growing, as does everyone, likewise with Susan she's not an experienced grower but has a lot of experience working in organisations, and those two tried to steer it in their direction in a more open free structure. Paul was like *no*, it won't work, I've seen this happen before and *they just clashed*. They just had this one meeting where everything went *phreeew*, completely fell apart and the meeting didn't achieve anything. We'd already had about 4 meetings before that which were starting to get argumentative and not really achieve anything. And then [he] was just like I'm not having anything to do with them, I want all of the information about me on the Grow Sheffield website removed, in this really reactionary kind of way, then he got voted off the committee, he wasn't anything to do with it, so he basically branched off at that point, he then set up [his own enterprise]. and he decided well I'm gonna do my own thing, I don't need Grow Sheffield. I can do my own thing."

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

This particular conflict is part of the underlying story of Grow Sheffield and its "long and potted history" (Core team member, field notes, 12/2015). As described by Mark, the departure of a key founding member from the core team left a void in the direction of the organisation - leaving two opposing sides vying for control. The conflicting viewpoints could not be resolved, resulting in one member leaving the organisation and subsequently being voted off the committee (being absent from the meeting himself). This is an extreme example of unresolved conflict, reveals the pertinence of key themes already identified (in Chapter 4) underlying the dynamics of negotiations. Firstly, the importance of 'vision' arises once again. Whereas in the emergence of Grow Sheffield, Amy's vision is part of what unites diverse members and gives structure to the early community of practice, here the need to negotiate a perceived loss of vision and resulting loss of direction, leads to conflict between members with views that are irreconcilable. There is a sense of power struggle as opposing sides with different background and competencies attempt to lead the community in different directions. The ability of one side to articulate with the members more effectively leads to the opposing side losing control altogether as he decides to leave the organisation altogether.

Contextualising the 'clash' of opposing visions, Mark describes those on each side of the conflict in relation to their identities and competencies within the community of practice, gives a sense

of how each individual contributes to the organisation in line with their skills, experience and knowledge. On one side is a member whose competence is underpinned by expertise in organic growing, representing a key aspect of Grow Sheffield's capacity and competence. On the other side are those with experience of organisational working (but with a lack of perceived growing knowledge and experience), with a subsequent drive to "steer [Grow Sheffield] in their direction in a more open free structure". Along with this however, he also points to the perceived lack of growing experience once himself and Paul were no longer part of the community of practice. For Mark, who identifies himself as a Grower and proponent of 'organic culture', this presents a significant turning point and overall reduction in capacity of the organisation.

Building on the previous chapter in which the role of negotiating identities came to the fore, this instance illustrates how conflict between identities can play an instrumental role in shaping the community of practice, and the capacities that constitute it. As described by Kubiak et al. (2015, p. 69) below, critical to the potential of communities of practice is the ability to negotiating multiple identities through which it is constituted:

"the goodwill which brings a group together can often mask significant differences in assumptions, ways of thinking and use of language. The group's potential power can only be realized if it establishes a shared focus and coordinated effort. These kinds of negotiations can create personally felt conflicts because they go to the heart of what practitioners care about and feel accountable to – in other words, their identity (Edwards 2010)."

This clearly resonates with the conflict described above, with a loss of focus and coordinated effort leading to the unmasking of differences in assumptions and resulting in unresolvable conflict between members. Such conflicts within the community of practice are indeed personally felt, with a high level of emotional investment in the shared practice, and personal relationships that develop over time. In order to address this challenge, Kubiak et al. (2015, p. 69) (again drawing on Edwards 2010), suggest the need for "collectively figuring out a way forward that reflects the group's diversity", in a way that promotes alignment between differing perspectives without marginalising members. Being able to foster this diversity has the potential to increase the capacity of the group, and of the range of skills and experiences that contribute to the collective capacity of the organisation. However, in instances such as the one described where conflict leads to departure of members, it not only reshapes the enterprise going forward, but becomes part of the shared history to which new members are inducted, and which forms part of the learning trajectory of community. Being able to draw on this history, and learn from it as it informs future negotiations is itself part of the collective capacity of the organisation.

Once the conflict is resolved (through departure of a key member), the remaining group is able to progress, moving on from 'argumentative' meetings in which not much is achieved. In this sense, enterprise is reconfigured and continues to redevelop in relation to the remaining members with a refined vision for the future. Members align their perspective once again and rebuild a sense of cohesion as the community of practice continues to move forward. While this presents a loss of capacity to the organisation, when viewed from a broader perspective, the skills and competencies of the individual are not lost, but as explored in the next section move to a different part of the local landscape of practice.

Branching off

Following Wenger's assertion that communities of practice should not be viewed in isolation this section briefly examines how conflict not only shapes learning trajectories of organisations, but how it works to shape the landscape. While the conflict described above resulting from a step change in structure and dynamics of the organisation might have had a negative impact in terms of capacity within the community of practice, it also indicates a key way in which capacity has the potential to travel across landscape of practice, carried by the individual as part of their life trajectory. This is illustrated by Mark's description (from the extract above) of how Paul "branched off" and decided "I'm gonna do my own thing, I don't need Grow Sheffield. I can do my own thing". Paul's engagement with community growing doesn't end with Grow Sheffield, and he goes on to set up his own enterprise (that aligns more with his perceptions and understandings). As will be explored further in Chapter 7, this demonstrates an important point about capacity being carried by individuals, and therefore rather than being lost (as one might assume if viewing a single community of practice in isolation), is capable of travelling around (and shaping) the broader landscape. This is exemplified through the story of Mark's own journey, once he too decided to leave the organisation:

"And at that point in 2009 I decided to start traveling around, and rather than being like rooted in one place and getting caught up in politics, I basically decided, you know that was when I made links in South Wales, made links in Oxfordshire, made links in Scotland, travelled around the whole of the year in different places. And was like, wow there's loads of other people doing cool things. you know you don't need, you just don't need that, those difficulties."

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

The extract above shows that despite no longer actively engaging with Grow Sheffield, Mark continued to engage with other growing and community food initiatives across the UK. Although as individuals, he (and Paul) were no longer accountable to the organisation, it meant that they could develop and refine their own interests and learning trajectories, starting new enterprises that align with their perspectives and from a landscape perspective contribute to the overall

diversity of initiatives present. Rather than leaving behind his work with Grow Sheffield, Mark took with him the ideas and skills he had developed - helping to propagate the Abundance model across the UK, as described by a former Grow Sheffield staff-member below:

“Mark went away to kind of spread the word around the country [...] I mean there was obviously already ideas of doing it, but yeah he kind of spread the word and inspired various groups to start up.”

Interview GS (26/3/2014)

This demonstrates that whilst conflict can in many ways be damaging, resulting in a reduction in capacity within the community of practice, it can at the same time lead to the propagation of new ideas in new niches, contributing to the overall diversity which characterises the community food sector (White and Stirling, 2013). Membership of a community of practice is always part of a broader trajectory, with individuals bringing with them their experiences and competencies, as well as carrying them forward through future participation in multiple communities and landscapes. When perspectives and identities are too far apart to be reconciled and aligned within a community of practice, as part of individual trajectories they have the potential to diverge and lead to the development of separate enterprises on which new communities of practice can be based. This theme will be developed further in Chapter 7, looking at how capacity is generated and moves around at the landscape level.

Recruitment and Capacity

Having highlighted some of the complexities of gaining a rapid increase in resources (including conflict and resulting loss in capacity), this section examines the dynamics around recruitment of staff who by taking a paid role within the community of practice contribute time and energy as well as the skills and competencies developed over the course of their own life trajectories. Although the internal dynamics of the community of practice changed during the transition to the Local Food Fund, the extra resources and capacity gained enabled a step-change in the scale of activities of the organisation with multiple projects across the city. The staff team that were recruited were responsible for operationalising the vision and strategy underpinning the community of practice (guided by a voluntary ‘core team’ of directors). This section draws on accounts from the staff team, examining their personal trajectories into the organisation and the ways in which the capacities they bring with them from past experiences and multi-membership contribute to the collective capacity of the organisation. In the extract below, Andrew describes the way in which he became part of Grow Sheffield:

“I gave up what was kind of nearly part, full time work, because I wanted to do other things and try my hand at comedy writing and that sort of thing, and do some freelance work. But then this job came up for Grow Sheffield and the main attraction was that it

was 7 hours a week, erm, and so, I thought I could handle that number of hours, but as it turned out it was also an organisation that I had, had some dealings with in the past when I was [working for a regional funding bureau], I'd given them some funding advice, erm and I sort of knew a few of the people, I knew sort of the work. And as it turned out it was a good fit. Because it was a web project, I'd done IT projects in the past and it was also about food growing and you know I'd been involved in that sort of thing for a while, I'd got my allotment and that sort of thing. so yeah overall, although it was practicality that attracted me to it in the first place. there were also kind of other good reasons why I went for it and I suppose why they chose to employ me. I suspect there were probably other candidates that had more direct experience with growing and horticulture and stuff like that - erm and maybe with food more generally and working with food businesses, but it feels like what was needed in that project at that time was someone who had reasonable project management experience."

Interview GS (26/3/2014)

Andrew goes into depth on the background of why he applied for a position at Grow Sheffield, and speculates as to why he was successful in his application. He highlights practicality as a main driver, and fitting in the role with other aspects of his life such as freelancing and comedy writing. This is a theme that reoccurs in other accounts and illustrates the concept of multi-membership, as individuals engage with multiple and diverse communities of practice, fitting in various roles as part of their everyday lives. He also points towards opportunity, with the job 'coming up' at the right time, providing a window through which his own personal ambitions and aims could be realised.

Adding to a sense of trajectory, Andrew points to his past experiences and the competencies he had developed through various roles (for example his "reasonable project management experience"), as well as a general interest in the broad enterprise of Grow Sheffield in relation to food and growing. He also highlights his previous connections with Grow Sheffield as a funding advisor. This proves beneficially in two key ways - through 'knowing a few of the people' and 'knowing the work'. This perhaps highlights that to some extent his own identity and perceptions 'align' with those of Grow Sheffield, specifically in relation to familiarity in terms of engagement of familiar 'people' and enterprise of familiar 'work'. In the next extract, Rachel echoes themes of practicality, opportunity and personal trajectory, as she describes leaving one role and going into the next:

"Well honestly two things, so there was the role itself but also the role I was leaving. So I was influenced through looking for a different role because of my previous workplace. Erm, it seemed to match a lot of my experience, but also it was interesting to me because, because Grow Sheffield sort of wore its heart on its sleeve really on its job advert in that it wasn't erm.. it didn't seem like any other similar role, it very much had the sort of ethics, very very overtly stated and those sorts of things [...] but Grow Sheffield particularly looked different because of its its sort of values I think, it was very open about stating them. And in the whole sector there's a lot of project management roles or coordinator roles or various different things in the third sector generally [...] but they all kind of run

along the corporate line really. So even the smallest NGOs have sort of corporate selection and a way of doing stuff, and again Grow Sheffield were very different in the way they.. they did it very properly, it was all done correctly, you know fairly.. but it was interesting to see the things they were doing slightly differently”
Interview GS (25/3/2014)

The journey Rachel describes as she moves from one position to the next, relates to Wenger’s (Wenger, 2010) description of how “Multi-membership is sequential as we travel through the landscape and carry our identity across contexts”. Our identities develop through our experiences of and participation in the various communities of practice of which we become part. In this way, Grow Sheffield presents both a practical opportunity that would enable Rachel to both draw upon her skills and previous experience, but also aligns with the ethics and values that form an important part of her identity. For her, Grow Sheffield represents a departure from the “corporate line”, doing things “differently” and wearing “its heart on its sleeve” in terms of values and ethics. Rachel refers directly to the job advert, which by exhibiting a certain set of values and ethics works to attract individuals that align with the joint enterprise of the organisation. This presents an opportunity for Rachel to become part of a community of practice in which she can further develop identity through learning and becoming competent in an environment underpinned by shared values. Rachel also hastens to add that despite having a different way of doing things, they still “did it very properly”, “correctly” and “fairly”, pointing to that whilst the values and ways of working are distinct, there is still a sense of professional standard and legitimacy that chimes with more standard modes of operating.

As well as talking about how the role ‘matched’ her previous experience, Rachel highlights how her skills complemented those of the rest of the team:

“I think that was the bit that was what complemented the rest of the team because the rest of the team had very specific delivery skills and expertise in their technical sides of stuff and some of the other bits as well, but that, the duller bit⁴⁵, was the bit that was potentially not there, so that was the bit that I think they wanted from me.”
Interview GS (25/3/2014)

This contributes to the idea that it is through diversity rather than homogeneity that mutual engagement in practice is made both ‘possible and productive’ Wenger (1998, p. 75). As discussed in the previous chapter, in the context of a shared practice this ‘partiality’ of

⁴⁵ Here Rachel is (rather modestly) referring to her role as project coordinator which included: “all of the administration stuff, so all of the managing staff and organisational stuff, the payroll, budgeting, cash flows, stuff like that. Managing volunteers, managing and organising the sites, and activities, and kind of creating contracts with other partners, and all of the risk assessment and health and safety stuff that you have to put in place and stuff like that, so all of that really” *Interview GS (25/3/2014)*

competence between members “is as much a resource as it is a limitation”, leading to various ways of relating and engaging with one another (Wenger, 1998, p. 76). While similar competences may be ‘overlapping’ and facilitate support and collaboration, divergent competences can be ‘complementary’, working to further develop heterogeneity as differentiation of roles are reinforced. In the extract below, Sally describes the context which led her to apply for a role within Grow Sheffield:

“when I saw the role I was attracted to it because of what it was trying to do, a lot of what it was trying to do were things that personally I could relate to because they were the sorts of things that I thought about, that I worried about, things that I was concerned about, I think especially just having a child as well you think more about the world you live in and the future, and what we are doing to our environment”

Interview GS (16/4/2014)

A key attraction for Sally is that the things that Grow Sheffield ‘was trying to do’ were things that she could ‘personally relate to’, things which she connects to the future in relation to broader environmental issues. This once again demonstrates ‘alignment’ of perspectives, but also goes further in ‘imagining’ how the ethics and practices of the organisation relate to broader global issues. Whilst environmental issues and sustainability form an important part of the underpinning ‘values’ and ‘ethics’ of the organisation (and individuals involved), they are rarely mentioned explicitly in the day to day practices within the organisation. This doesn’t mean however, that they are not embedded in the practices, and identities of the organisation and its members. The following exchange demonstrates the care that is taken when bringing new people to the core of the organisation through staff recruitment⁴⁶:

Me: Do you think there’s any risk of losing that ethic - is the ethic embedded in the organisation or does it come and go with people?

Rachel: I think it is, and I think it could come and go with people, but I think that.. I mean when they do recruit, they recruit very carefully, I mean for an organisation of its size, you know, and the human resources that it has... the recent process to recruit two new project coordinators was incredibly involved you know, and it was really thorough, and you know it wasn’t oh were tired lets choose a.. at all... it was, it was kind of ongoing until there was total consensus, and I think because of that there’s a great deal of care taken in trying to make sure that those sort of values are preserved, it’s very much a part of everything else they are looking for. and I think the core team are very strong as well, so while they remain strong the values will.”

Interview GS (25/3/2014)

⁴⁶ This exchange takes place in the context of the end of the Local Food Fund, as all LFF funded staff are about to leave the organisation, with two new members joining the team. The question I pose is around whether the significant turnover of staff risks changing the underlying ethic of the organisation.

Here Rachel describes how despite limited capacity, the core team of Grow Sheffield put a significant amount of time and capacity into the recruitment process, with emphasis placed on making sure “that those sort of values are preserved” as part of “everything else they are looking for”. She also remarks that “the core team are very strong as well, so while they remain strong the values will”, which demonstrates how the values of the organisation are constituted by its membership (and through their shared history of and connection to negotiation of enterprise). However, whilst this contributes to cohesion within the group, it also raises the question as to how far this limits engagement of different types of people, with different perspectives and values. As Wenger (1998) points out, the social cohesion that holds communities together, is also a source of the boundary that might keep others out.

This section has shown how from the perspective of the individuals applying and from the organisation itself, a range of factors influence the recruitment of new individuals to the core of the community of practice. These include practical factors (such as fitting in engagement within the context of multi-membership of everyday lives), skills and experience (as part of individual learning trajectories, and in terms of complementing existing skills within the organisation), and alignment of values and ethics (between the individual and with the collective identity of the organisation). While individuals are recruited for their skills and suitability for particular roles, having values and ethics that align with the joint enterprise of the organisation generates a sense of cohesion that helps facilitate mutual engagement. Competence therefore describes not only skills and practical input, but the ability to fit in with, understand and put into practice the values and norms of the community of practice.

Compromises of Scale

The Local Food Fund and recruitment of staff brought with it significant increase in capacities available to the organisation, including access to skills, expertise, and dedicated time and energy of a committed team, thus enable the scaling up and out of activities within each of the key projects. While the legacy and impact of these projects were significant, scaling up also brought with it challenges in relation to the changing dynamics within the community, particularly in the relationship between volunteers and staff members. The aim of this section is to highlight some of the complexities and compromises facing organisations as they scale up and formalise activities in relation to funding grants. In the extract below, Michael talks about some of the positives and negatives associated with this shift, highlighting some of the key challenges that have been faced:

“.. its enabled the development of the project obviously. And it enabled.. a much more kind of concerted, efficient erm... kind of operating system. Erm.. yeah. Obviously its allowed us to do a lot more really, I suppose. in a number of ways. Kind of spread across the city as well to a greater extent.

[....]

I think one thing that the money has done has meant that the organisational project has kind of come down to one person, the coordinator. [...] And what I wanted Because what we had initially, we had kind of a group of volunteers who were kind of really eager and keen, and although they didn't have maybe that much time to put in, they were full of ideas and kind of erm, like enthusiasm, and I tried to keep that going, but it hasn't really worked, so, and that probably most my fault in terms of I could try harder to have kind of developed that to keep that going. But what's happened is when someone is paid, people are like, oh well that person is paid now so they can coordinate it, it's their job to it, that's what they're doing, I don't need to have that kind of role. so it's a bit of a shame that we've lost that, it changed the dynamics massively. And that's why Abundance now is kind of more reliant on having that coordinator in place, because maybe the, the core volunteer group isn't quite as strong, though we do have, some really strong volunteers, there are some area coordinators, kind of a handful, and im sure they'll carry on doing stuff, [...] they are happy to be self-directed and just get on with things, so if there isn't a coordinator in place they'll still do it, which is really good, and it might inspire more people to, but there might have to be a bit of research. But there is the intention to have the coordinator still.”

Interview GS (26/3/2015)

While having funding and a staff team certainly did enable projects to develop in a more “concerted”, “efficient” way, increasing the spread and extent of activities across the city, the development of this kind of structure or “operating system” came at the expense of the voluntary capacity of organisation. Michael describes how having a project coordinator created a sense of hierarchy, where responsibility for organising the project became concentrated on the one paid individual whose “job” it was to do it. As well as running the project and coordinating activities across the city, Michael gives a sense of how he as coordinator also feels partly responsible for maintaining engagement of volunteers, which he feels has decreased as a result of changing dynamics in relation to having a paid position. He also describes how as a result of loss of volunteer capacity, there is greater reliance on having a paid coordinator. This illustrates a dependency that emerges, as more activities to sustain and less volunteer capacity to take over responsibility creates a need for ongoing funding beyond the scope of the short-term grant. This demonstrates how funding, while offering short-term gains, can create a cycle of dependency which without continuing resources might impact the long-term sustainability of the project through the centralisation of responsibility. This relationship between funding, staff and volunteer capacity, and long-term sustainability is elaborated on further by Mark:

“Once you get a paid coordinator [...], not for everyone but for some people it changes the dynamic of the volunteers, cause it's like well I'm doing this for free, how come you're getting paid for this. And that kind of thought is just one of these nagging thoughts that for some people they just can't handle that. And it's like well maybe they don't realise

how much work is involved. It generally should be a paid, I realised it should be a paid role. Either that or you just have you have it more decentralised, so it's like well I'm just gonna co-ordinate the trees on my street, I'm happy to co-ordinate the trees on my street because it's not very much work. I can speak to my neighbours, I can see when the trees are ready, I don't need to drive, I can walk, I can carry the boxes up and down the street, that's easy but once it becomes a driving, a whole city scale... So it's a question of scale really"

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Once again the changing dynamics of the community is a key impact of creating a hierarchy through having a paid staff team but ongoing reliance on volunteers. Mark, despite having coordinated Abundance on a voluntary basis in its early years, "realised it should be a paid role" indicating the level of work that is required to sustain the project. He connects this to the concept of scale, envisaging how a decentralised, small scale, and local approach might work without a coordinator. While this to some extent represents the 'vision' of Abundance, with decentralised self-directed groups, in its current format (referring to the previous extract), the "intention" is to still have a coordinator. Despite this, there is clearly potential, as Michael describes how some volunteers are "self-directed" and able to "get on with things", possibly without needing a central coordinator. The reference to there having to be "a bit of research" gives a small indication of a potential future direction of the project, based on reskilling volunteers and generating competence in a range of Abundance related skills. In the final extract below, Michael elaborates on the risks of entering a funding loop, retracing steps to some of the conflict at the beginning of the chapter, and pointing towards to future direction:

"I think once you get into that kind of loop, the kind of funding loop it's really hard to get out of it, you're just kind of spending a lot of your time looking for more funding and more funding. And I think there's a lot to be said about not entering into that initially, this was one of the things that were discussed initially, and it caused some kind of political rifts in Grow Sheffield as well. I mean we're moving toward trying to generate a quarter of our income through self-generation, so that's definitely a step in the right direction as far as I'm concerned. because then you're just reliant, what you're doing is reliance on the funding climate or the economic climate, and it's not something you can control, it's not very stable.

Interview GS (26/3/2015)

Michael describes how reliance on funding and entering into a "funding loop" also creates dependence on the "economic climate", something which is identified as beyond the control of the community of practice. In order to mitigate this risk, he describes the move by Grow Sheffield towards self-generation of income - an objective introduced towards the end of the local food fund which aims to increase the self-sufficiency and therefore perceived sustainability of the organisation. This idea, negotiated and written into strategy, demonstrates a level of reflexivity within the organisation, as they develop as part of a trajectory of learning. The next

section examines some of the tensions and challenges that emerge as Grow Sheffield in response to limited funding attempts to scale down effectively.

Scaling Down: Sheffield on a Plate and Beyond

Having explored some of the challenges of scaling up and in relation to funding in general, this section moves onto the dynamics of effectively scaling-down whilst maintaining key capacities on which the community of practice is based. As Grow Sheffield's period of Local Food Funding came to an end, so did the staff contracts, with all members of the staff team leaving their positions (marking a considerable drop in capacity). Overlapping with this was the recruitment of two new staff members who were employed as part of the Sheffield on a Plate (SoaP) project⁴⁷. A period of handing over helped produce continuity during this time, and enabled the facilitation of all three major projects to continue in some shape or form. Grow Sheffield's role in the partnership was to engage students and to deliver workshops and activities around food and growing. Each of the three projects from the LFF continued, with a greater focus towards students⁴⁸. While SoaP enabled Grow Sheffield to continue its central projects (with a tailored audience), the lower level of funding meant that staff time was reduced to one day per week for each of the two new coordinators (with GS aiming to, and being successful in securing some small amounts of funding to extend this for other projects). This section looks at how the organisation attempts to maintain key capacities and key activities during this period, at the same time as managing with less time and resources.

While funding enables organisations to upscale and expand activities, it can also be a source of insecurity and unsustainability over longer time periods with ongoing pressure to look for new funding to sustain practices (White and Stirling, 2013). This has arisen as a dilemma not only in relation to Grow Sheffield, but through talking to individuals connected with a range of small scale community projects in both Sheffield and Manchester. The following extracts demonstrate some of the challenges, before going on to look at ways in which Grow Sheffield at the end of

⁴⁷ SoaP was funded by the National Union of Students (NUS) Students' Green Fund, and was a collaborative project focusing on sustainable food, which brought together the city's two universities and a college along with a number of charities and community organisations. According to the NUS Students Green Fund website (accessed 2016): "Sheffield on a Plate promotes student-led food production and cookery, instils sustainability in food outlets, minimises the amount of food sent to landfill and increases the amount of items donated to food banks."

⁴⁸ Abundance continued in key areas, with workshops focusing on students (Abundance also had some of its own funding which enabled it to carry on more broadly too). The Sheffield Food Network was used as a basis for developing a student market, with student volunteers developing contacts gained through the online map. The Community Growers model and a small number of the freelance Growers that delivered the project were employed as part of the SoaP project, developing community gardens and delivering workshops for students and staff at the institutions.

the LFF, looks to move forwards whilst maintaining key capacities that have been developed. In the extract below, one experience staff member describes with a sense of familiarity the challenge faced as the LFF comes to an end:

“there’ll be the normal scrabble for funding that there always is when big funds come to an end, because they don’t do it in a staggered fashion, they do it all at once, and I think the normal groups will kind of carry on because they’re good at it, they’re good at scrambling. So they’ll know what to go for next, how to go for it, how to phrase it, they’ll find a way of surviving, and the little ones that can’t, or don’t have the resources to get funding through these sort of big initiatives, *wont*, [...] so I think it’s going to be the same old story, as always really, anything like that. and when the next lot, maybe it will be around public health, or employability, you know that will be a couple of years and the same thing will happen, the ones that are good at it will carry on, the ones who didn’t have enough, or weren’t able to do their own bids, will stop.”

Interview GS (25/3/2014)

Here the struggle facing Grow Sheffield in finding the resources required to sustain activities is described as “the normal scrabble”, occurring periodically as big funding projects come to an end. There is a sense of the competence that is required for organisations to be “good at” competing at this level, in that they “know what to go for”, “how to go for it” and “how to phrase it”. This gives a sense of landscape level competence, where organisations need to be able to speak the right language, and know how to navigate opportunities, and also have the “resources to get funding”. This demonstrates a dilemma facing smaller organisations in not having the capacity to be able to focus on “scrambling” in order to generate further capacity. Rachel elaborates further on Grow Sheffield’s position within in this cycle of large scale funding:

“lots of organisations are very target led, and very funding led, and obviously Grow Sheffield wants funding, and obviously we are involved all the time in looking for it, but its generally coming in the right order, its generally coming from people, people approaching us and then together trying to find a way to do it, as opposed to we just kind of invent a new thing to fit with a funder, which is often again something I’ve seen in previous experience, and it doesn’t have the same effect, it doesn’t have the same long term staying power, because it’s not entirely sincere, its meant well, you know, people aren’t just going out to cause havoc, but yeah I don’t know. I don’t know the answer to it.”

Interview GS (26/3/2014)

While the level of insecurity facing Grow Sheffield as an organisation is apparent, significance is placed on doing things “in the right order” to create long-term sustainable projects by meeting needs, rather than “invent[ing] a new thing to fit with a funder” (a theme explored further in the following chapter). This echoes several other references to avoiding “chasing funding” as a survival strategy, which is considered here by Rachel as “not entirely sincere”. While a problem is clearly identified in attempting to build something sustainable within an unsustainable system

of resource provision, the way forward is still unclear forming an ongoing part of negotiation within the community of practice. Central to this negotiation however, are the values and ethics described in the previous section, and a drive towards generating projects with legacy that have “long-term staying power” beyond periods of short term funding. In the extract below, a Rachel discusses some of the dynamics of the “hand-over” to new staff working as part of the SoaP project:

“[...] its more going to normal practical kind of hand over of a job, and I suppose there’ll be email communication I expect long after we’ve gone, [...] I think both Alice and Phil were sort of slightly phased by the fact that we were all kind of leaving and that would normally look like people, you know rats jumping off a sinking ship[...] and again that’s one of the things that’s really positive is that it’s not that at all [...]. At no point have we been kind of asked to reroute our energies into desperately scabble around for funding to extend our roles, and that is what *always* happens in third sector, and because of that we just carried on doing our jobs and doing them properly, but also people made arrangements to do other things [...] but every single one of us who is leaving is keeping our foot in the door, so we’re all making ourselves available to do freelance work, we’ll all be involved with volunteering in the future I’m sure, we’ll all be coming back and joining in in various ways, so I think that’s really really positive as well and I think it speaks highly of the way Grow Sheffield just gets on with stuff and focuses on things, and doesn’t, doesn’t kind of lose its focus in this kind of big terrifying looking around and trying to grab whatever is falling out of the sky”

Interview GS (26/3/2014)

Grow Sheffield’s particular way of working that is seen as distinct from how other third organisations might work, drawing on their particular set of values and ethics that underpins the organisation (as described by staff members in the previous section). While this doesn’t solve the issue off funding and lack of resources, it does contribute towards maintaining links with the LFF staff members despite their contracts coming to an end. Members are described as keeping a “foot in the door”, and being available to engage in various ways, which means that the experience and capacities that they have developed as part of Grow Sheffield are still retained through these connections. Since this interview was conducted in 2014, staff members have indeed engaged in a number of ways, including: one member joining the core team of directors, volunteering, assisting with directing particular projects, and fulfilling work as freelancers⁴⁹. This illustrates the deep connections that are made and value of Grow Sheffield’s enterprise and the ways of working and connections it facilitates.

⁴⁹ The freelancer structure itself was designed to be able to develop a base of skilled workers to which work could be offered on an ad hoc basis. This presents a way through which Grow Sheffield has access to a range of skills and expertise, through competent members who are familiar with the community of practice. It also provides a way through which skilled members can be recognised and promoted through Grow Sheffield passing on opportunities and connections.

In the extract below, a Rachel elaborates on the challenges facing the two new coordinators who are about to take over delivery of key projects which are to continue under the SoaP funding:

“I think they’re going to find it hard, at the moment, mainly because everything is so new, but I think they’ll be fine, I mean they’re both very capable people, they’re both very experienced in community development work and general administration of projects and stuff like that. they’re both keen and interested in Grow Sheffield and what we do, and the growing side and the working with people, so I think they’ll be fine, they’ll just need a bit of time to find their feet because there’s so much going on really. And I think more [funds] will emerge, they’re currently on I think a day a week, but I think very shortly, more will emerge where they’re able to build up their time a bit and beyond more widely kind of, involved in other developments, I think there will be lots of opportunities..”

Interview GS (26/3/2014)

While many of the old staff team will be around in an informal capacity for support, Rachel describes the scale of the challenges facing the two new staff members. She describes how adjusting to the new environment and practices of the organisation will be difficult, however she also expresses confidence in their capabilities to adjust. As with the LFF, a great deal of care was taken in recruiting the right team, equipped with the necessary skills, experience, enthusiasm and values to fit into and make valuable contributions to the community of practice. Towards the end of the extract, Rachel comments on the future trajectory, anticipating more funds and more paid time to emerge to build up their working hours, and extend the scope of the project beyond the remit of Sheffield on a Plate. The ways in which such opportunities are encouraged and generated as part of a cycle of innovation will be explored further in the following chapter.

Generating Income

In response to the broadly recognised challenges around reliance on grant funding, at the end of the Local Food Fund, Grow Sheffield developed a new strategic objective as part of its business plan to work towards self-generating 25% of its require income. The extract below from the business plan highlighting the objective, reflects negotiation that took place at a ‘strategy meeting’ in which possible ways forward for the organisation were discussed, and at which concerns and challenges were raised (strategy meeting notes 10/13):

“5.3 Self funding by income generation

Grow Sheffield activities and projects funded by 25% self income generation by March 2016

5.3.1 Rationale

All not for profit organisations understand and experience the difficulties of obtaining funding by external grants. The current economic climate is causing more difficulties of access to funding. As GS has successfully evolved to a structure of a voluntary strategic board and paid operational staff team the CT is reluctant to continue to use hard won

cash resources to research and apply for funds or revert to presuming on directors' voluntary time to fulfil this function.

Core and Staff team are in full agreement therefore that more self-sufficiency should now be given priority. It is generally agreed that the notional figure of 25% may be hard to achieve, but a high target is required for motivation.

Some parts of the organisation are uncomfortable about charging money for our 'products' and services. This particularly applies to the longer term volunteers for Abundance. A balance of cost-effectiveness and honouring our values and the personal principles of valued volunteers will be key in making the choices."

Grow Sheffield business plan (2013-2016)

The rationale behind the objective is presented in relation to the broader "field of influence" (Wenger, 1998), citing the "economic climate", and referring to the difficulties facing 'all not for profit organisations'. Within this context, it is agreed that the way forward for the organisation should be to move towards "self-sufficiency" rather than using "hard won cash resources" or "voluntary time" to "research and apply for funds". Here Grow Sheffield is making a clear statement towards attempting to step out of the "funding loop" (Interview GS, 26/3/2014) described in the previous section. At the same time, the difficulties in achieving this are recognised both practically, and in terms of challenging the ethics and values of the organisation. The statement captures key concerns highlighted through discussion at the strategy meeting, but also documents boundaries and ways of working that will underpin future negotiation, promising to take account principles and values of members in decision making. Through this process of negotiating, and with caveats added, "full agreement" is reached enabling the organisation to proceed on the basis of consensus (strategy meeting notes, 10/13).

The strategic objective manifested in a number of ways, including development of enterprise as part of ongoing projects (for example Abundance chutney sales, or small scale fundraising through events), identifying areas of practices that could generate an income without compromising values. One key idea that was the marketing of fruit trees grafted as part of the Abundance project, as described in the notes from a core team meeting below:

"Abundance Tree sales - enterprise based on selling organic Sheffield-based fruit tree varieties. Abundance activities can help spread the word, and vice versa. Fits in with strategic objective towards having a percentage of self-sufficiency. However, needs research and planning, to see what resources/expertise are available. Also needs cash upfront for a pilot study"

Meeting notes (11/02/13)

This note marks the beginning of what would later develop into the 'fruit tree project' as a social enterprise. The approach here is tentative, with recognition of the research and resources

required, as well as expertise and avenues for marketing, with Abundance identified as a potential route for development. While it took several years to establish in terms of developing ways of working, building up stock, and developing the marketing and sales aspect, the project was successful and continues to generate a moderate income whilst fulfilling a range of social and environmental objectives. The minute below demonstrates some of the progress and ongoing negotiation within the project two years after its initiation as noted above:

“-Phil gave a report of ongoing activity within the Tree Project. Grafting sessions focusing on learning and ones on producing trees have been run separately, which has proven to be a successful model.

-Trees have been moved from Greave House Farm, and ordered by species, to make them easier to locate (with thanks to Tom).

-Over 300 fruit trees have been grafted, and thanks was given to the freelancers and volunteers that have contributed.

-There is a potential buyer for a large order of 100 trees, who is in contact with Mark.

Core team meeting minutes (17/04/15)

This extract demonstrates progress on a number of fronts. Firstly, practice is being refined through continual engagement, with the development of a “model” for separate grafting workshops, and through making stock “easier to locate”. While the education aspect was considered an important part of the project, producing large numbers of successful grafts required the focus of more experienced practitioners. The workshops were therefore divided into those for newcomers (but still led by experienced members) and those for more experienced volunteers. This model also provides potential continuity for the future, teaching the next generation of interested volunteers skills that they might contribute back to the project. Secondly, having skilled “freelancers” that are able to work on the project demonstrates a further structure that has been developed to increase the capacity of the organisation. This provides a skills bank of potential employees that are offered ad hoc work around running various projects and activities. With many of the freelancers having connections the organisation from the LFF period or before, this demonstrates a way of retaining access to capacity without needing continuous funding. The extract also demonstrates some of the connections made, enabling sales of trees (through Marks’s contact), as well as facilitating the storage of stock (i.e. at Greave house farm).

While this is just one example of how Grow Sheffield seeks to reduce reliance on external funding, it is part of a broader trajectory, not just within the organisation but across the sector more broadly. Following the Local Food Fund and challenges facing community food initiatives across the UK, the Big Lottery funded a project called ‘Growing Together’, providing £800,000 to support organisations to reduce their reliance on grant funding and develop more diverse income streams. The data below from an initial survey conducted as part of the initiative

demonstrates the extent of insecurity and reliance on grant funding across the sector. According to the survey, 47% of third sector growing organisations that reported ‘regularly’ or ‘occasionally’ operating at a loss. Table 8 shows that projects are likely to be dependent on grant funding to the extent that lack of funding poses a ‘significant threat’. The project aims to develop confidence in finding new sources of funding (i.e. in relation to the bottom line of the table), in order generate “greater financial resilience and stability within the sector” (Base Line survey, Growing Together, 2015).

	1 Disagree	2	3	4	5 Agree	Total
Is the success of your project dependent of grant funding?	63	36	72	58	118	347
Do you consider a lack of funding to be a significant threat to your future?	41	54	59	77	115	346
How confident do you feel about raising income from new sources?	23	83	154	61	23	344

Table 8: Baseline Survey, Growing Together (2015)

Whilst funding brings with it capacity and is for many organisation is a necessity, particularly in terms of being able to bring staff on board to coordinate and deliver larger scale and more broad ranging projects, it also creates a dependency on the need to gain further funding to sustain those projects. White and Stirling (White and Stirling, 2013) point to funding as a long-term stress on community food initiative, and a source of insecurity with uncertainty of future availability of grants. This demonstrates that while there are significant existential challenges around reliance on unstable and often scarce grant funding, there are attempts to address this and re-balance the sector. This indicates a sense of reflexivity, both at the level of small scale organisations such as Grow Sheffield who are able to despite limited capacity identify a problem and negotiate a solution; as well as broadly through interrelated landscape level interventions.

5.3. Case Study: Negotiating Arts as Enterprise

Having looked at some of the major transitions in Grow Sheffield’s history in terms of dynamics of engagement, recruitment and capacity, this short case study shifts the analytical gaze to follow one aspect of grow Sheffield’s enterprise as it evolves over the course of the organisations history. The theme of the arts was introduced in the previous chapter as a central part of Grow Sheffield initial vision, with participatory arts providing the “channel” through which food

growing knowledge and skills could “flow” (Interview GS, 3/3/2015). Since its inception, key characters behind this founding vision have moved on, and various opportunities and challenges that have arisen have influenced the ways in which it has been negotiated as part of the trajectory of the organisation. Although the arts always has been and still is a key part of the joint enterprise, both the extent and ways in which it has been operationalised through the various activities and projects has changed over the years. The arts therefore provides an interesting element that illustrates many of the key themes highlighted though the empirical section so far.

As described at the beginning of chapter, there was a major period of change surrounding the local food fund, leading to key founding members leaving the organisation. As well as the loss of driving figures behind the vision, the major focus of the funding was on food growing and food related activities as opposed to the arts. Although some artistic activities remained, the growing focus was reflected in Grow Sheffield’s strategy for delivering the project as highlighted below:

“I think there was a sort of period where, just because there was a focus obviously on what we were actually doing [...] we were putting in the bid for the Grow project, and then doing the Grow project, and everything that was involved in that which was obviously like massive you know. so I think during that time there was maybe...apart from Allotment Soup which continued... maybe a bit of a lull in terms of other sorts of arts activities. [...]I suppose the focus was more on the growing activities and erm harvesting activities, which I think is as it should be.”

Interview GS (7/3/2015)

Sophie describes the shift in focus towards growing, with a “lull” in terms of arts related activities. The scale of the project is described as “massive”, creating what is to Sophie an “obvious” need for the change in enterprise. The way this is described as “as it should be” gives the impression that this was a necessary and justified step in order to fulfil not just the requirements of funding, but do justice to the opportunity afforded by it. This once again contributes to a sense of trajectory or logical progression based on the opportunities available through which the momentum and enterprise of the organisation can be carried forwards. Andrew elaborates further, in an interview conducted at the end of the Local Food Fund:

“Fundamentally the aims aren’t changing. Erm. What might. I think... The core team have been very conscious that over the period of the local food fund, the arts strand of Grow Sheffield's work has taken a real back seat. Other than allotment soup, and occasional arts activities, there’s not much going on. Its mainly been about growing, which is you know fine, but if Grow Sheffield believes that it is about growing and arts on a relatively equal footing, then they are way out of wack and so arts needs to come back into it somehow. And so I think they're going to spend some time on that.”

Interview GS (26/3/2014)

Here we are given a sense of broad recognition from the core team of what Sophie described as a “lull” in arts activities and how this relates to a perceived divergence from the original Grow Sheffield enterprise of combining the arts and growing. This demonstrates a tension between the need to align with the funder’s requirements and objectives, but also maintain alignment with Grow Sheffield’s own enterprise and foundation based on growing and the arts. It also shows however, that enterprise is to some extent flexible, and to evolve to be articulated in response to opportunities available at the time. Ultimately however, recognition of departure from initial vision and what Grow Sheffield “believes that it is about”, leads to a renewed focus on the arts once the LFF project comes to an end. While enterprise evolves, it is also therefore underpinned by a sense of collective identity (which is itself negotiated in relation to the members, history and repertoire of the organisation. The extract below shows how in the post-LFF strategy, the arts objective returns to the foreground, with the aims of Grow Sheffield being “slightly amended to reflect Grow Sheffield’s intention to refocus on artistic and creative engagement” (Business plan draft 2013-2016):

“5.2 Artistic and Creative engagement

All GS projects and activities supported and enhanced through artistic engagement, giving maximum opportunity for creativity to all members, staff, volunteers and the general public.

People of Sheffield more aware/interested in growing/harvesting their own food by participating in activities with artistic focus.

5.2.1 Rationale

Grow Sheffield’s roots are still firmly embedded in the unusual combination of artistic engagement within a city wide food and harvesting growing endeavours to achieve GS’ vision. The artistic ‘strand’ and history gives GS part of its ‘USP’. It is generally agreed that for a variety of reasons this aspect has dropped down our agenda and that it is critical to find a suitable way to restore it and integrate into the other top line objectives.”

Grow Sheffield Business strategy draft (2013-2016)

The objective and “rationale” described here are the result of negotiation as part of a strategy meeting that underpinned the development of the business document presented (strategy meeting notes, 10/13). It describes a return to the initial “vision” of growing Sheffield, unpinned by the “unusual combination” of arts and growing. Explicit mention is given to “history” of this strand of Grow Sheffield identity, and the role this plays in giving the organisation its “USP”, highlighting the importance of the shared history and repertoire of the organisation in terms of the image and identity it creates. The objective to “restore” and “integrate” the role of the arts indicates the negotiation ahead in rekindling the arts as a central focus of the organisation. The extract also once again demonstrates a sense of reflexivity - with members being quite aware of perceived short-fall, and taking action to re-negotiate the trajectory of the organisation.

In an attempt to realign itself with original artistic enterprise, Grow Sheffield put significant effort into a funding bid to the Arts Council, to fund a resident artist to join the core team and co-ordinate art activities. As shown below, the language used in the bid gives a sense of Grow Sheffield's attempt to articulate itself with the arts, or perhaps more specifically, with the enterprise of the Arts Council to which they are applying:

"We aim to connect people to each other, to their environment and the seasons using food and food growing. Art and creativity are at the heart of this aim with art playing a key role in facilitating cultural shift and 'creating new stories for us to live by'.

[...]

Each year, we have successfully delivered our artistic harvest event Allotment Soup, which partners community artists with allotment-holders to develop artistic and creative work and activities which responds to the setting, growing and the environment. And we have continued to deliver art exhibitions and used artistic practice in our Abundance fruit harvesting project, as well as engaging artists as volunteers to run creative sessions with community food growers and participants in community food activities."

GS arts funding bid (2014)

Grow Sheffield presents itself in a way that draws upon its own history and artistic repertoire to give a sense of capacity, drawing on past experiences and demonstrating competencies. The extract is based on an excerpt taken from Grow Sheffield's 'Our Story so far' section of its website, edited to resonant with the arts council enterprise. This demonstrates one way in which the 'stories' of the community of practice created at a key point in history (representing a key aspect of repertoire), can be reinvented and attributed with specific meaning. This particular story is used as a boundary object to convey a sense of competence that is designed to resonate with the funder. However, it also demonstrates difficulty in translating meaning and value beyond the community of practice into a different 'regime of competence' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015), as the bid is ultimately rejected. This proved that initial concerns that "the language of the application might not be 'artistic' enough to attract the ACE" (Core team minutes 9/4/14), were well-founded. The extract below summarises some of the key recommendations from the arts council on how to improve the bid better meet the funding requirements:

"Firstly, the bid was well written and clear. However, the balance of the bid needs to be tipped towards the arts.

[...]

ACE need to understand the artistic quality of the artist's work or see a very clear commissioning process and the experience of panel members. What they are afraid of here is that low quality art will be supported.

[...]

There should be less emphasis on social outcomes and more on artistic outcomes."

*Extracts from email detailing feedback from telephone conversation with ACE advisor
Email correspondence, CT (2014)*

Concerns about 'low quality work', lack of process or experience, and need for "less emphasis on social outcomes and more on artistic outcomes" highlights a divergence between the enterprises of the two organisations. While Grow Sheffield attempted to present its enterprise in a way that would resonate, the focus on social outcomes, and need to tip the balance towards the arts suggests that further compromise is required in order to reconcile perspectives. The feedback given by the arts council led to much discussion about how Grow Sheffield should move forward. Having put so much energy and resources into the bid already, and with what was perceived as relatively straightforward recommended changes to implement, reapplying seemed at first like a logical way forward. However, as shown in the email excerpt from a core team member below, the necessity of stepping away from social outcomes, in order to meet artistic objectives was too far a departure from Grow Sheffield's enterprise at the time:

"At first glance - my opinion is that there is not much here that we cannot easily rectify if we go for another application. All stuff we were aware of.

The key questions are I think - are we still ok with the arts strategic objective? If so where does an artist in residence now fit into an action plan. If this is still the case - how and when do we apply to ACE or any other body for funding given current limited resources."
Email, core team reaction to arts bid recommendations (2014)

Once again, this shows the negotiation of enterprise to be linked to the negotiation of opportunity, capacity, and identity - with the question raised as to how an artist would fit into Grow Sheffield's broader strategy (without being accountable to the social aims and objectives of the organisation). In this instance the requirements of the funder are too far removed from the enterprise of the organisation to be justified in relation to the objective outlined above. Instead, Grow Sheffield moves away from a focus on grant funding, and towards developing arts in a voluntary capacity, and through developing partnerships with artists and community arts organisations. This will be explored further in Chapter 6, as arts and growing enterprise contributes to innovative capacity and development of a culture around growing and the arts.

5.4. Feeding Manchester: Maintaining Momentum

Having examined some of the opportunities and challenges that have shaped Grow Sheffield's trajectory over the course of its history, I turn now to Feeding Manchester. Unlike Grow Sheffield, Feeding Manchester has developed without a great dependency on external grant funding and without a reliance of the capacity afforded by a staff team to facilitate its operation. This is however largely related to the role that the Kindling Trust plays in contributing to its ongoing stability by providing time and support to co-ordinate the network and organise events. Despite this, as with Grow Sheffield, basic survival is once again highlighted as a significant

achievement and ongoing challenge. This is demonstrated in the extracts below in which co-directors of the Kindling Trust give a similar response when asked what the main successes of Feeding Manchester have been:

“I think I would say that it exists, still, and that people find it useful.”

“Just the fact that its still going. Erm Yeah.... Just that really.’

Interviews FM1 and FM2 (2015)

This section therefore explores the dynamics of survival underlying Feeding Manchester, through which it has continued and evolved beyond the initial momentum of the early establishment and launch outlined in the previous chapter. It focuses on a different set of challenges and opportunities to Grow Sheffield, emphasising processes around maintaining the engagement of a network over time and in working at the landscape level. It also examines the development of its trajectory over time, and the challenge of maintaining organisational stability in the context of an ever changing landscape of opportunities and challenges.

Feeding Manchester aims to hold conferences three times per year, and although it is not always successful, managed to hold 16 events between 2008 and 2016. Table 9 summarises the Feeding Manchester events so far, giving a brief description of the focus of each of the conferences. This will be referred to throughout the section, highlighting key points in its trajectory. While the initiative itself might not be directly dependent on grant funding, the first section analyses the extent to which funding pressures across the landscape of which participants are part, influences the capacity of the network. It then moves on to examine some of the broader challenges around maintaining momentum, engagement and relevance in a changing landscape.

Conference	Focus
FM1+FM2 2009	Initial framing and developing ways of working building practical solutions and making connections
FM3+FM4	Discussion focus on defining and promoting sustainable food definition. Engaging local authority through their climate strategy, and development of ‘visioning of Manchester’s sustainable food sector in 2020’ document
FM5	Discussion on website criteria, marketing, and possible events.
FM6	Website launch and development of land army model
FM7	Social, updates, review, networking
FM8	Broader focus, range of presentations and discussions on sustainable food systems

FM9 co-ords, 2 years, foodlink	Events focus, reflecting on collaborations arising from FM,
FM10	Workshop on accessing and using land, and planning permission
FM11+ FM12	Local focus with events held in Prestwich and Bolton
FM13+FM14	Sustainable Food Cities programme introduced, visioning for Manchester as sustainable food city. Development of strategy, building on visioning doc
FM15	Launch of sustainable food strategy
FM16	Making food fair - interrogating sustainable food as accessible to all, in relation to food poverty
FM17	Virtual Feeding Manchester Survey

Table 9: List of Feeding Manchester (FM) conferences

The previous chapter focused on FM1 and FM2 as early events in which the community of practice was established, creating a platform for development of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire focused around developing and supporting a more sustainable food system. Following this, focus shifted towards developing various tools and resources (such as a sustainable food definition (FM3 and FM4); and a website (FM5 and FM6)). Negotiation of shared vision also informed intervention with local authorities by engaging with local climate strategy (FM3 and FM4) as well as developing presence at local events (FM9). Practical workshops addressing particular challenges (such as land access, FM10), as well as connecting with projects in local areas (FM11 and FM12) formed the basis of later conferences. From 2013-2014 (including FM13 to FM15), emphasis shifted to engaging groups in developing a sustainable food strategy, building on previous visioning and with the aim of engaging local authorities. Having launched the strategy, there was a lull in activity until FM16, which was successful in attracting a broader range of participants, exploring themes in relation to sustainability, justice and food access. This marked a turning point towards more broadly focused topical events. A virtual feeding Manchester was held through the form of an online survey, asking members for feedback and possible direction in 2015. However, since this point, events has largely been focused around key shifts in the landscape - for example Brexit and its influence on food and farming, or more recently Manchester devolution as providing an opportunity to forward food strategy. This section continues by examining the dynamics behind some of these underlying trends.

Resources and Capacity

While Feeding Manchester hasn't been directly reliant on external grant funding in the same way that Grow Sheffield has, it still requires a certain amount of resources to coordinate and run the events. While this has largely been managed by the Kindling Trust, the extract below from the minutes of an early conference event (FM2) demonstrates that the sustainability of the network in terms of resourcing is something that was discussed in the early stages of the initiative:

“Sustaining the *Feeding Manchester* events:

Views/Suggestions given:

Under-represented groups could do with funding, to make it as accessible as possible.

People not making much money should not pay.

If here as a volunteer – should be funded.

It's not that much - for what we get.

We should continue with the DIY culture – not look for funding.

We could ask the public sector to pay more to subsidise the smaller groups.”

FM2 write-up (2009)

This demonstrates recognition of the importance of resources for running events, but also their uneven distribution and availability. The suggestion to “fund” under-represented groups or that those earning less “should not pay” implies an awareness of the limitation that lack of capacity has on participation. Coupled with the suggestion to charge public sector representatives more (as they are perceived as being relatively resource rich in comparison) to “subsidise” smaller groups perhaps highlights underlying tension within a highly resource uneven landscape. The suggestion that volunteers “should be funded”, suggests that individuals representing other types of organisations (i.e. community-based or third sector) should have their costs covered by that organisation. In this way the costs of events are distributed with some degree of fairness between participating individuals and the organisations they represent. Consideration doesn't however extend to the overall time costs of planning and organisation, perhaps illustrating once again an inherent reliance on the Kindling Trust as host and key organiser.

The extract above also demonstrates an extra dimension in the relationship between sustainability and capacity that emerges at the level of a *meta*-community of practice. Capacity lies not only in the resources held by the organisation, but depends to a greater extent on those held by its members. While the Feeding Manchester initiative itself has not engaged in the cycle of short term funding, instead choosing to “continue with the DIY culture”, many of organisations that constitute it do rely on short-term grant funding and volunteer time. This generates a need to prioritise their core activities, potentially limiting their scope for

engagement in network building. Arising from this, time (or lack thereof) is identified as a key constraint, and a problem inherent to working with what is essentially a network of activists:

“it’s the time and resources thing to be perfectly honest. That’s it really [...] I think one of the difficult things, that I find difficult about FM, is that everybody that comes to it, including us, are kind of very busy already doing their own thing. Which is, you know in sense why they are part of that network, because they are doing work on this thing, but what that means is that, people don’t, it is quite hard to find time to carry forward what comes out of those meetings.”

Interview FM2 (2015)

Lisa describes an almost paradoxical situation where the individuals that they are aiming to engage are those already engaged and “very busy” in sustainable food related enterprises. While their competence and value to the network arises out of their work as practitioners, it also limits to extent to which they are able to engage with it. The constraint of limited time capacity described by Lisa is a commonly arising theme in both case studies, and no doubt community initiatives in general. While extra funding might not directly address this, it does provide a way to effectively pay for the time of individuals to take on roles, and therefore increase the capacity of the organisation. In the extract below, Lisa addresses positives and negatives of gaining funding to increase the time available to coordinate the organisation:

“it’s a tricky one because if we had a worker that could become easier because it could be someone actually lobbying on behalf of the whole of FM, or someone going out and supporting groups of how they get to use it. but then the other, the downside of that is that if we do that, then we’ve got another thing that we’re needing to raise funding for, and do we want to become dependent on that, or do we want it to, get it to the point where it happens, because its members make it happen.”

Interview FM2 (2015)

Here, the advantages of funding described include creating extra time of a worker to take a lead in engagement not just between groups and the network, but in lobbying those in positions of power. It might also go some way to addressing challenges raised in the previous extract of finding time to “carry forward” ideas and actions raised at events, adding to a sense of momentum. However, despite the obvious increase in capacity that funding would bring by enabling engagement of a dedicated worker, it is not seen as a long-term solution. The challenges of funding (as highlighted in the Grow Sheffield case study) are well recognised within the sector, not least the risk of dependency and need to embark on a capacity-demanding cycle of fund-raising as mentioned in the extract above. The dilemma described here again is one familiar and fundamental one across the landscape of sustainable and community food based practice and likely across the third sector more broadly. This was also reflected in a recent survey of the civil society food sector organisations, which called for more funding to be made available

to facilitate the trend towards increasing collaboration and networking across the sector, an area in which funding is especially scarce (Food Ethics Council, 2017).

The challenge facing individual organisations to engage in networking activities, whilst trying to maintain their own enterprises in a resource scarce landscape is illustrated in the following extract from an interview with a member of Feeding Manchester's steering group, who also manages a separate community food initiative. She describes the challenges she faces in managing multi-membership of the two initiatives, with increasingly limited capacity:

"I mean I know for myself, it just gets harder and harder and to get out, and spend a day doing something. I always prioritise that, with particular, so like Feeding Manchester, or something else that I know will be, the benefits will be great because I'll be there debating things, you know talking about things, working through things with people, meeting new people who are interesting and interested, erm but a lot of people maybe don't know that about it, won't make you know the 'Yes' choice, because it is, it is difficult. You know and normally you're having to pay, whether it's very reasonable or not, and not everybody has got that money anymore. You know we used to have a budget for attending conferences and things like that. We don't have anything now. Not at the moment anyway.

Me: do you think that's a general trend that its more difficult now, with funding?

Yeah yeah, definitely. Yeah."

Interview FM3 (2016)

The extract above demonstrates the real and tangible difficulty currently facing sustainable food practitioners as they face many of the challenges that have been described in relation to the Grow Sheffield case study above. Having less funding and less capacity to deliver, at the same time as an ongoing responsibility to provide and maintain services and community engagement means that difficult choices have to be made. When funding for core activities and core costs is scarce, and there is no budget for "attending conferences and things like that", making the "'Yes' choice" for networking, as described above, becomes increasingly difficult. While she is clearly committed to Feeding Manchester, and realises that "the benefits will be great", she admits that those less familiar might struggle to prioritise it. When asked about the future direction of the initiative she responds in the following way:

"It's about knowing that there is a desire from people for it to still be here, you know, I don't particularly know what I want the next issues to be, I'm a little bit bored of sort of going to things that are about the funding situation, or you know, it just gets a bit sort of, you know: well we know that, I'm really well versed in all that now thank you. But er, I think, I think, how we all work together to keep things moving forward is a good one, a good question. And can we? Do people have the time, the resources, the capacity to sort of do that?"

Interview FM3 (2016)

Here, having the "desire" for Feeding Manchester to continue is identified as key, as well as members being able to commit the 'the time, the resources, and the capacity' to keep it going.

Also necessary is the ability to “work together to keep things moving forward”. This highlights how survival is negotiated as part of trajectory, and connected to a sense of forward momentum required in order to maintain relevance, and (as highlighted as an achievement at the beginning of the section) to continue to ensure that “people find it useful” (Interview FM1, 2015). Along with maintaining capacity, this sense of utility is an important aspect of Feeding Manchester’s joint enterprise, constituting a key part of what is necessary to ensure continuation of the initiative. This raises the question of how to make Feeding Manchester useful and worthwhile enough so that its members, even in a resource scarce environment, will choose to prioritise it. The next section therefore examines some of the ways in which engagement is encouraged and facilitated.

Enabling Engagement

As discussed in Chapter 4, the joint enterprise of Feeding Manchester includes two interrelated aspects: developing a network of mutual support and knowledge sharing for practitioners, and connecting the enterprises of its members by making landscape level interventions in promoting a sustainable food system. While the latter is important in providing drive, motivation and inspiration to catalyse engagement, the former is central to providing support and developing a sense of cohesion across the community. Momentum is required along both fronts in order to maintain engagement and generate a sense of progression.

As discussed, the availability of resources at the landscape level influences the capacity of members to engagement with the networking as part of a meta-level community of practice. While Feeding Manchester is limited in the extent it can influence resource availability at the landscape level, it can work to increase the capacity of its members in other ways, by providing a platform for sharing of opportunities, and development of partnerships and collaborations (as will be explored in Chapter 6). It can also provide value by providing a platform for support, where groups facing similar challenges can proactively discuss and collectively negotiate solutions and strategies for moving forwards. While the formal aspects of the Feeding Manchester conferences focus on strategic working and development of landscape level interventions, the informal aspects are arguably of equal importance in fulfilling other aspects of enterprise.

In communities of practice theory, Wenger (1998, pp. 74-75) places importance on the social and informal aspects of practice, and the role they play in developing community cohesion:

“The kind of coherence that transforms mutual engagement into a community of practice requires work. The work of ‘community maintenance’ is thus an intrinsic part of any

practice. It can, however, be much less visible than more instrumental aspects of that practice.”

Feeding Manchester doesn't only provide a platform of learning and practice-based knowledge sharing, but places a strong focus on the informal and the social, and on maintaining a positive atmosphere and relationships within the community. This reflects to some extent the importance of the intangible and informal within communities of practice, which while often undervalued are important in generating the social glue that holds the community together. Following Wenger's (1998, p. 74) assertion that “whatever it takes to make mutual engagement possible is an essential component of any practice”, important elements of Feeding Manchester could include the post-event, pub visits, the lunch breaks, the informal chat and gossip that occurs as members are provided with a periodic opportunity to ‘catch up’ on various goings on across the landscape. These less visible and less documented aspects are arguably as important and integral to the shared enterprise as the formal agenda-ed and minute-ed items of meetings. In this way, enterprise embodies and “reflect[s] the instrumental, the personal and the interpersonal” (Wenger, 1998, p. 74). The extract below emphasises the role of the ‘community maintenance’ that the networks like Feeding Manchester can provide:

“I think actually networking in times of austerity is even more important, just to find out how the people are and have some therapy. It's like I get groups of teachers together just to have them go, I'm shattered how are you? It really is. Can't underestimate that community spirit and that community strength as well.”

Interview FM4 (2015)

Despite the challenges that austerity brings in terms of reduced capacity and resources to enable engagement, here it is presented as creating an even greater *need* for networking and building of connections and relationships as part of the community of practice. Underlying this are the “community spirit” and “community strength” which give a sense of resilience and of the capacity that is generated through mutual support. This also resonates in the extract below in which a member of the network describes the ways in which Feeding Manchester has influenced her role in managing a separate community food enterprise:

“I'm sure it has, I mean even just through gaining inspiration, I think and feeling part of something, rather, because its easy to feel quite isolated, when your running something and you've just got your head down, and you're constantly worrying about money and how to move forward and I think to be going to events where you just meet loads of other people who are in the same boat, even if its not exactly what you do, who sort of understand the sector, and understanding the issues involved in being a voluntary sector organisation, I think that, that's yeah, its supportive, and you feel inspired by you know going to things that other people have put on, so yeah its definitely I would say influenced.. And I think its because people have felt that, they've obviously got something out of it, whether that's meeting other people, being able to debate things that are

important to them, find new solutions to old problems, and they feel inspired by the end of the day. You get great food. (laughs) So yeah, they're basically getting something out of it."

Interview FM3 (2015)

Here, this member describes a range of ways in which she (and others) are "getting something out of" the network. Central to this is a sense of support from those who understand the challenges specific to the sector and share common challenges and difficulties in negotiating increasingly limited resources. In addition, "inspiration" is identified as a key influencing factor, highlighting that as well as providing support in working through challenges, connecting with in a positive way and sharing successes, ideas and potential solutions also contributes to the sense of community that is generated. In the extract below, Lisa elaborates on how the sense of community and togetherness generated contributes to a sense of movement (comparing it with the food network in Bristol):

"There's a real movement and a feeling of people kind of coming together. Erm, and I would say that the people, at least the people involved in FM would feel like that's part of how that happens, I think it was interesting with the discussion in Bristol, because I was really surprised, because they were saying yeah we don't have that here and I was just like *really?* Like I think of loads of foodie stuff in Bristol, no but like, you don't have the feeling of people really working together necessarily. Yeah, or the network, maybe theres people working together, but there's not the feeling of a movement. And so, I think that that's one of the, I would say, one of the successes of FM, a big success."

Interview FM 2 (2015)

Lisa describes the generation of a sense of movement that goes beyond being a network. While a network (such as in Bristol) is described as "working together" this is seen as distinct to "the feeling of a movement" in which people are "coming together". This perhaps highlights the importance that a sense of community, formed around broad landscape challenges and generated through informal as well as work activities, plays in helping to generate coherence as a *meta*-community of practice.

Maintaining a Neutral Platform

As well as maintaining engagement of members of the community of practice over time, another challenge that has faced Rob and Lisa as coordinators of Feeding Manchester has been the need to actively develop and maintain a sense of autonomy and ownership of the community with those that participate in it. While the Kindling Trust, as already discussed plays an important stabilising role, providing the ongoing co-ordination and drive behind organisation of events, it also attempts to create a sense of mutual ownership and autonomy of the initiative as a community of practice. There has been significant effort from the beginning to keep the two

separate and maintain a sense of independence for Feeding Manchester. In order to support this aim, it has developed its own website, its own mailing list, and a unique set of members; and as previously discussed an enterprise to some extent has been directed by negotiated of its members. This is illustrated in the following field note from a meeting with one of the coordinators:

“He described how they try to keep Feeding Manchester as a separate entity from Kindling Trust, although it is essentially the same people that run it and it draws upon the resources and momentum of KT to organise it. He said that on the Feeding Manchester website, there is no mention of Kindling Trust, and vice versa, only to point people in that direction if they should search for it. This was to try to maintain it as an ‘open forum’ where people wouldn’t be put off, or have expectations based on associations.”

Field notes, Meeting (19/06/15)

This describes how Feeding Manchester whilst drawing on the capacity and “momentum” of the Kindling Trust, does not draw direction from it in an explicit way. There are tangible attempts to keep the two apart, enabling the network to maintain its position as an “open forum” where expectations are not based on association with the Kindling Trust. The challenge of maintaining neutrality and building a sense of ownership is further outlined by Lisa below:

“and the thing of whether people felt like it was theirs or not and they could be part of it, I think that’s a challenge, because we’ve always sort of said its not, even though we are the people that make it happen and put the time into it, we wanted it definitely to be a network of people, rather than Kindling events that we put on. So we’ve always kept it as that.”

Interview FM2 (2016)

Here Lisa makes a clear distinction between Feeding Manchester as ‘a network of people’ compared with “Kindling events”. This places emphasis on the importance of mutual engagement between members and the collaborative enterprise they generate. At the same time, as the ones who ‘make it happen’ and have the ability to decide that it should be “kept” as “that”, there is clearly a sense of control and power in the role they play. However, key to engagement and being able to be “part of it”, is that participants feel a sense of ownership, and can feel “like it was theirs”. This presents an interesting point of negotiation for the representatives of the Kindling Trust as they attempt to create a network that encourages engagement on equal terms, but in which capacity to organise and control are unequal.

One in which this has been addressed is through the creation of a “sub-group” of several key members, who act as a steering group playing an advisory role in influencing the direction of the network. While most of the practical organisation in the run up and on the day of events still falls to the Kindling Trust, the addition of the group plays an important role:

“and now we have the sub-group that’s really great, I really love that. I think for me that’s one of the successes as well is having the subgroup, so its not just me and Rob doing it... But they are all really really busy as well, so its really, but that’s fine”

Interview FM2 (2016)

Here Lisa is clearly enthusiastic about having an input from the steering group, despite the fact that they too are struggling with limited capacity. The fact that they are “really really busy as well” perhaps indicates their level of engagement and competence within sustainable and community enterprises, which adds value and experience to their roles as advisors. Their ‘knowledgeability’ of the landscape through engagement in it makes them well placed to help steer the network, but at the same time means that they have limited time and capacity to spare. Despite this, the inputs they can make are clearly valued highly, providing not only advice and direction, but a sense of moral support. The extract below gives a sense of the negotiation that takes place:

“...we talked about this at the subgroup, and interestingly it didn’t come from us, it was kind of what I’ve always secretly wanted, but not wanted to impose that but people were saying we think it would be really good to politicise... it a bit more because at the moment it feels like a nice gathering of people and actually, what we are talking about it is totally changing the food system and that’s a political thing. Like food IS political and that’s, there’s no getting away from it, but you can *not* talk about it like that if you know what I mean, and so, I think we’ve always wanted it to have a bit more of an edge, a radical edge, but didn’t want to put people off.”

Interview FM2 (2016)

The way that Lisa “secretly” wanted to politicise the organisation, without wanting to “impose that” demonstrates an awareness of responsibility and potential power, but also caution to avoid using it to take over and control the direction of the network. She emphasises that the idea didn’t come from “us” (referring to the Kindling Trust) but that other representatives of the network were calling more a more politicised approach (which happened to align with the enterprise of the Kindling Trust). Despite this, there is still a sense of tension that emerges with the risk of “putting people off” being weighed against the assertion that “food is political” and that a more “radical edge” is both necessary and justified.

Changing Membership and Changing Enterprise

Over the course of Feeding Manchester history, the focus and membership of events have evolved. It has been consistent in attracting participants representing a range of groups and organisations, with at least around 30 attendees at each event and according to one coordinator a gradual increase in numbers (Field notes, 2015). While it was estimated that there were around 10 regular members that attend almost all events, many others are described as “dipping in and out” showing variation in who makes up those numbers (Interview FM1, 2015). There has

also been a trend in more recent years towards events that are much more open than in the beginning, inviting people with a broader interest in sustainable food, rather than solely practitioners. Related to this, topics of debate and discussion have evolved, reflecting the changing landscape of sustainable food issues, culminating most recently in Making Food Fair, which gained attention from across the UK. One of the coordinators elaborates in the extracts below:

“I think it’s kind of become a more, you can come to it sometimes and not other times, and maybe we and maybe we thought it would be much more of a thing that people came to each time. But I don’t think that’s, you know that’s, fine.

[...]

it’s sort of become more a thing that you come to if you’re interested in creating a more sustainable food system, and so I suppose the range of people has changed, in that it includes individuals or students, or whatever different.. a wider bunch of people.”

Interview FM1 (2015)

This gives the impression that rather than developing as a relatively closed and close-knit community of practice as originally intended, the initiative has tended towards attracting a broader range of people, perhaps reflecting a broad interest in challenges surrounding sustainable food. Underlying the changing scope of engagement of the network is the changing enterprise, which has evolved since its emergence as a relatively closed forum for practitioners. This became most apparent following a lull in activity following the launch of the Food Strategy in 2015, which presented a key milestone. The next conference in late 2016 entitled Making Food Fair, invited and attracted a much broader audience (with around 50 participants from a range of organisations). Since then Feeding Manchester has become a more open network, picking up on topical issues and providing a forum for discussion of the changing landscape and new challenges that have arisen (for example the influence of Brexit on food and farming, or development of a movement around the Right to Food). The extract below gives a sense of how enterprise develops in relation to engagement:

“So in some ways I think it’s a bit like a snowball isn’t it, you know its got a certain amount of momentum as you’re rolling it and it gathers stuff, and you know some people melt away, and others appear when the snow comes round again, you know and on you go, so that kind of continuity I think”

Interview FM4 (2015)

The kind of continuity described gives a sense of how momentum builds as part of enterprise, despite change in membership as people dip in or out. The initiative gathers pace and substance of its own that while connected to the membership, also goes beyond it, through generating shared history and repertoire that form part of its practices. She also gives a sense of almost

cyclical trajectory, with “others appear[ing] when the snow comes round again” giving a sense of the underlying potential that manifests during times of opportunity.

5.5. Summary

This chapter has explored how the case study organisations have negotiated the various challenges and opportunities they have faced, in order to maintain capacity and maintain the momentum through which joint enterprise shapes their trajectories. Examining responses to fluctuating resources and a changing ‘field of influences’ highlights the interrelated challenges of survival (in a resources scarce environment) and maintaining practice in the long-term (thus creating impact and generating legacy). Responding to these challenges requires drawing on diverse capacities, competencies and collective identities to produce innovative and collaborative ways forward.

Investigation of Grow Sheffield’s trajectory has focused on the role of funding as being central to capacity - both in terms of scaling up and formalising activities, and in terms of scaling down whilst attempting to maintain capacities. The formalisation of Grow Sheffield and subsequent development of more rigid structures and hierarchical ways of working fundamentally changed the dynamics of the organisation. Within this, conflict arises as a key theme, highlighting Wenger’s (1998, p. 77) assertion that communities of practice are not always harmonious. Negotiation, particularly in a group of people with diverse identities, values, and ideas is challenging, and can lead to divergence as well as convergence of perspectives. Negotiation therefore (whether successful or unsuccessful) has the potential to shape individual trajectories, the history and direction of joint enterprise, and the broader landscape (as key individuals branch off and engage their capacities and experiences in new ways outside the community of practice). A communities of practice framework facilitates analysis on multiple levels, and can engage with changing dynamics through examining the ways in which resources, capacity and long-term sustainability interrelate.

As well as changing the dynamics of the community of practice through formalisation, gaining funding enabled a step-change in the level of capacity of the organisation through the recruitment of a dedicated staff team. Examining the careful processes of recruitment reveals an alignment of values, ethics and perspectives as well as assembly of personal capacities that contribute to competence and enable engagement of staff members with the joint enterprise of the organisation. While this extra capacity enables the scaling up and out of projects and development of new structures and ways of working, compromise is made once again in terms of changing dynamics leading to the loss of volunteer capacity. In response to this, Grow

Sheffield negotiates ways forward that reduce reliance on funding, whilst attempting to maintain key capacities and practices on which the community of practice is based. A degree of reflexivity is apparent, both at the level of the community of practice which negotiates responses based on the skills, capacity and enterprise of the organisation; as well as at the broader level through interrelated landscape intervention (such as Growing Together).

Analysis of the trajectory of Feeding Manchester as a meta-community of practice reveals a different set of challenges. While funding and resources still play a key role in shaping the network, it is in a more indirect way - through influencing the capacity of members to engage. This highlights the multiplicity of Feeding Manchester's enterprise, which both aims towards system level interventions, and provides support and a sense of coherence that constitutes community. This contributes towards the development of a sense of 'movement' with forward momentum and potential to respond to landscape level challenges, when the opportunity to do so arises.

Through this analysis, a communities of practice framework provides useful in unpacking the dynamics behind the ways in which communities of practice (at different scales) respond to the 'field of influences' and landscape of opportunities and challenges they face. It reveals some of the complexities involved, with examination of shared histories revealing the tensions and subsequent compromises that are required to reconcile multiple identities, with competence, capacity and enterprise of the communities of practice in question. The dynamics and reflexive learning that form trajectory demonstrated in this chapter will underpin analysis of some of the processes of innovation explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

Negotiating Innovation across Boundaries

6.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters explored how the case study organisations have negotiated the challenges and opportunities they face, focusing on internal assemblage of capacities, competencies and identities. The challenges of survival and maintaining long-term impact of projects highlighted the need for ongoing innovation within community food initiatives. Building on analysis that has so far focused on internal negotiations, this chapter looks at how the processes of innovation work *across* the boundaries of communities of practice, as they seek to spread knowledge and develop sustainable practices in the communities with which they work. This chapter will draw from examples of cross-boundary working from each of the case study organisations, as they engage with individuals, organisations and communities outside of the community of practice.

A community of practice approach is helpful in understanding innovation not as a one-off event but as a continual process in which learning and knowledge is constantly refined and renegotiated in relation to changing external forces and internal capacities. If initiatives focus 90% of their time on surviving and only 10% developing activities (as stated in Seyfang and Smith (2007, p. 596), drawing on Church (2005); Wakeman (2005)), then as illustrated in the previous chapter the dynamics of survival have a significant role to play in understanding of innovation in the context of grassroots initiatives⁵⁰. Innovation is understood therefore as inherent to the survival of the organisation - which is also fundamentally connected to and dependent on their ability to fulfil primary aims of effecting social change in the communities in which they work. Therefore, rather than viewing internal and external processes as separate, innovation is understood as part of ongoing process of negotiation, and continual reflection and learning that takes place within the community of practice over time.

Building on previous chapters focusing on trajectories of the organisations in question - this chapter will also examine the development of innovative capacity over time, and how through processes of social learning this can lead to social change across boundaries. According to Smith (2006) and Maye (2016, p. 6), successful 'niches' diffuse practices by communicating effectively

⁵⁰ In his study of the Permaculture movement from a communities of practice perspective, Maye (2016, p. 6) also calls for "the need to appreciate internal niche processes versus external processes by understanding the role of identity and group formation."

with outside audiences. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, (2015a, p. 18) argue that “competence is less well defined at boundaries. As a consequence, the innovation potential is greater, but so is the risk of wasting time or getting lost”. This chapter aims to shift the framing away from how innovation can be ‘diffused’, ‘harnessed’ or ‘unleashed’ (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2014, p. 2) but examine how it is co-produced, and negotiated across the boundaries of communities of practice.

This section will begin by focusing on data collected through engagement with Grow Sheffield, drawing on examples in which they work across boundaries to develop practices in communities in which they work. It will examine the interrelations between developing innovative capacity over time within the organisation, and embedding practices in outside communities through social learning. Comparison is then made with Feeding Manchester who work to develop practices at the broader system level, innovating solutions that help support a more sustainable food system in the region. Innovative capacity is generated by bringing together different groups, and creating spaces of innovation in which they can connect and identify ways they can work together across boundaries. This chapter will lay the foundation for the Chapter 7 which focuses on landscape processes, looking at how communities of practice position themselves within the landscape and how innovative capacity moves around at the landscape level.

6.2. Developing Innovative Capacity

In previous chapters, the focus has been on capacity as assembled within the organisation - bringing together the mix of people, skills, infrastructures, strategies, tools and resources to be able to identify and respond to opportunities and challenges over time. Innovation was framed in terms of collectively developed responses to problems, and specific to the community in question - drawing on their unique sets of knowledge, experience and capacities. This section will go further to look at how this capacity for innovation works beyond the community of practice, to bring about change in the broader communities in which they work. It will examine how rather than just being diffused, practices are co-produced and develop through social learning and reflexive engagement across boundaries.

As will be revisited throughout the chapter, innovative capacity is difficult to define and as community organisations are well aware, difficult to quantify. It arises out of complex processes which develop over time, and depends on the collective skills and learning of the organisation. This section will begin to draw out some of the key themes arising from work with Grow Sheffield in how innovative capacities develop from and enable cross boundary working.

Generating Opportunity

While previous chapters have focused on *response* to opportunities and challenges as part of trajectory, innovation also requires being able to generate opportunity. In the extract below, a staff member of Grow Sheffield describes the way in which opportunities arise from the sense of ‘good-will’ and ‘momentum’ that is created from working with various groups of people (as part of in this instance Local Food funded projects):

“I think there will be lots of opportunities, and again that’s partly the result of the *good-will* and the kind of the momentum that’s been created by *this* project, people want to work with us, so we have, a number of enquiries in there, about three or four just in the last two weeks of people who want to work with us and propose projects and things.”
Interview GS (25/3/2014)

Here the ‘good-will’ and a sense of ‘momentum’ that are identified are key capacities which give rise to opportunity for working across boundaries with different people and projects. Creating an environment which attracts other people and partners is therefore key, and is derived in part from the competence developed over time - or in this case - as part of the three-year Local Food Fund project. Grow Sheffield is presented as a positive organisation to work with, and as is elaborated on further below, successful engagement helps to develop a ‘bank of good-will’ on which further practice can be developed:

“I think also the main thing, I hope is that there will be kind of a bank of good-will which sounds like a really erm, vague and sort of fluffy thing to have come out of a project but I don’t think it is, I think its one of the core and most important things, [...] having a good, having a sense of achievement, having a sense of being appreciated, having a sense of being empowered, having a sense of someone that’s available to support you, having a sense of someone valuing what you’ve done, and having a sense that there’s other people in the city doing similar things and they’re available, all that sort of stuff is what’s going to provide kind of, you know, the underlying completely untouchable but there none-the-less... erm.. *potential* for doing more stuff, and I think again, I think Grow Sheffield in many ways is quite good at *generating* that, because of the people who are employed and are going out and doing stuff, and because of the volunteers and their commitment and because of the way they tell other people about it, they’re keen on it, you know its something that they’re keen on and they feel special to be involved, because it is special, so I think that’s probably a really important thing as well.”
Interview GS (25/3/2014)

Here the description of how Grow Sheffield is able to generate an environment in which people feel compelled to continue to contribute to the organisation, beyond the scope of immediate projects or short-term participation, is seen as a key achievement. In contrast to the short term nature of funding and the tendency towards development short term projects - the capacity that is described above has a sense of long-term commitment.

The first part of the extract focuses on individual feelings of achievement, appreciation, empowerment and value, which contribute to creating a sense of good-will towards the organisation, and in turn enables and encourages continued engagement (bringing various skills, capacities, connections). In addition to these personal motivations is the sense of support and connection to others participating in similar practices across the city⁵¹. The capacity generated is at once described as vague and fluffy, core and important, and underlying and untouchable, illustrating the way in which it is both difficult to grasp, but also key to the trajectory of the organisation.

The second part of the extract focuses on how Grow Sheffield generates that capacity - through its employees and volunteers which go out and engage with various communities. They are committed and 'feel special' to be involved, and carry with them commitment to the organisation, its ways of working and its broader aims towards generating change. They are perhaps able to some extent to translate their energy and enthusiasm, or 'goodwill' across boundaries, spreading the positive values highlighted in the first part of the extract. Engaging communities, and developing good-will all contribute to a development of capacity for innovation.

The extracts above give a sense of how long-term sustainability requires momentum, and being able to move forward despite fluctuation in external resources (i.e. funding). At the core of the organisation is a 'bank of goodwill' that can be draw upon, but also needs to be maintained by providing support and fulfilment to those involved. It gives a sense of the forward thinking that is required for continuity, in being able to generate the next set of opportunities before the current projects and connected resources run out. This is a theme that will reoccur and will be picked up on later in relation to how opportunity is mediated by capacity.

Empowerment through Social Learning

The bank of goodwill described above contributes to Grow Sheffield's capacity for innovation, through individuals' commitment to the organisation. However, a key aim of the organisation is also to encourage participants to be able to engage in practices (such as growing or harvesting) independently. The extract below goes into depth on the importance of developing a sense of empowerment, to enable individuals and communities to be able to function independently

⁵¹in Wenger's terms, this relates to 'knowledgeability', of how one's own work fits into the broader landscape of practice in the city. This will be picked up further in Chapter 7.

without having to rely on external organisations. Here a staff member refers to the example of the Community Growers project:

“I think there’s also, I *hope* there’s also a sense of empowerment that’s come out of it on the part of those projects, so they don’t feel like they need to rely on people like Grow Sheffield, or Heeley city farm, or Whirlow or anybody else to do some growing. So our ideas has been people getting to grips with it and feeling they want to do it themselves, and think that *has* come out of it, I’m not sure if it’s always just been down to us or its it’s down to the fact that if you begin to do that with people they realise they can, so they just do. but I think the nice thing about Grow Sheffield is that it then doesn’t seem to retain those projects, it doesn’t seek to retain ownership, it’s just quite happy to allow that to happen and then move away, or be available for support if necessary, and I think that might, I hope that’s come out, so like a sense of empowerment.”

Interview GS (25/3/2014)

Empowerment is connected to competence, giving people the skills and confidence to be able to run projects independently without being reliant on external funding through organisations like Grow Sheffield, or others. In this way, innovative potential is able to diffuse beyond the boundaries of Grow Sheffield through the development of independent projects with their own momentum. Ownership is identified as a key part of this process, with Grow Sheffield being willing to pass on control to the participating communities. In this sense ‘goodwill’ is not confined to Grow Sheffield, but exists as part of a network of connections of people working on growing across the city, as will be explored further in Chapter 7. This is elaborated on further in the extract from an interview with a staff member below:

“So often like, charities and organisations will set up an event or one-off thing, which is good fun, but that’s it, it starts and finishes there, and so there’s no, no real momentum gathering, and I feel like this, this is different in that sense. Like Abundance, it will be very hard to kill Abundance in all honesty, it will be very hard this year to keep it going *in the same way* if there’s no staff member, but still I don’t think it will disappear, because it’s almost like, it’s almost out of our hands now, it’s there, it exists, somebody will keep it going, the volunteers will do it even if no one else does, and then they’ll keep calling it Abundance because its there’s, you know they won’t kind of reject that title, because it’s not something that someone has imposed, or said, or kind of stuck a, I mean there is a logo, but you know what I mean, it’s not something that’s owned. And it’s also not something that if they did choose to carry on, Grow Sheffield would argue with, they wouldn’t say oh no you can’t do that, because it ours, because the point of it is that *it’s not*, its community generated and community led, and I feel like that’s genuine. And I think that makes a huge difference, because so many organisations do something, do it well, do it engagingly and everything else, but then its theirs, it belongs to them and it’s almost like, that’s already kind of cutting off any potential for people taking it and people running with it because it belongs to them and therefore it belongs to them, nobody else can do it without permission and you sort of already kind of stymying any kind of development, so I feel like it’s quite different in that sense, they are quite happy, people are happy to see things grow and change..”

Interview GS (25/3/2014)

The focus here is developing something that is “community generated and community led” - that “exists” out there, and is “out of our hands”. Abundance is presented as having a trajectory and life of its own - and is not dependent on the resources or stability of a host organisation, but is led by the volunteers that are engaged in it. Even the title and logo of the organisation are considered as owned by the community and therefore more likely to continue to exist in the long-term. In contrast to the inherent struggle for survival presented in previous chapters, Abundance is described as being “hard to kill”, demonstrating the extent to which it is buoyed by underlying energy and capacity of engaged and empowered volunteers. With the sense of momentum that is generated, focus of negotiation shifts towards finding new ways of working, in which they can “grow and change” - perhaps even independently of Grow Sheffield. Once again empowerment, sustainability and momentum are connected to ownership and allowing and enabling communities to take control of the projects and practices that they have been instrumental in coproducing.

Encouraging this kind of ‘development’ of innovation beyond the boundaries of the community of practice is central to Grow Sheffield’s mode of working and theory of change and is key to their aim of developing long-lasting impact within the various communities in which they work. This way of working also to some extent aims to generate models that are replicable - and can be reproduced and adapted by other communities and organisations beyond the boundaries of Grow Sheffield⁵². The staff member makes a point of comparing and distinguishing Grow Sheffield’s approach to other organisations whose way of working involves retaining ownership of projects. As will be explored further in Chapter 7 - implicit in this statement are certain tensions between different ways of working across the landscape, between organisations who are often perceived as being in competition (not just for funds, but in terms of reputation, competence and impact). The next section focuses on a case study following the Community Growers project, and aims to demonstrate boundary activities as part of an ongoing innovative process of reflexive learning.

6.3. Case Study 1 - Community Growers

This case study draws on data collected from participatory engagement with community growing projects connected to Grow Sheffield. It aims to explore in-depth the texture of social learning that takes place, both on site through engagement with practices around growing, and over time as shared histories of learning develop and are negotiated within the community of

⁵² For example, this can be illustrated by the way the Abundance model has been adopted and adapted across the UK.

practice. This section will draw on data from site visits to look at the ways in which community growing has provided a vehicle for learning and change in practice in communities.

Context

Community growing has been a central focus of Grow Sheffield since its inception, with the aim of enabling anyone who wants to grow their own food. During the Local Food funded period, Community Growers was one of three key projects, with a small team of coordinators being employed to work across 12 hubs in the city to “to teach, organise and support people to grow their own food and inspire people to do it for themselves” (Grow Sheffield website, access 2016). Since then, several of the projects have continued independently, with various links to Grow Sheffield. Grow Sheffield also continues to draw upon and develop the Community Growers model through interaction with a range of partners.

This section will examine how learning has been co-produced in participating communities- focusing on specific examples, site visits, and secondary accounts given through reports and project reviews. The first part will explore how through mutual engagement in the practice of growing, Grow Sheffield attempts to develop skills and capacity in the communities in which it works, and how at the same time participating communities develop their own ways of doing. It will then go on to focus on organisational learning and reflexivity, as Grow Sheffield incorporates lessons learnt into its own practice and ways of doing, which is then implemented in future projects. This trajectory of learning leads to the development and consolidation of ways of working, tools, structures, legacy and capacity over time. This case study therefore illustrates two interconnected levels of learning and innovation - the first co-produced through mutual engagement across boundaries within different communities; and the second which forms part of Grow Sheffield’s own trajectory of learning.

Community Growing (and Eating) in Arbourthorne

The community garden site at Arbourthorne is connected to a nearby community centre, and was developed by one of Grow Sheffield’s community growers, with initial work focusing on the building of infrastructure (two poly-tunnels and a number of raised beds). The garden is located in what is perceived as a “difficult” area (Core team meeting minutes, 10/14) - with high levels of deprivation and unemployment (with volunteers often being difficult to engage, but potential for high positive impact if successful⁵³). Two visits were made to the site: one on a regular

⁵³ “There is high unemployment in this area and potentially many people who can benefit from such a project.” Community Growers report (2012)

volunteer day, and the other as part of a session run in partnership with Manor and Castle Development Trust (part of a series called Cook, Eat, Grow, aiming to generate skills and confidence of local people to eat healthier). The course was advertised with “come along to our free four week course to learn food growing skills, make new friends, and have a healthy lunch” (event flyer). The turnout of around 15 people was very pleasing for the coordinator, being the busiest session to date. The second visit was part of a regular volunteer day, in which some of the workshop participants had returned, along with regular volunteers.

During the first visit, the community grower ran a workshop in which participants could get involved with some basic growing activities such as planting seeds. The following extract demonstrates some of the ways he attempts to engage the relative newcomers to growing:

“Peter started with a tutorial on planting broad-beans in a raised bed, explaining about crop rotation and planning where and how to plant, before getting people to plant some rows of beans themselves. He got people to lay the beans out before pushing them the correct depth into the soil, encouraging them to be creativity and plant them in whatever arrangement they pleased (not just straight rows). Some of the volunteers got stuck in straight away, others were more reluctant. One elderly lady used a stick to push the beans into the soil, but after finding this ineffective gave up and finally got her hands dirty - afterwards she seemed quite satisfied with having got stuck in.”

Field notes, Arbourthorne visit (4/3/15)

The focus of the exercise above was on getting people to practically engage by planting seeds for themselves - with Peter giving clear and simple instructions on how to proceed. Although Peter provided information about the process, the emphasis was on ‘getting stuck in’ and getting hands dirty. The focus on not having to plant in straight rows connects specifically to Peter’s teaching style, as in this and other workshops, he emphasises that there are no right or wrong ways to grow, but that it is about trial and error and experimentation. Through this, he aims to develop confidence in doing, and acceptance of failure if something doesn’t go as planned. The following extract illustrates how by participating in a simple process of planting seeds into the soil, they are engaging with the natural cycle of growing:

“Some volunteers wanted to know when the beans would be ready to eat - which would be in a few months’ time. They were eager to see the produce, or to know when they would start to come up. Peter said they would have to come back in June when they would be able to harvest them. One man said he would be back next week to ‘see how his babies were getting on’. It seemed that planting seeds was one good way to get people to come back, not just for the produce, but to check on the growth, connecting people in an immediate and direct way to the growing cycle.”

Field notes, Arbourthorne visit (4/3/15)

The extract above demonstrates the potential of growing to engage people as part of an ongoing and continuous process. Planting of seeds seems to be an appropriate way to introduce people

to the practice, creating some form of commitment in starting a process that will continue over week/months. Although the planting of seeds is a long way from eating the food, there is an implicit connection between the two. Overall, participants were interested and willing to have a go, with some being more deeply engaged than others. Many had attempted some form of food growing before, and used the opportunity of having access to the knowledge of a grower to troubleshoot questions:

“Peter tried to explain about the process of germination, which lead one participant to comment that he didn’t know the *Latin* for things, asking if it meant when the plant ‘started sticking out of the ground’. Lots of questions were directed to Peter with the aim of troubleshooting own gardening problems or experiences - things like what soil is needed, how to handle builders rubble in your back garden, to why grape vines or tomatoes weren’t fruiting as expected.”

Field notes Arbourthorne (4/3/15)

This demonstrates some form of exchange - with participants willingly engaging with Peter as part of the workshop, and Peter sharing his knowledge and understanding. While participants might take home knowledge that might help them overcome their own individual problems and barriers with growing, Peter also learns from the interaction, for example in terms of what types of workshop might be useful in the future, or how to communicate key principles of growing to newcomers. Through such shared experience over time, Peter has the opportunity to consciously improve the delivery of his workshops overtime⁵⁴, and participants have the opportunity to gather the knowledge and hands on experience to be able to take home lessons learnt and develop their own growing skills if they desire.

Focus in the workshop was not only on food growing, but also eating. Despite it being early in the year, there were a variety of foods for participants to try. In the following extract, Peter attempts to convince participants to eat produce growing on the site, to varying degrees of success:

“There was a large rocket plant taking over most of one of the beds, which Peter encouraged people to try. Some participants were eager to sample some and were very enthusiastic about the result. One man went to fetch his wife to give it go, although to his disappointment she wasn’t as keen. Several others also had reservations - the thought of eating part of what looked like a large over-grown weed having little appeal. Peter continued to lead the way, sampling a variety of young vegetable plants, trying to get people to eat the different parts of the plants such as seeds and flowers, and tasting the different flavours on offer. He proceeded to bite off a whole young pakchoi plant - leaving only the roots behind. The exercise generated a lot of interest and excitement, with

⁵⁴This is exemplified further by a series of growing workshops developed by Peter in which he focuses on particular themes each week - such as container gardening, growing in small spaces, herb growing, propagating workshops.

people being surprised about the accessibility of eating various plants, that previously they wouldn't have been able to identify. The pak choi and rocket in particular were identified as going from being perceived as expensive and plastic wrapped, to being abundant, free and easily grown and eaten. He explained that plants that often grow as weeds often make up the expensive and most tasty part of 'posh' salads you buy in the supermarket - and that he encourages all kind of plants/weeds to grow and propagate themselves, for minimum effort and maximum gain. Some of the participants took home salad leaves and flowers, young broccoli shoots and other produce on offer. Others were less keen - with one man who had been previously keen in trying everything on the allotment remarking that he wouldn't know what to do with it as part of a dinner, and that he would stick to broccoli in its usual form"

Field notes Arbourthorne (4/3/15)



Fig. 9: Demonstrating eating flowers from an overgrown rocket plant



Fig. 10: Volunteers planting out and watering leeks

The extract above demonstrates some of the challenges with changing perceptions of food, and attempting to get people to integrate new practices into their normal lives. It also demonstrates

the potential that growing creates through providing hands on experience with food in its original form.

The first part focuses on how Peter attempts to get people to eat something that they wouldn't normally recognise as food, with participants having varying degrees of confidence and enthusiasm to participate. A key focus of Peter's workshops is often on widening perceptions of what counts as food, and increasing accessibility to it - not only in a financial sense, but in terms of developing a broader understanding of what is edible. In the example above, it is the different parts of the plant that are rendered edible, but later in the workshop he also challenges understanding of 'weeds'⁵⁵ - encouraging people to identify and eat edible ones (with nettles used as an example, having more iron than spinach); and also challenges understanding of what needs to be cooked and what is best eaten raw in terms of flavour and nutritional value.

Another theme that emerges is comparison between supermarket and allotment produce. People are often familiar with and can relate to the former to develop understanding of varieties they might not recognise on the allotment, for example kale is described as being 'like cabbage but less round' and can be eaten in the same way (Field note, 14/5/16). Appearance is a key factor, with supermarket food placing high value on aesthetics but being perceived as having little substance, and home grown food as often looking odd, irregular (or characterful) but being superior in terms of nutrition and taste⁵⁶. In order to illustrate the diversity in terms of variety, Peter encouraged planting of several different types of carrot - as part of this he described how purple "was the original colour" of carrots, sparking discussion about how what is considered normal now might have once been strange (Field notes, 14/5/16).

Despite the potential that growing has to challenge perceptions of food in various ways, the last sentence of the extract illustrates the real difficulty in generating change - as even those that are keen to participate might not be able to integrate what is learnt in one context back into the routine of their normal lives. While there is clear potential of growing impacting on eating habits, established practices around preparing, cooking and eating meals also create a barrier.

⁵⁵ He defines 'weeds' as plants which are growing where you don't necessarily want them to, meaning that they can still be useful and valuable. In this instance spinach was the weed, as it was growing in a bed destined for legumes - and so participants were encouraged to collect and eat the 'weeds'.

⁵⁶ The example used by Peter was tomatoes imported from Spain, and grown in forced conditions with high water content. He describes how it looks like a tomato but doesn't taste like one, and that the standards of appearance create a system in which waste is prevalent and food is poor quality.

As well as getting participants to sample various produce, a key focus of the workshop (as is often the case) was in sharing a meal on site. This reveals further insight into the relationship between perceptions of cooking and eating:

“A key focus of the workshop beyond Peter’ sampling of various allotment produce and weeds, was the lunch that was provided - a simple and healthy vegetable soup cooked on site[...] It was noted by staff members that people didn’t seem bothered by the dirt, or lack of crockery etc. and that this must be related to being in the outdoors. It was discussed how dirt was healthy and natural (versus sterile environments). Staff also commented that while most people were keen to get involved and try new things, some were more reluctant and less confident - something that was highlighted to work on in following weeks.”

Field notes (4/3/16)

Having worked with participants before in a normal kitchen environment, the member of staff was surprised at how well they had taken to the poly-tunnel as a setting for lunch, with only basic facilities (Field notes, 4/3/16). The fact that she relates dirt and soil to being positive when in an outdoor setting is counter to the way in which she is used to food being prepared (with the necessary hygiene certificates requires for community cooking). This example perhaps illustrates the way in which the fundamental connection between soil and growing that the volunteers had participated in changes perception of how dirt is perceived in the context of the garden.

The examples above illustrate the various ways in which through connecting the practices of growing and eating, understanding and perceptions of food can be challenged. While this has the potential to influence the broader everyday practices of participants (and in some cases is proven successful⁵⁷), the difficulties in achieving this are well recognised. In the extract below from the Community Growers handbook⁵⁸, Peter reflects on some of the challenges he faced around convincing people to incorporate new practices around eating into their daily lives:

“One unexpected concern was what to do with the vegetables we had grown! It has been hard to encourage people to actually take it, especially some of the slightly more exotic salad leaves because people didn’t know what to do with them. Some of the radishes had got so big that people didn’t recognise them! Our Community Growers Coordinator spent time teaching one of the regular members how to harvest with the aim that he could help encourage others.

Peter said “People are nervous of growing and they think it’s something that they will fail at. However, you just have to treat it as an experiment – that way you can’t fail. Just pick it and see what happens!”

Community Growers Handbook (2015)

⁵⁷ “Alistair who works at The Spires had never grown anything in his life and is now making raised beds, sowing and harvesting crops and becoming knowledgeable about food growing.” Community Growers report (July-Sept 2013)

⁵⁸ The Community Growers Handbook is a publication of Grow Sheffield which aims to act as a guidebook for establishing community growing projects by sharing learning from the Community Growers project.

The fact that people “didn't know what to do” with the produce grown or weren't able to recognise varieties was clearly a barrier in this particular community growing project (to the extent that it was chosen as a key point to publish in the handbook). This challenge is reflected in the focused efforts of Peter (as demonstrated in the extracts from site visits), to tackle the persisting barrier of getting people to experiment with new perceptions of growing and eating. While both Peter and the participants in the project are working to develop their practices (from different starting points and with different end goals), and in the process are developing an infrastructure and community around growing, there are clear difficulties in translating knowledge from one context to another. Each community has its own challenges, and developing strategies and capacity to sustain projects requires long-term engagement and planning. The following section explores in more depth the way this learning accumulates over time.

Reflection and Learning at the Organisational Level

While most of the community hubs were distinct and had little or no direct connection to each other, the Community Grower coordinators were in contact both with each other, and through the staff team of Grow Sheffield also connected to the structure of the organisation and the core team of directors. Furthermore, as employees and part of a funded project, they were accountable both to the organisation and the funder, and therefore had to respond to expectations around delivering outcomes and providing updates and reports to demonstrate progress (or account for failure). Through these connections, and as part of developing practice, lessons learnt were shared throughout the project and transferred through the community growers to the various participating communities. The following extracts from interviews, and from the Community Growers' Handbook⁵⁹ gives a sense of some of the learning that took place.

The extract below from an interview with a staff member highlights the changing nature of the Community Growers project, as ideas and ways of working develop in relation to experience:

“Its kind of wound up developing community growing sites and that wasn't necessarily the original intention. You know the intention is, you know, how do you kind of like stimulate people who want to grow, and kind of you know in a community, and get them to kind of work together and do that. So that could be done through sort of container growing, you know, kind of working with people just temporarily on a site, but then they are sort of taking that learning back and doing it in their own yards and that sort of thing. so for example the.... Walkley Streets one which was an early Community Growers thing,

⁵⁹ Growers were invited to share learning from their projects and reflect on what worked well and what could be done differently.

was an example of that, where they kind of you know did some sessions on like container growing and things like that and worked on you know one street in Walkey and people had sort of pots in their gardens and stuff, and that was quite a nice, quite a nice little thing. But then in many ways it lots lots easier to be able to do this sort of work if you have got a base, where you can have people coming to and doing a bit, effectively like a little community allotment. And its easier if you've got a community hub organisation that can sort of almost host the activity. So although I don't think the original intention was to develop these sites that has effectively been what's happened, so yeah Hollensend Methodist church, spires Centre in Arbourthorne, erm down in Beighton, and the ones, Foxhill forum, they're all examples where we've kind of ended up establishing little growing sites."

Interview GS (26/3/2014)

Here the member of staff describes the progression of the Community Growers project, as it develops from its "original intention" of street based projects, towards site-based hubs that act as a "base". While the aim of enabling people who want to, to be able to grow food as part of a community remains the same - the approach changes. This indicates a sense of learning trajectory that takes places, as ideas and expectation shift in relation to practical challenges (and opportunities) that are presented, with the move towards creating gardening sites being described as 'in many ways lots lots easier' (even more so if a "host" organisation is present). In the extract from the Community Growers handbook below, Peter elaborates on some of the challenges in running the 'Growing streets' project in Walkley:

"We also found that people weren't as keen to get involved with the growing streets project as we had hoped. Going out with just a wheelbarrow is much easier in that you don't need so many resources but if you don't get interest from people it won't work. This sort of project works better over a longer period of time as it requires a lot of relationship building – it needs to be more personal as you are working at people's homes. There seems to be some scepticism from people accepting that some things in life are free! Due to limited hours it also meant that a lot of time was taken up with the promotional work/workshop activities and admin rather than the actual "doing" of the project."

Community Growers Handbook, Community Grower Case Studies (2012/13)

Here, a clear challenge is presented in terms of engaging participants. The project relies on having dedicated individuals who are willing to let the community grower into their homes and gardens, requiring a higher level of commitment than for example attending a volunteer day at a neutral site. People are described as "sceptical" for not accepting the "free" service - suggesting a misalignment of values and understanding between the grower and the community or individuals involved. This perhaps also indicates a misalignment of expectations, as people are wary to accept something for free, or perhaps reluctant to engage to the level expected. In addition, the time required to build relationships was perhaps beyond the capacity of the grower - who identifies the time spent on promotion and preparation as being at the expense of "doing" the project. Lessons learnt from the project are reflected on further in the extract from the

Community Growers Handbook below, in which Peter modifies his plans for a second project, based on his experiences of the first:

“Peter then decided to change his original plans. His experience from his first hub in Walkley had highlighted the difficulties of working in area without having a central space for storage and deliveries, so he decided to work with the Spires instead.

Therefore, don’t be too rigid in your plans. Listen to people in the community as your idea may not be what is best for your area.

Having a piece of land to develop as a community garden with a weekly session and regular volunteers has made a real difference. At this hub we have had to be much more practical and hands on in order to get the initial work done. This has also meant that there is a lot more physically to show for our time.”

Community Growers case study (2012), Handbook

The extract demonstrates the way in which experiences from one project helped to shape the next, with a key lesson learnt being to “listen to people in the community” in order to find out what is “best” for an area. Peter also elaborates on the practical benefits of having a central hub: having somewhere to store tools and take deliveries, but also having a place for regular sessions where progress is visible and tangible with more to “physically” show for the time committed⁶⁰. This perhaps gives an indication of momentum generated at the local level, with development of practice being reflected in the physical progression of the garden, as well as in the development of competencies around growing and in connections within the community. Below another staff member reflects on some of the lessons learnt, drawing on their position as having a relative overview of the Community Growers project:

“it seems that the community growers that worked in partnership with a local organisation in the local area seemed to get on better, I think that was, it was easier working along-side an existing organisation in the community. than in the areas where they tried to do it direct with residents, because I think people are naturally quite wary and sceptical, or just don’t want to get involved. But I think also community growers found that easier sometimes, because also there might be sometimes a plot of land, somewhere to leave tool, just practical things like that where to store things in the local area.”

Interview GS (16/4/2014)

Here the staff member describes how working with a pre-existing community group or organisation makes it easier to convince people to participate than working directly with residents. As well as practical reasons (with access to land and storage being an issue), working with an organisation means that the work of bringing people together and generating a sense a community is already underway, and likely under the remit of the organisation in question. This

⁶⁰ “our focus this year was on getting the site set up and ready so that there is something for people to see. That way it may encourage people to get involved in the near future once there is something tangible work with.” *Community Growers report, Peter (2015)*

enables Grow Sheffield to focus on engaging that particular community with growing - rather than spending resources on the initial step of trying to generate a community through growing⁶¹.

However, the model of working brings with it its own set of challenges - not least in tackling how to sustain the site beyond the limited funding period, when the work of community development and generating sustainability around projects is a long-term process. Here a staff member describes the challenges as the local food fund draws to an end:

“you've now got this difficult transition of what happens on those sites, is there enough will to take those projects forward, you know and how much kind of is GS expected to you know sort of take those things forward, and how much does the community want it. You know they're all, there's quite a lot, sort of tricky, there are a lot of tensions going on there. and so, and Grow Sheffield dealt with them in different ways you know. At the spires in Arbourthorne there seems to be a sort of idea with the staff team here, potential, so I effectively wrote a bid that they could submit. That was successful. The Beighton one - GS owned that bid - that continues as a GS project, so they'll have the same problem but in a years' time. The Foxhill one - there didn't seem to be that kind of enthusiasm. We let that one go, since then there's another project.”

Interview GS (26/3/2014)

The extract above describes the “tensions” occurring as part of a period of transition when funding comes to an end. A key challenge is balancing the expectations for projects to continue, against the will of the community to take it forward. The member of staff describes the “potential” of the Arbourthorne project, which leads him to write a funding bid for them that they will essentially ‘own’ but with the continued support of one of Grow Sheffield’s growers⁶². Although to some extent the project will continue to develop in the same way, with the same level of support, there is an important shift in who “owns” the project - with an organisation or community willing to take responsibility for it. This contrast to Beighton - where the Grow Sheffield owned bid is seen as a less sustainable solution - with the same issues arising in a years’ time. Interestingly, while the lack of enthusiasm to continue the Foxhill project meant that a further funding bid wasn’t supported, the end result was that eventually another project

⁶¹ Although introducing growing can help to *further* develop a community - for example, St Mary’s growing hub developed in partnership with a local English language initiative, and helped to provide a means for engaging further volunteers, and connecting the group with the broader community through developing growing skills in conjunction with language skills. (Community Growers report, 2012)

⁶² “The bid would be in the [partner organisation’s] name (along the lines of our general approach to support hubs towards independence and local ownership) and would be for sessional costs for community grower time (ideally a GS community grower), some community engagement sessional costs, plus publicity, volunteer expenses, etc. (There may be similar possibilities along these lines with Foxhill, Hollinsend and Mosborough if host organisations are prepared to ‘own’ the projects).” (Funding Report, 2013)

developed anyway - building physically on the site that was developed, but potentially also drawing from some of the capacities and ideas that had developed within the community.

While Grow Sheffield's model of community growing draws on key principles of empowerment and ownership to develop sustainability within the communities of practices that are developed, there is also site-specific learning as the model plays out differently in the various communities to which it is introduced. Furthermore, each of the community growers is enabled to develop projects in ways that draw on their own specific sets of competencies⁶³. In the extract below another staff member describes the importance of "will" or motivation to keep projects going as being a source of value on which any attempt at funding depends:

"a lot of the projects we've done, the hubs, they will now have, hopefully all of them, the ones that are still going, is, is that they have somebody within the group whose got an eye on the local B&Q or community assembly grant of a couple of hundred quid, and they're keen enough on what they're doing that they'll go and look for more, and that's the main thing I think, the main thing isn't how to write a £1000 bid, because if you haven't got anything to write it around it doesn't count. The main thing is having the drive and the enthusiasm to keep your project going and then *you will*, somehow or other you will keep it going, [...] that's the thing that's most important, is giving people the motivation, and giving people the... not *giving it to them* but helping them to find it, and also helping them to find it within themselves to kind of take leadership, take ownership of the projects, cause once they've done it... you know if I give you something really really like, you're not going to give it up willingly [...] and if you do really really like it you'll go and find other ways to keep it, so I think that's crucial really"
Interview GS (25/3/2014)

Here, as well as providing the skills for groups to run projects independently, emphasis is placed on generating the "will" for people to want to carry on, to the extent that they will find ways of sustaining the project themselves. Rachel emphasises that it is not about 'giving it to them' but 'helping them to find it in themselves' - illustrating the focus on capacity building, and developing not only skills, but confidence for people to take ownership of projects. Enabling the communities that Grow Sheffield works with to gain the competence required to take control, enables a transfer of power and responsibility for the project to be transferred across boundaries. Again this development of ownership within the community is central to Grow Sheffield's model of sustainability, which within the scope of the Community Growers project appears to have been reasonably successful⁶⁴.

⁶³ "it was obviously very flexible so each community grower could do something quite different". *Interview GS (16/4/2014)*

⁶⁴ "some hubs obviously were more successful than others, but I think in hindsight it was deemed a successful project because quite a significant amount of those hubs are still happening, you know they're

6.4. Building Connections and ‘Culture’ around Growing

The focus of the case study so far has been on community growing - firstly looking at the on-site development of practices through boundary engagement with communities; and then looking at how this fits into trajectories of learning and development of models within the organisation. Clear challenges arise in developing long-term impact, with practical and resources challenges, as well as difficulty in engaging volunteers and in getting them to translate the practices shared into their daily lives. This part aims to go a step further to examine how crossover between different projects and development of connections aims towards developing a particular ‘culture’ around food and growing.

Following the Local Food Fund and the end of the funded Community Growers Project, Grow Sheffield investigated ways to continue to move forward and develop projects. The extract below is taken from a funding report produced by a staff member, proposing options of how to direct future funding applications:

“Hyperlocal Food Hubs: A project to bring together community food growing, Abundance, and SFN into one overall neighbourhood food system. The project would seek to link up people and groups at neighbourhood level into neighbourhood food hubs looking at e.g. having Abundance hubs hosted with community growing groups, running cooking/preserving activities, and linking up with local cafes and shops as potential buyers of community produce, and other community activities such as food banks as recipients of donated produce. I anticipate that this type of project would involve funding for salary costs for Abundance co-ordination, community growing co-ordination and some SFN support for local volunteers, plus overall co-ordination time (plus all the overheads and project running costs you might expect). With this project idea, I am looking for something that can be described as a clear development from the LFF-funded projects rather than a continuation of them in their current form.”

Grow Sheffield funding report (Nov 2013)

Here the idea is to create a food “system” at the neighbourhood level, connecting all major Grow Sheffield projects, and linking with different organisations such as food banks and local businesses to promote sustainable practices at multiple levels. Through this, a range of practices can be embedded in communities that focus not only on growing, but using pre-existing resources such as fruit trees, developing cultures of sharing, and promoting sustainable food businesses. The last line of the extract emphasises that this would be a step forward in

going to continue, they’ve either applied for future funding, they’ve got their own grants now to carry on, that will work, that was always the idea behind it, was that the community growers, but then the community, or the residents or the local organisation whoever it might be would then carry on the project, so I think *really* that was happened in a significant amount of cases”.

Interview GS (16/4/2014)

developing projects - which relates both to fulfilling funder's requirements for novelty and progressing the aims of the organisation by linking various practices.

While the idea described above never came to fruition as a discreet project (as a "hyperlocal food hub"), parts of rationale and general trajectory of learning are exhibited in the development of projects after the end of the Local Food Fund. Part of this is the shift towards "partnership working" taking lessons learnt about sustainability and efficiency of working with partner organisations and pre-existing communities, but also developing projects beyond community growing to create Abundance hubs and sites for workshops and learning a broader range of skills.

Evidence from the Community Growers handbook on how projects plan to move forward also illustrate the tendency towards making connections within the local community:

"The community cafe is opening again and the veg grown will be used in the cafe which is another great way of getting people interested in the garden."

"Spires is also a food bank and we are hoping to link in with this, so rather than just hand out the food we are hoping to show people how you can grow food too."

"The idea was that the garden would be used by the whole community and not just school. The longer term aim is to help rebuild the relationship between school and the local community."

"Spending one year in an area is fine but you need longer to really establish and develop networks and also to get things growing."

Excerpts from Community Growers handbook (2015)

Here moving towards generating links in communities and establishing projects as part of network is seen as a key future step towards intervening in pre-existing sets of practices. Using produce to connect people to the garden, connecting growing skills with emergency food provision, and using the garden space to develop connections between a local school and the community demonstrates a range of ways in which the space of the community can be used to generate connections.

The last line of the quotation, referring to the time required to "get things growing" gives a sense of the long timescale involved in embedded the growing site and associated practices in to the community in various ways. It also alludes to the fact that the process of growing itself is part of these long-term processes, and establishing a productive garden, with infrastructure, good soil, and efficient ways of working is also a process that takes time and is connected to natural cycles of growth.

Growing Culture through Arts

Returning once again to the theme of the arts (building on discussion in Chapters 4 and 5), this section examines the role of Grow Sheffield's arts enterprise in helping to contribute to the generation of a culture around 'arts' and growing. This connection has influenced the development of practice in a number of ways. Firstly, growing is itself presented and taught as an intrinsically creative activity. Mark captures the inherent creativity of growing practices in the interview extract below:

"So you paint a picture or make a carving, or you write a bit of story or whatever or perform, its instantaneous art. Its art where the reward comes back relatively immediately.

Growing is an art form but it doesn't come back immediately, you know the actual food, well you know the experience and the process comes back immediately, but the food of it is weeks, months, decades later. And it's very difficult for people to think long-term nowadays in our culture. and that something we have to start trying to encourage people to do".

Interview GS (3/3/2015)

Here, Mark, who identifies himself as both artist and grower (see Chapter 4), compares growing to other performative arts, describing it as an "art form" that rather than being instantaneous, is created and developed over time - taking weeks, months, or even decades to come to fruition. He connects this with a perceived difficulty in contemporary culture to "think long-term". Engagement in the creative process of growing therefore to some extent requires a change in thinking and mindset, that for Mark contributes to development of growing culture. In the extract below, growing is once again presented as a practice that like art is inherently creative, but also emphasises the openness of participation it can invite:

"There is also a perception that art is something only special people can do. The creation of a work of art requires an idea, materials, skill and the will to make it. (Eric Gill "The Nature of Art"). The same applies to growing food. Gardening, like any creative activity is life-enriching, bringing a sense of fulfilment in seeing an idea become a reality."

Arts council bid (2014)

The extract emphasises the role of the arts both as intrinsic to growing, and as a channel through which participants can be engaged. Parallels are drawn between growing and art, both being presented as activities that are open to anyone (with the right support), and both being described as "life-enriching" in "seeing an idea become a reality". This statement invokes a sense of trajectory, learning and personal (or organisational) development as part of a material process of creation (of art or food). Grow Sheffield presents itself as an organisation that could provide the necessary "idea, materials, skill" and engender the "will" to facilitate participants to embark on this creative process.

The extract above also alludes to the potential of art for stimulating *engagement*, which as identified in Chapter 4 is a major part of the arts strand of Grow Sheffield's enterprise⁶⁵. Grow Sheffield aims to make both growing and art something that is not restricted to "special people", by giving them the skills and confidence to develop their practice around it. This is exemplified in the extract from field notes below, which detail a community art exhibition that was organised collaboratively by Grow Sheffield and a local community arts organisation. Here, Grow Sheffield's focus on the participatory arts is apparent in contrast to a more conventional style of exhibition that occurs as part of the same event.

"While it attracted a lot of artwork through a call to artists by both GS and Ignite, Grow Sheffield's involvement was more interactive, holding workshops for people to participate in, having a banner making table, where children and adults could add their drawings etc. directly onto the new homemade banner (Karen said she was glad some of the children wanted to take their work home rather than put it on!). As a result, there was a mixture of high quality work that was for sale (up to around £200), and artworks made by children (and not quite so professional adults!). This was quite well received as colourful, fun and inclusive."

Field notes (6/2/15), Plant on the Wall Exhibition.

In support of Grow Sheffield's participatory, inclusive and engaging approach, two workshops were also held prior to the exhibition, where individuals could create small artworks that would be displayed as part of the exhibition. The participatory and performative element of Grow Sheffield's approach is also demonstrated (and to some extent symbolised) by the banner making activity, with children and adults leaving their mark on a banner which would later be used as a public display, representing the organisation at the Sheffield Food Festival. An interesting tension emerges in the relief expressed by Karen that not all of the contributions were included (with some children taking their creations home), perhaps reflecting the need to maintain a certain standard of reputation and professionalism, whilst attempting to embody the ideal of inclusivity and participation.

The event clearly created two quite contrasting but complementary platforms, attracting both amateur and professional artists, and representing the quite different, but aligned enterprises of each of the organisations. While the event was considered a success, some tensions did emerge as evidenced by the extract from the event feedback below:

"Call for Artists. Unfortunately, some people were put off sending their work to the exhibition because they thought it would not be professional enough. We would like to keep the mix of professional and amateur art and bring in people from other areas. The

⁶⁵ As exemplified on the Grow Sheffield website: "Grow Sheffield uses artistic practice and arts activities to engage people with food growing, and vice versa." Grow Sheffield website, 'Grow Sheffield Arts' page. (accessed Mar 2016).

work done at Sophie's workshops in New Roots made a big contribution and shows the way forward for future years. We know several artists running workshops in Community Centres, Church Halls as well as those connected with Growing Projects who would encourage their students to send in work to an exhibition. This would bring them into contact with Grow Sheffield and the idea of growing food.”

Extract from 'Exhibition Feedback' email (2/3/15)

The recognition of a tension demonstrates a point of negotiation between the two organisations and communities of practice, and highlights the challenges of working across different regimes of competence. A mismatch exists between members of one community of practice - one in which artistic expertise and skill are valued, and another where participation and inclusion are encouraged. Despite the issue raised, a clear way forward is decided: to expand on the participatory community based approach, drawing from a broader circle of contacts. This is likely therefore to be an ongoing point of negotiation both within each of the two groups, and between them. However, the competences and relationships of mutual engagement developed through running one successful event, will likely feed into the process of potential future events. The success of the event and positive alignment between two communities of practice helped to strengthen the partnership and lay the foundation for further collaboration, with plans to make the exhibition an annual event, and an invitation to participate in an alternative Food Festival. This once again demonstrates a positive cycle of innovation, in which opportunities are created, based on goodwill, shared learning, and development of a relationship in which competence is recognised.

The exhibition also illustrated further ways in which the arts contributes to development of practices and culture around growing. Firstly, the focus on growing as a theme for art places value on the practice and the produce of growing, giving it attention and a sense of importance that might be overlooked as mundane in its usual context. In this way growing is celebrated⁶⁶ through art, and is represented through new, creative and thought-provoking ways, that bring images and objects associated with one practice into a new environment with a new audience. It also enables appreciation and valuing of the beauty and creativity of nature and natural forms. The theme of celebration is one that reoccurs as a key part of Grow Sheffield's repertoire, not only explicitly through events, but in a more subtle way through the often simple but elegant imagery and styles used to represent and symbolise both Grow Sheffield.

A final way in which the arts and growing contribute to the development of a culture around food, is through the way in which they are connected through seasonality and natural cycles of

⁶⁶ A theme echoed at many Grow Sheffield events, including live performances and installations at Allotment Soup; performances of the Abundance song/dance at events

growing. This returns to the initial point raised by Mark at the beginning of the section, in which he points to the long time-scale of growing as a creative process. As well as providing a symbolic and celebratory connection, there is a *practical* connection in facilitating engagement throughout this time-scale, with art providing a sense of continuity throughout the growing year. This is demonstrated in the email extract below, which presents a response to the idea of having two annual growing/abundance themed arts exhibitions:

“Two annual art-focussed events in spring and autumn with community-based workshop activities linking in-between give a balanced, flexible and seasonal structure to the ‘growing year’. Perfect!!”

Email extract, ‘exhibition feedback’ (06/03/15)

The idea is welcomed, as an innovative solution to a challenge facing many community growing projects in how to engage members throughout the dormant part of the growing cycle. The workshops activities help to provide continuity through winter, with celebratory events to mark the Autumn (harvest) and the Spring as the start of the growing year. In this way, arts is presented as a way to connect and engage people with the rhythm of the natural calendar, establishing arts as a key part of the repertoire of the organisation in keeping momentum and engagement going throughout the year. This is reflected in the extract below, which refers to an aim of Grow Sheffield’s annual autumn Arts activity, Allotment Soup, which has marked a key point in their calendar for ten consecutive years:

“Demonstrate the links between culture and agri-culture – the role of creativity and the arts in engaging with our environment in particular growing food and the seasonal cycles.”

Grow Sheffield website, ‘Allotment soup aims’ (accessed March 2016)

This demonstrates an explicit attempt to develop connection between growing (or agri-culture) and culture, with creativity and arts providing a way of engaging with the environment and natural cycles through growing. Arts is clearly demonstrated as a key part of the vision of how Grow Sheffield envisages change and development of culture around growing. There is also a broader underlying sense of connection to art, through the imagery, styles and approaches used and encouraged by Grow Sheffield. However, the extent to which art is mobilised as a tool for engagement and creativity also depends once again on the competence and capacity of the individuals who are working across boundaries, and the ability of various communities to engage with this element of practice. Despite this, the arts plays a clear role in developing the innovative potential of the organisation, through encouraging creativity, developing partnerships, facilitating year round engagement, and through contributing to the practical and conceptual development of culture around growing.

6.5. Experimentation and Reflexive Learning towards Sustainability

The case study example focusing on community growing illustrated how practices are developed within communities through engagement across boundaries, as well as how the practices of the organisation develop over time through accumulation of learning. The process of innovation requires putting ideas into practice and learning from the results, an inherent part of which involves a degree of uncertainty and risk as to what the outcomes will be. While focus from outside is often placed on success (whether as presented to funders, or to other stakeholders), failure too is an essential part of the learning process. Although often existing under the surface, lessons from past failures are a performed through practice that has developed in relation to lessons learnt. Despite the role failure can play (which is often recognised in negotiations internally), an environment where funding and opportunities are competitive, and funding bodies and other institutions are averse to failure means that it is often necessarily hidden from view. Seyfang and Smith (2007, p. 597) point to this in their work on grassroots innovations:

“Innovation is an experimental process, and an important aspect of this is openness to learning from failure [...] Whilst continued funding of failure can be difficult to justify, it seems unreasonable to cut funding from initiatives willing to adapt activities, overcome earlier problems, and continue experimenting. This is the lifeblood of innovation.”

Understanding what is at stake and deciding whether a risk is worth taking or not is part of negotiation required for developing innovation and often depends on availability not just of opportunities but capacities to respond. In the case study above the direction of project development was towards what were considered ‘easier’ ways of working. In the extract below, Rachel goes into more depth about what that means in terms of practice:

“and I think the thing to do in that situation is to not force stuff either because if you then go back and force people, to say right well we’re going to fund a project and it’s going to be here.. your work is going to be so hard, you’re going to be like banging on closed doors to try and get people to come along, you’re not going to have a solid core of really enthusiastic committee people, so you’re going to have to be haranguing them into doing it, and soon as you back off it will fall over. and in some ways, for instance the Loxley hub in the first year was a little bit like that, we were sort of determined to try and do something in Loxley and people obviously weren’t that bothered, and in a way you know, if they’re not that bothered they’re not going to do it and that’s fair enough, and you know they’ll do what they wanted to and they’ll carry on doing whatever they’ll do, and in a few years they might come up with something like yes whatever, but for now it wasn’t right for them and that’s fine, and I think we sort of, we began to wise up to that abit and began to respond more[...]. all of the others it was the other way around really, the local organisations approached us or people already existed and wanted to do something. And that was far more successful that was far more likely to stay around. and also there far more likely right from the word go to take some responsibility for it, whereas you know the other one, its like well you can come along and play around for you, that’s great thanks very much, but when you’ve gone, well I’m too busy I’m not going to do it, so it’s a bit like that.”

Interview GS (25/3/2014)

Here Rachel describes the learning that took place through failed projects that were organisation- rather than community-led. In this context 'easier' ways of working means working with people that already have a desire to learn about growing and participate in a project. Through this capacity can be directed at developing practices within communities that are to some extent already engaged, without having to use resources on developing or motivating the community from the outset. Easier in this sense means more efficient use of resources, more and longer term impact and higher rate of success. Whilst the aim of this is to maximise potential for long term sustainability of projects and the practices they aim to embed, there is also a risk that the overall impact is directed towards communities that are deemed 'easier' to reach, perhaps limiting their transformative potential. Andrew elaborates further:

“and the issue is I suppose without that level of salary and co-ordination into it, where might it have continued, and it probably would have continued in the sort of fairly wealthy middle class suburbs of Sheffield, and not so much anywhere else. And you know, so that's always an issue for an organisation like Grow Sheffield is that it would ideally like to be doing most of its stuff in the sort of hard to reach areas, but the harder to reach areas are harder to reach. If you'll pardon the tautology!”

Interview GS (26/3/2014)

While Andrew points out that Grow Sheffield ideally would be working in “harder to reach areas”, limitations of capacity restrict practice to areas that are already likely to be tuned in to the values and aims of the organisation. This is a trajectory that is well recognised in community growing initiatives - with tendency towards proliferation of initiatives in what Andrew describes as “middle class suburbs”. While the focus on generating impact with limited resources can lead towards risk of concentration of easier to reach areas, recognition of the problem within the landscape of practice can lead to solutions. At the structural level (particularly in relation to austerity and increasing demand for services at the same time as reduced funding) funders are more focused towards work that prioritises 'deprived' or 'vulnerable' people and places. At the same time, Grow Sheffield has shifted its own practices, embedding the focus on diverse areas into its key aim to work *across* the city, and into its practices through directing work towards 'deprived' demographics or areas of the city. From this direction, the focus towards partnering with pre-existing organisations has another advantage beyond being 'easier', as described in the extract below:

“its quite often say an organisation that works with refugees or an organisation who work with the elderly, who want to set up a specific thing, that's *the best* way to do it really, because then you have a specific goal. and the gardening is the means to the end, its not the end, and again personally I think that's probably the best way to go about it because that group will maintain what its doing, the garden will be maintained because of the interest and the connection with the group and everything else. [...] gardening and

growing just for growing's sake is a hard to thing to generate enough, enough of a movement around, you need a group of people who want to work together, you need people who want to build a community, or you need people who want to support a place, or you need people who want to learn a language or whatever, to provide the kind of ongoing... if you want to do it together."

Interview GS (25/3/2014)

Here having a stable community organisation - often framed around a particular group such as in this instance refugees or elderly people - doesn't just mean more security and less resources focusing on community development, it also has the potential to provide a way into those "harder to reach" areas. There is also a recognition that growing, in addition to its own intrinsic values, has to potential to help tackle a range of social needs by bringing people together as part of a shared practice - even if the motivation for generating this kind of cohesion isn't the growing itself. In one way, this model helps to reduce (or perhaps share risk), as the work of developing community cohesion is connected to the partner organisation, with Grow Sheffield helping to develop that further by bringing in specialist skills and knowledge.

Knowing whether a project will be successful from the outset, or even being able to understand why particular projects might fail can be difficult as described by a staff member below:

"I don't know really, it's hard to say, I think again I'm not necessarily someone that's in the best place to answer but er, m I think sometimes it's just a hundred different factors that you don't know about [...] it could be so many reasons"

Interview GS (25/3/2014)

The broad range of factors and complex processes involved can make innovation difficult to predict. The personal nature of relationships, and dependence often on a small number of volunteers adds to the potential risk involved. Being able to respond to situations and adapt projects to the contexts in which they develop is therefore also key⁶⁷. The importance of learning is described in the extract below from an interview with a core team member:

"the fact it didn't work doesn't mean that it's not worth trying again, but, and its difficult, well, what lessons do you learn. Cause in that whole management sense, you do look to learn from your mistakes, or, they don't have to be mistakes, you look to learn don't you? if you look to review anything, its like well what went well, what would you do differently next time? [...] so its trying to do that kind of circle of learning and reviewing and amending, making changes, and you know that kind of continual improvement. So that kind of left me you know, even more bereft, because at least if there had been some identification, because then with that you can then to try to tackle something, can't you:?"

⁶⁷ "Yeah ownership is really key, and being responsive, I think, as opposed to, you know as organisation being responsive, as opposed to ...reactive, no, whatever the other thing is, prescriptive yeah that's the word" *Interview GS (25/3/2014)*

ok we tried this way but to achieve.. , and come up with other solutions, so again, the fact that they just decided to pull out,”
Interview GS (15/7/2016)

This extract gives an insight into the perspective of a director of Grow Sheffield, with the role of learning in a ‘management sense’ emphasising being able to review and reflect on experiences (whether of failure or success). The question of ‘what would you do differently next time’ gives a sense of learning trajectory and the tendency towards continued development and improvement of models. The process is described as a ‘circle of learning and reviewing and amending, making change’ which gives a sense of how on a practical level learning is part of an iterative process of continued reflection and change. The last part of the extract refers to an experience of a partnership that didn’t work out, but without ‘identification’ of reasons. The core team member is described as feeling left ‘bereft’ for not having had the opportunity to respond to the situation in a productive way, and not being able to engage with an act on a process of learning. Part of the process of innovation therefore might not only be in responding to opportunities, but in finding those ‘other solutions’ and trying to tackle old problems in new ways. Finally, the commitment and expectations that had arisen (but led to disappointment and bereavement) point towards the fact that it was not only a learning opportunity that was lost, but also time, resources and ultimately project outcomes. The next section addresses the role of capacity in the process of innovation and learning.

6.6. Capacity and Sustainability

“yeah there will be [opportunities], yeah I think so, I think its just capacity - that’s it really.”
Interview GS (25/3/2014)

While experimentation (and failure) can be understood as a useful and necessary part of the learning experience, it also requires and depends on the availability of capacity. This can be in the form of time, energy and competencies of individuals involved; of funding available; of materials, tools and spaces; and of structures and ways of working to be able to engage effectively with practice. Whereas opportunities and ideas are abundant, capacity is often extremely limited and choosing which ideas to prioritise and develop is therefore a critical part of negotiation. In the extract below there is a return to the idea of responding to and creating opportunity that was presented at the beginning of the chapter, this time linking it to the availability of capacity:

“the biggest thing is being able to respond to [opportunities] really, having the time to do it and think it through, but there’s plenty of, plenty of enthusiasm, so just being able to tie them into various ways of accessing funding.”
Interview GS (25/3/2014)

Whilst innovative capacity arises out of enthusiasm and is related to opportunity, being able to 'respond to them' is presented as the key challenge - having the time, being able to commit to the processes of developing practice, and crucially being able to tie them in to ways of accessing funding. Having the capacity to innovate relies on being able to integrate all of these factors in order to be able to capitalise on the opportunities available. Knowing where to start isn't always easy, as explain in the interview extract below by a core team member:

"there's something there that you believe and you've got a passion about and you know its making a difference, and you know that people benefit, and if that's, if that's what your own ethos is, then that makes it a lot easier to keep going when it gets really really tough, but then, it really does pull out the need for a vast range of skills, and.. it gets to be, hmm, well I suppose turning it around, its then looking at time management and priorities, and, and actually knowing, and that's ok, but you've also got to have that vision about being strategic because yeah you've only got a certain amount of time, and a certain amount of resource, so where do you direct them, and, and a bit like the example I was talking about earlier with that project I thought was really gona, you know that could have really been the answer, and if it had of worked, it would have been, but it didn't."

Interview GS (15/7/2016)

Having the capacity for innovation requires 'being strategic' in directing resources towards priorities⁶⁸. She talks about the personal and emotional commitment to 'keep going when it gets really really tough' - drawing on passion and desire to have a positive impact, making a difference in people's lives. She draws on her own bank of resources and perhaps what was referred to earlier in the chapter as 'good-will' to stay committed to a project beyond the scope of short-term projects or funding. Managing the responsibility and need for strategic thinking with practical engagement, as she highlights calls upon a 'vast range of skills' which contributes to the collective capacity of the organisation. She elaborates further on the role of personal commitment below:

"I mean I'm kind of quite pleased that I've gone through that thought process because there are other solutions, and sometimes, when you are in a voluntary organisation and things seem really tough and you don't know what the answer is, either it doesn't get done or you look to your own resources, and that really isn't, that's not sustainable either, in what we're talking about. So yeah, sometimes it is a bit about being smart and knowing what skills you've got and what experience and using them in the right way, and maybe yeah, just kind of learning to say, or accept that maybe there are certain things can't be done, or that other people can come up with a solution that maybe you've not thought of and you don't always have to be the one to, to be contributing to that, and but it's kind of trying to kind of foster that atmosphere.

Interview GS (15/7/2016)

⁶⁸ With the example at the end of the extract demonstrating the risk in terms of failure and loss of resources.

She describes a tendency towards drawing on ones 'own resources' as not being *sustainable* at the organisational level - but goes on to give a sense of the way in which this can happen anyway when alternatives are limited. Although she talks about being able to accept when things can't be done, or that they could be done by others, in reality it is often those who have the skills and experience to be able to carry out a task that take on the responsibility, leading to potential for overburdening committed members. Another core team member addresses the issue in a different way, which perhaps highlights the risk to collective capacity of over-burdening volunteers:

"Cause sustainability is to me is all about resource, and that's the resource where you get volunteers to carry on doing it. A bit like Abundance really, get volunteers to do it. and you get the money. because there's two things, the people resource and the financial resource, and you've got to balance to two"
Interview GS (14/6/2016)

In looking at both accounts, lack of financial resources has the potential to lead to pressure on the personal resources (time, energy, skills, or even finances) of those who are committed to the organisation. While the first part of the chapter focused on opportunity and the positives cycle of building momentum and capacity, when considering the balance between personal and financial resources it is easy to envisage how negative cycles can also occur. The interview extract below explores implications of the dynamics of capacity on developing strategy and directing the organisation:

"so it's a bit chicken and egg really isn't it? It's like well who have we got? If we've got this group of people and they're saying well they'll probably be around for the next year and they've got a bit of time, if we use that, what will we do with that, oh that's our strategy, or do we say, well ideally we would want to do this, have we got the resources to do it. It is, it is a chicken and egg thing, really. And I think the first way of doing it is the most realistic way but it's dangerous. Because if you formulate a plan and a strategy around the personalities of the people that are there, and then they go or they don't do deliver or whatever..."
Interview GS (19/7/2016)

The dilemma is described as to whether it is best to start from the people resources, looking at the skills, capacities and interests of those at the centre of the organisation; or to start from the ideal scenario but with the risk of chasing funding. Developing sustainable approaches to engendering good-will and safe-guarding the person-centred resource an organisation is at least as important in this instance as gaining financial resource. In reality the two are interlinked, with project delivery and successful funding bids each requiring both people and financial resources.

So far the chapter has examined processes of innovation at different levels of analysis - from within boundary engagements as practices are co-produced through shared social learning; and

at the organisational level as learning becomes part of an ongoing reflexive process of innovation within the community of practice. The dynamic between opportunity and generating and managing capacity is complex but fundamentally linked to long-term sustainability of the community of practices. Part of the challenge facing the organisation is to maintain momentum moving forward in a way that ensures capacity (both in terms of good will, and strong volunteer base; and in terms of financial resource) beyond the short-term nature of project-based and often short-term funded work. Organisations therefore draw on their own bank of core capacity in order to develop funding bids for future projects to ensure ongoing funding. The next section examines how demonstrating capacity and innovative potential in a way that resonates with key resource holding stakeholders contributes to negotiating the enterprise of the organisation.

6.7. Measuring and Valuing Innovation

As highlighted at the beginning of the chapter, it is clear that much of what counts as innovation and innovative capacity is hard to measure, at once being “vague and sort of fluffy”, “underlying” and “untouchable”, and “core and most important” (Interview GS, 25/3/2014). At the same time, as organisations are often reliant on some form of external funding and resources, conveying value to those external organisations is crucial for gaining and maintaining resource capacity. This section looks at how difficulty in measuring less tangible aspects of innovative capacity and therefore difficulty in conveying value to funders (and other stakeholder), can lead to a potential focus on the easily measurable and more tangible outputs.

In the extract below a staff member of Grow Sheffield describes the way in which community organisations work in relation to funders. There is recognised difficulty in accounting for softer outcomes of work, which leads to focus on the more easily measurable outputs:

“The gold standard for community projects should be to have a credible theory of change which explains how a given set of activities will impact on participants/beneficiaries, what change that will bring about and what difference that will make to their lives. And then it should be able to measure whether that happened, whether the theory worked, and ideally, show that those changes wouldn't have happened anyway, and show how the model could be improved. In practice, almost no-one does this and funders don't really ask for it: i.e. when things are hard to measure, they tend not to be measured. Instead, practitioners place undue weight on what can be easily measured. In this case, that means outputs get measured and are considered important, whereas outcomes are given lip service as important things, but in practice, are not measured with anything like as much rigour.”

Email correspondence (2014)

The staff member describes how in an ideal scenario, effective measurement fits into a broader ‘theory of change’ so that organisations are able to make evidence based improvements to their models of working. He accepts that in reality neither funders nor community organisations meet

this standard, which leads to focus on the 'easily measured' and on 'outputs' rather than 'outcomes'. This demonstrates a recognition within the sector of some of the challenges facing organisations in demonstrating impact and in finding appropriate ways to measure and communicate value. He elaborates further, referring specifically to the report from the Local Food Fund (of which Grow Sheffield was a beneficiary). His analysis of the report concludes:

"I was disappointed to see that they resorted to some broad-brush statements about outcome and impact and have (so far at least) made no attempt to quantify the outcomes, or measure the difference that these projects have made. Even further than that, you see the author's slight discomfort with the idea of outcomes in the text - they seem much more at ease with physical outcomes (e.g. oh look, a previously derelict site is now a market garden) than the less tangible social outcomes (e.g. x number of people learned skills in y which enabled them to go on to do z)."

Email correspondence (2014)

The staff member's analysis of the LFF report supports his earlier statement that 'outcomes' are reported with less rigour than the more easily measured 'outputs' to the extent that he senses a 'discomfort' from the author in terms of how they deal with 'less tangible social outcomes'. In practice this raises the risk that the more visible, easily quantifiable impacts are assigned greater value, than less tangible social impacts. This is reflected to some extent in attempts to measure impact within the organisation, for example Abundance records the number of volunteers, amounts of fruit collected or number of centres receiving fruit, without accounting for 'softer' impacts that give an insight into skills gained, practices developed, connections made. The challenge is difficult to address effectively, particularly with limited capacity and prioritisation of resources towards *doing* core activities rather than *measuring* change. The extract below is from a funding report presented by a staff member to the core team of Grow Sheffield, recommending that the organisation works towards developing a stronger evidence base:

"I have been working on the development of a stronger case for support for GS activities – i.e. evidence of need and outcomes. The lack of food-related funding opportunities means GS funding bids will need to be for activities which meet other non-food-related aims such as health, education, social welfare, etc. The result is that we will need a stronger evidence base around a) the overall story of how our work helps people and makes the world a better place, and b) specific local evidence which demonstrates the benefits of GS activities. I propose a short survey to go out to our mailing list to begin to generate some of this local evidence."

Grow Sheffield funding report (2013)

This extract demonstrates how the end of the Local Food Fund (which directly supported and recognised the broad ranging benefits of local food projects), calls for a greater need to be able to articulate the social benefits of food projects. Rather than being funded for their intrinsic value, food projects are funded as a vehicle to achieve broader social aims, and so therefore are

required to demonstrate their models of social change (or ‘story of how our work helps’) as well as specific evidence of impact. Although the importance of being able to communicate value effectively is recognised, in practice it is difficult to achieve and rarely prioritised. The challenges and opportunities of effective monitoring and evaluation were discussed at a ‘monitoring and evaluation’ workshop I attended in Manchester, along with a member of Grow Sheffield’s core team⁶⁹. Table 10 shows the key points from discussion which involved representatives from around 10 low carbon community groups (including Grow Sheffield), on the pros and cons of monitoring and evaluation:

The positives that Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) can bring	The negatives of Monitoring and Evaluation / what gets in the way
<p>Gives an evidence base</p> <p>Helps accountability</p> <p>Helps manage projects</p> <p>Helps to show we’re making a difference</p> <p>Show if we’re moving in the right direction?</p> <p>Profile raising</p> <p>Reflect on progress</p> <p>Prove value to funders / communities</p> <p>Method for continuous development and learning</p> <p>Celebrate success – get more support</p> <p>Direction of travel</p> <p>Targeting limited resources</p> <p>Justification and secure funding</p>	<p>The time and effort involved in getting the detail</p> <p>Difficulty of monitoring and evaluating softer objectives, such as attitudes</p> <p>Lack of expertise</p> <p>How to capture all the learning?</p> <p>Not just doing the positives</p> <p>Deciding what to monitor? How do you use it?</p> <p>Is it meaningful?</p> <p>Getting people to fill in the forms</p> <p>Boring! - we want to do stuff instead</p> <p>Might show failure</p> <p>Who is it for?</p> <p>Do creative approaches to M&E lead to usable data?</p>

Table 10: Notes from flip charts, Monitoring and Evaluation Workshop, 29/4/14

On the ‘positive’ side of the table, benefits are focused around two key aims. The first concerns accountability, justification and *showing* that organisations are making a difference and progressing; in other words, outwards facing objectives aimed at demonstrating value beyond the boundaries of the community of practice. The second focus is geared more towards an internal focus on learning, being able to reflect on, celebrate, and effectively manage projects

⁶⁹ The event was part of a project by Oxford University, aiming to trial monitoring and evaluation methods with low carbon community organisations. Expenses were covered and a small donation was made to the organisation to help cover costs and enable participation of small scale often volunteer-led organisations.

and target resources towards where they will have the greatest impact. On the 'negative' side, challenges are faced around the difficulty and lack of expertise of monitoring in an effective way (that takes into account softer aspects), as well as the time and effort required (and prioritisation of wanting to 'do stuff instead'); demonstrating that capacity within the community of practice is an issue in terms of both skills and resources. In addition, there are concerns around meaningfulness of data and question of who it is for (and whether this precludes including the negatives, or risks showing failure), again demonstrating uncertainty as to how and what value should be translated beyond the community. In comparing the two sides a tension emerges between finding internal value in the process of monitoring and evaluation, in which learning (and therefore failure) is important; and in conveying value in a way that will be recognised by external parties with different regimes of competence, and who are more likely to see failure as a weakness rather than as a productive part of the process of innovation.

These tensions and the challenges of effectively monitoring 'softer' aspects of enterprise, such as innovative capacity described throughout the chapter, highlight a difficulty facing small scale grassroots organisations in demonstrating their value to external stakeholders. This is captured by Rachel in the extract below:

“you can have concrete things like a publication and you can have you know a project with 10 people that runs every Wednesday [...but] I think actually the goodwill will last a lot longer and it will lead to a lot more than you know, a certain *thing* which has a start and a finish date, and which will just *finish* if there's nothing left underneath it, and that actually, although it's a lot harder to kind of quantify”
Interview GS (25/3/2014)

Being able to describe and value what is 'underneath' projects in the generation of capacity, competence and long term sustainability, is an ongoing challenge highlighting the complexities of Grassroots Innovation. This section has aimed to demonstrate how by examining the dynamics and processes of learning within communities, a communities of practice approach provides an effective way of understanding how organisations like Grow Sheffield work to develop and maintain long-term change in practices, both as part of the learning trajectory of the organisation, and as co-produced within the communities in the communities in which they work.

6.8. Feeding Manchester and Innovation at the System Level

Having looked in depth at some of the processes of innovation within Grow Sheffield, this section examines some of the landscape level dynamics through analysis of Feeding Manchester. As a meta-community of practice that connects a network of practitioners working on sustainable food, Feeding Manchester provides a space for innovation in which members can

work to identify problems, and frame solutions aimed at intervening at the landscape level. In addition, through mutual engagement in the network (both formal and informal), practitioners can identify and develop mutual opportunities based on collaboration with other communities of practice. This forms the basis of joint enterprise, and aims to create spaces of innovation that facilitate the connections underlying the community of practice.

Innovation is often presented as arising sporadically out of these connections in a way that is difficult to predict, pinpoint and track. As within Grow Sheffield innovative potential is mediated by the capacity available to engage in new activities, take risks and experiment. This arises both in terms of capacity to organise and facilitate events on which Feeding Manchester is based, as well as in relation to capacity available to individual organisations/individuals that make up the network. In this way broader landscape level factors and trends (not least the economic climate of austerity) form part of the 'field of influence' that shapes the meta-community of practice. After examining the way in which Feeding Manchester constitutes a space of innovation, the final section will present a case study of FarmStart project. This illustrates the processes through which innovation develops out of the space of Feeding Manchester, and is framed as a landscape level solution in supporting the development of the local sustainable food system.

Creating Spaces of Innovation

In contrast to the model of innovation explored in Grow Sheffield (in which engagement across boundaries involves going out into communities), as a meta-community of practice, Feeding Manchester relies on bringing multiple related communities of practice together in a shared space to build connections and strategically tackle system-level problems. As discussed in Chapter 4, this is part of what could be described as a protective niche space, where communities are able to develop ideas, express alternative values, create new visions and experiment with different configurations of practice (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). Feeding Manchester enables communities of practice to build continuity across their boundaries through coming together and collaborating in this space. However, as highlighted in Smith et al. (2017), the challenge facing grassroots innovation movements is not only in maintaining such spaces but in moving beyond them (as will be explored further in the FarmStart case study below).

As within Grow Sheffield, innovation is conceptualised as being co-produced. Feeding Manchester provides a platform where individuals and communities of practice can work together and build connections across their boundaries, aligning enterprises and working collaboratively towards mutually beneficial aims. While the space provided by Feeding Manchester generates innovative potential, the nature of innovation produced is sporadic and

can be difficult to track, being taken in different directions by the various organisations involved. This is demonstrated in the exchange below with a long-standing member when pressed on outcomes that have developed from collaboration within the network:

Laura: "erm. I cant think of any specific major ones but I just, I know there are. I mean we've met, we've had collaborations that have developed out of things that have been discussed at Feeding Manchester, and im sure that's been the same for other groups, you know, they will have met people and it would have sparked a relationship, and that would have developed into , yeah. Without a doubt."

me: "...its hard to pin down..."

Laura: "exactly and they sort of veer off, so you don't necessarily always link back, so yeah without a doubt there will be all sorts of things"

me: "can you think of anything for you?"

Laura: "not off the top of my head but I mean you know. I mean Rob is often passing things on to us, its not directly feeding Manchester, but it, erm, kind of is. I just know that that's why the relationship is really important to me, and why Feeding Manchester, because its just *about* being connected within your city, and you know the other people who are connected to that, its its just, it just serves to make things stronger and more positive and harder to take away really, so yeah"

Interview FM3 (2015)

This extract demonstrates the almost intangible nature of innovation arising from collaboration. Although Laura can say 'without a doubt' that there have been outcomes produced, she struggles to identify anything specific, focusing more on the *processes* though which such innovations occur. She describes how discussion and meeting others leads to relationships being 'sparked', which then has the potential to develop into tangible outcomes. She also describes how opportunities are passed on through the relationships that are build, and that it is such connections that 'make things stronger and more positive'. The fact that outcomes 'veer off' and don't 'link back' gives a sense of how Feeding Manchester creates innovation not just along its own trajectory of development with progress from one meeting to the next, but creates fertile ground for innovation in multiple directions in line with multiple enterprises. It is therefore not only about aligning as part of a single joint enterprise, but in creating an informal space where small scale partnerships and relationships can grow, developing opportunities to further the practices of the range of communities that are represented.

Laura also describes how the strength that is built through this kind of networking makes things 'harder to take away'. Building on Chapter 5 which highlighted the importance of both informal community building and more formal instrumental aspects of practice, this gives a sense of resilience that is built through the connections and positive relationships developed between

members. Once these links are established, they may provide further innovative capacity for the future without being reliant on the broader initiative or on the availability of capacity or resources. This contributes to a sense of long term impact and legacy as the network facilitates connection, even if the innovations that might manifest are not directly attributed or related to Feeding Manchester. This is echoed in the extract below, in which Rob talks about the development of a growing site in relation to Feeding Manchester:

“...but that wouldn't have happened if we hadn't set up Feeding Stockport⁷⁰, and had the relationship with the local authority, which wouldn't have happened if we hadn't have set up the whole Feeding Manchester network. So like, you can point to quite a few things like that, but you can't directly say oh Feeding Manchester did that.”

Interview FM1 (2015)

While Rob struggled to pin-point any specific achievements that can be directly attributed to Feeding Manchester, he was able to talk about the links that had been made and the opportunities that had unfolded through those links - in this case leading to the establishment of a new growing site for training small scale commercial growers. Similarly, with Grow Sheffield, innovative capacity is difficult to identify, but can be expressed in relation to opportunities created and ability to act on and facilitate innovative solutions to manifest from those opportunities. When pressed on this topic, Lisa is also able to identify some connections and resulting innovations that have arisen directly as part of the trajectory of Feeding Manchester:

“actually when you go back to the first discussions, things were like Land Army. Idea for the land army came out of it, and we've managed to create the Land army, and the website came out of it, and we've created the website, and erm, people saying can we have speakers on this, and kind of we've managed to do that, so certain things do definitely come out of it. And people make contacts and then, who knows, in a sense it kind of hard to know what comes out of it for other people.”

Interview FM2 (2015)

As a representative of the Kindling Trust and coordinator of the network, Lisa comments on some of the successes that have developed from discussion within Feeding Manchester. Unlike the spin-off projects described by Rob, these outcomes are part of the trajectory and repertoire of Feeding Manchester, constituting some of the key tools, resources and knowledge sharing platforms that have developed. In addition to this, she identifies difficulty in knowing 'what comes out of it for other people', as outcomes contribute to the range of trajectories of the organisations that constitute the network. This demonstrates a similarity with Grow Sheffield,

⁷⁰ Feeding Stockport is itself an example of an innovation that developed from the Feeding Manchester model. Unlike Feeding Manchester, the project is funded by the Sustainable Food Cities network and has a paid coordinator who works with local authorities and other stakeholders to further sustainable food system objectives.

in that learning occurs both within the organisation as part of its own trajectory, *and* through those (individuals, organisations or communities) interacting with it, as they negotiate learning as part of their own trajectories. The two paths of learning are interrelated, feeding into and influencing each other through ongoing engagement over time.

While this innovative capacity is an important part of the enterprises of both Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester, it is also inherently difficult to measure. Outcomes are hard to track and even harder to directly attribute to Feeding Manchester because of the way they unfold as part of negotiation and in relation to a broad 'field of influences' (Wenger, 1998). As shown in Chapter 5, members recognise the value of informal and community building aspects as being as important as more instrumental parts of practice in generating connections and a sense of cohesion. However, echoing the challenges faced by Grow Sheffield in the previous section, there is difficulty in capturing and conveying this sense of value and innovative potential beyond the confines of the community of practice. It is here where a communities of practice approach can prove useful in understanding and valuing the work of grassroots innovation, through identifying and understanding the processes and dynamics through which capacity for innovation is produced.

6.9. Case Study 2 - From Ideas to Innovations

This case study follows the trajectory of innovation developing as part of the Feeding Manchester network, examining how it evolves, catalyses new projects, and interlinks with existing systems of practices. It highlights how Feeding Manchester itself is part of a broader interlinked network of projects connected to and orchestrated by the Kindling Trust, and how these interrelated projects have facilitated innovations that aim to contribute towards the development of a local sustainable food system in Greater Manchester. This case study takes a broader perspective, viewing Feeding Manchester as one part of the puzzle in which multiple projects and initiatives join to piece together a sustainable and mutually supportive system of practice. This connects to the following chapter which continues with a broader landscape approach, interrogating some of the challenges and limitations in attempts to instigate transformative change.

The story begins with the emergence of the idea to create a 'Land Army', which as highlighted in an interview extract presented earlier⁷¹, arose out of the early Feeding Manchester

⁷¹ "Actually when you go back to the first discussions, things were like Land Army. Idea for the land army came out of it, and we've managed to create the Land army" *Interview FM2 (2015)*

discussions⁷². The idea was suggested in relation to a range of 'obstacles' facing growers and as part of a solution to increase the amount of both skilled growers and organic produce grown. The following field note addresses how the idea for the land army is presented by the Kindling Trust at a workshop around developing sustainable food systems⁷³:

"The Land Army was presented as a way of connecting needs and resources identified at Feeding Manchester gatherings - the resource being volunteers offering to help, and the need being the time/energy shortage of those attempting to make a living from organic growing. In practice - this works as an exchange, as volunteers, in return for their labour, are provided with fully organised day - transport to and from the site, an opportunity to learn about growing, an escape from the city, a variety of tasks and activities, and crucially - a free lunch! There was a brief mention of the origins of the Land Army - with women forming a large part of the agricultural workforce in support of farmers during war-time Britain.

Field notes (24/10/15)

Here the initiative is presented in terms of mutual benefit or exchange through connecting *needs* and *resources*. It achieves this by bringing together growers (who struggle with labour shortage but can offer growing skills and experience) and volunteers (who have time/energy and also want to learn or experience organic growing). As well as increasing resilience of growers by increasing their capacity to respond to situations that require increased labour, it aims to provide a path through which interested individuals can take a step towards becoming an organic grower themselves. The initiative is also part of a broader aim to "help increase the production of sustainable food for Greater Manchester", by enabling participants to play a "hands-on role" in offering "a solution to a number of challenges faced by local organic growers, such as labour issues and costs at busy periods e.g. harvest time" (Feeding Manchester website, accessed 2015).

The idea for the project as mentioned in the extract above, is "inspired by the Women's Land Armies of the First and Second World Wars", who took to the fields to support the country's agricultural food production during the period of war. Here elements of practice and rhetoric are taken from a war-time context and reinvented and renegotiated in the context of the struggle of small scale sustainable food system (*against* the perceived hegemony of the large-scale industrial unsustainable food system). This gives contributors to the creation of a sense of virtue

⁷² The idea is mentioned as part of a workshop on "Increasing produce and growers" as one of many possible suggestions as part of a "Solutions Brainstorm" (FM1 minutes, 2009).

⁷³ The workshop entitled "Creating a more sustainable food system in Gr. Manchester", was presented as part of a national food sovereignty gathering, with Kindling Trust presenting to a range of food practitioners from across the UK. It looked at how the Kindling Trust has been attempting to "create a just and ecological city through sustainable food" through their various projects in Manchester (Field notes, 24/10/15).

and moral duty, through creating a sense of continuity through time, connecting to (ideals of) practices of the past. It also creates a sense of belonging and perception of scale, with volunteers being part of a cohesive underlying *force* that is helping to power to sustainable food system. The language, practice and renegotiation of meaning contributes to a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998) that can be drawn upon across the sustainable food network. It also places a sense of value on the volunteers who participate, that goes beyond the labour they provide and casts them as a key part of the system. In this way, Land Army volunteers are viewed and valued as an important part of work towards building resilience in the small scale organic sector.

The following extract describes how shortfalls of the project in not providing a realistic pathway into growing, leads to the development of the array of projects on offer:

“Lisa talked about how the aspirations of [the land army] being a path for prospective growers to get into commercial growing fell short, and that this led to them developing an organic Horticulture Course - valuing organic growers as teachers, who could share their knowledge and skills. However, it was identified that practical barriers such as land access, resources availability, and need for ongoing support persisted, which led to the FarmStart project, with the eventual hope of starting a Kindling Farm. FarmStart aims to fill these gaps by providing a manageable area of organic certified land, as well as tools, infrastructure, market access and the support of a fulltime project coordinator with growing skills.”

Field notes (24/10/15)

Here, a clear trajectory of development is described, as the failed aspirations of each project lead to development of the next with the eventual aim of establishing the Kindling Farm (a project that the organisation is still working towards). Going a step further from the land army, a horticulture course develops with emphasis on developing competence in participants to be able to engage in the practice of growing at a commercial level. This too falls short, with “knowledge and skills” not being enough to overcome “practical barriers”, leading to the Development of the FarmStart project. Here, the innovations that unfold are all framed in relation to “gaps” being filled, as part of an ongoing trajectory where ideas are tested and incrementally improved, leading to the development of new models and ways of working. The extracts below describe the FarmStart project in more detail:

‘FarmStart Manchester is the UK’s first farm business incubator, and aims to make the route into farming easier.’

‘By trying to remove the barriers that stop people getting started in vegetable production, we hope to make it possible for a new generation of growers to emerge.’

Kindling Trust website (accessed 2015)

As the first of its kind in the UK, FarmStart is described as “incubator” for those interested in a route into commercial organic farming. This resonates with the idea of generating protective

niche spaces that provide a degree of safety and security where new practices can be developed, in this case quite literally insulated from the normal rules of the market. The project aims to help people overcome the barriers to entering farming (including “Access to land, capital and a lack of experience”, providing a “low-risk setting” where they can trial their “farming business ideas” (Kindling Trust website, accessed 2015). As well as providing access to skills and experience of competent mentors, the project provides resources and capacity in the form of land and tools. By overcoming these barriers, participants develop along a personal learning trajectory that constitutes a ‘route’ into small-scale organic farming. Practice is developed through social learning and physical engagement, with an inherent sense of ownership as they quite literally buy-in to the project⁷⁴. The learning process is further elaborated on below:

“New growers join FarmStart as TestCroppers, and benefit from access to certified organic land, training and mentoring, market access and peer support. This is a chance to see if farming suits them, and to put their ideas to the test. In year 2 TestCroppers go on as FarmStarters, and take on up to ¼ acre sections to trial their growing skills and business ideas. If they prove viable, they may expand each year.”
Kindling Trust website (accessed 2015)

A clear sense of learning progression is demonstrated in the path designed for participants. Beginning as “TestCroppers” gives a sense of experimentation and risk-taking as newcomers to practice come into a new regime of competence and are able to develop and test their skills at the micro-scale. While participants are likely to be highly motivated and aiming to develop along the trajectory set out on the project, there is an inherent sense of tension between expectation and reality as they are able to see if in practice “farming suits them”. In overcoming the barriers faced, emphasis is on the level of support available in a range of interconnected elements of practice, including growing, but also those relating to selling produce and engaging with organic food marketing. Following a successful introductory year, participants progress to the next level, cultivating a larger section of land and developing their own ideas and competencies further. While the project offers a way into farming, it is expected that in the long term, once equipped with the necessary skills, experience and confidence, participants move onto developing their own enterprises. Through establishing the competencies and the networks and connections necessary, the project aims to facilitate the transition towards developing independence in commercial growing without the ongoing support of the project.

⁷⁴ Participants pay £400/year to rent a quarter of an acre, covering some of the costs of the lease and the resources required.

Through participating as a Land Army volunteer on the FarmStart site, I was able get experience the dynamics of working in connection with both projects:

The volunteer day was well organised, with clear expectation set out for all parties (volunteers, Kindling Trust, and FarmStarters). Volunteers were expected to contribute to the tasks of the day within their abilities, and FarmStarters were expected to provide a range of tasks with enough variation to make it interesting and rewarding for volunteers. The Kindling Trust coordinator that was present organised the logistics, including the important task of preparing lunch. Outside of this structure, the day was informal, with the opportunity to meet, work with, chat to and share lunch with the FarmStart participants as we helped them with various tasks. While for volunteers the day was novel, enjoyable, and an escape from normal life (but still hard work), the atmosphere among FarmStarters was more focused and driven, with a tangible sense of responsibility and commitment with a need to get work done. For them the hard work had become a part of their normal lives that they slotted it in between day jobs. Whilst still a counting and being justified as a 'hobby' for one couple, they talked about how they managed to roughly break even (financially) last year, but are hoping to do better this year now they have more of a network of people to sell to. The reward seemed to be in the improvement, learning from mistakes and failed crops, building a network of helpers and buyers, and planning forward for next time."

Field notes, Land Army/FarmStart (13/6/15)

The stories presented so far have been presented as a relatively straight forward and unproblematic progression, with innovation unfolding through various projects being deployed to fill gaps; and of the learning trajectories as individuals' progress towards being fully fledged independent growers. However, engaging as part of the shared practices of participants reveals the compromises that are made between the ideals and the reality of practice. FarmStarters face an ongoing struggle, in battling weeds and pests, in praying for the sympathetic weather, in trying to fit tending their crops around day jobs and in finding a market for freshly harvested glut of strawberries or courgettes. While mistakes are presented as sources of learning, they can also be costly, demoralising and capacity absorbing. Success comes in the form of small victories - harvesting a first crop, sharing a meal of collectively grown produce, or finding a restaurant to supply with produce at a premium price. At the same time as participants learn, the project also develops by responding to where support is needed, developing cohesive communities to facilitate support, or developing new practices and structures. Underlying the smooth trajectory of innovation, is the messy and fraught process of learning, with incremental improvement building around small instances of success and failure.

Building Systems of Practices

As touched upon already, Farmstart, Land Army and Feeding Manchester are part of a broader interconnected network of projects geared towards generating and supporting the local sustainable food system. In addition to the growing and networking aspects, the Kindling Trust

has also developed market interventions, such as the 'Manchester Veg People' co-operative and 'Veg Box People' schemes, which connects and expands links between organic growers and buyers. It has also begun to develop avenues into exploring public secure procurement for sustainable food. Through this integrated approach it aims to create "a small (but perfectly formed) supply chain", of mutually supportive actors as a "viable alternative to the current system" (Kindling Trust website, accessed 2015).

Although working on a different scale by aiming to connect practices across a supply system linking multiple communities of practice, there are similarities to Grow Sheffield's attempt to develop sets of practices through promoting a culture of local food. In both cases an integrated approach recognises that practices are interrelated and that creating transformative changes requires building new configurations that enable change across bundles or sets of practices. Attending a presentation by the Kindling Trust, in which they articulated their approach of generating a sustainable food system to an audience of individuals interested in Food Sovereignty, provided an opportunity to examine how they frame and express this broader story and the role of Feeding Manchester in it:

"Lisa talked about how various projects had unfolded and progressed, and how this fitted into the bigger picture and long term visions of the organisation (ultimately leading to the Kindling Farm). Feeding Manchester provided a starting point for the story, being described as a forum for bringing together those interested in changing the food system in the city, in as a space for 'making connections, learning and taking stuff forward'..."
Field notes, quotation from presentation (24/10/15).

The field note above demonstrates a sense of interconnection between the various aspects of Kindling Trust's approach, to which Feeding Manchester provides a starting point. It is described as being part of bigger picture and vision for the city, giving a sense of how it is envisaged as aligning with a broader and more transformative aims. Being described as a forum for "making connections, learning and taking stuff forward" (in Lisa's words), connects to the sense of innovative space described in the previous section, giving the impression of how ideas and collaborative working towards those ideas can be generated. As each project is only a single part of the broader story, the limitations of each call for the alignment of practice across the system. This is elaborated on through the continued field note below:

"...At the same time as all of this, Kindling Trust takes a whole system approach by attempting to both increase the supply and the demand for local organic produce - with Manchester Veg People being presented as another Feeding Manchester idea connecting the two. Lisa described working on that particular project as an "interesting, hard, exciting few years".
Field notes, quotation from presentation (24/10/15).

The first part of this field note gives a sense of the whole system approach, in increasing both supply and demand of sustainable food. Feeding Manchester is presented as a source of ideas from which practices and structures can be developed in relation to this. The second part gives a sense in which these ideas meet reality, in the tension between being at once “hard” but also “interesting” and “exciting”. This once again hints at that whilst the stories formulated and told represent the unfolding of events, they do so in an over-simplified and unproblematic way. Beneath this are ongoing challenges of negotiating against incumbent well-established structures and practices and attempting to develop new interconnected and more sustainable ways of living.

As well as facilitating the development of projects and practices within the region, the Kindling Trust through its approach also connects to other actors more broadly across the UK. The extract below shows how elements of learning are widely shared, through workshops and programmes that invite organisations from different parts of the country:

“it is that thing of if that’s useful and it means it sort of sparks off things as well that’s great, we kind of everything we do we sort of say this is how we’ve done it here, these are the things that have worked and haven’t worked. You take the bits a that are useful to you, and that’s the same with FarmStart and Veg People and Land Army, and then when you make tweaks to it and make it work better than we have, then if you could let us know, that would be great and we can try and tweak ours, and it will all work better and so, yeah.”

Interview FM2 (2015)

Here, learning isn’t just confined the projects or organisations involved, or even to the region in which the projects and practices are developed. Links are made nationally and internationally through connections between individuals, and through the travelling and reproduction of different stories and models. She describes the way ideas, “spark” things off, enabling other groups to take useful aspects of practice, re-employing and re-inventing them in new contexts and giving them new meaning. The process is recursive and learning is shared between projects as “tweaks” are made and shared, enabling forward movement at a broader scale. Following this principle, the idea for the Kindling Trust’s Farmstart project, can be tracked back to the USA from where it originally developed, as described on the organisation’s website:

‘Before starting up here, Tom spent several weeks in the USA, learning about organic growing in Oregon and Washington and meeting other FarmStart-style projects. They’ve existed in the US and Canada since the 1980s so as Alex says, “it was a great chance to see mature farm incubator initiatives in action”.’

Kindling Trust website (accessed 2016)

This extract describes how a coordinator of Farmstart spent time visiting projects in the USA, before coming back and adapting the idea into a UK context. Here first-hand experience informs learning and enables replication and reinvention of practice in a new setting. The focus is on learning in practice, which enables the generation and formation of new knowledge and interpretations of practice. This learning is carried by the individual who is able to use it in the re-production and generation of new practices and meanings.

Although Farmstart operates on a small scale and is a relatively young practice, it is attracting interest from a range of organisations from around the UK. The project aims to become “the mother of all training programmes”, and has already provided a course in which 10 groups from around the country visited the site to learn about setting up initiatives of their own. In addition to this, Kindling Trust is reproducing the model in Manchester by propagating similar projects that learn from and build on challenges faced on the initial site. This demonstrates how ideas are able to travel as individuals engage in practice, and through their learning are able to re-integrate elements of that practice in new contexts.

This section has begun to highlight how interacts cross the landscape are necessary in order to facilitate the sharing of learning and practices at broader scales. This builds on Wenger’s assertion that “Communities of practice cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the world, or understood independently of other practices” (Wenger, 1998, p.103). The following chapter will explore these emergent themes further in examining how landscape level processes inform and facilitate the generation of innovation at a broader scale.

6.10. Summary

Communities of practice have the potential to develop unique solutions at the local level, informed and guided by their shared history and experiences, and connections with the broader landscape. Whilst innovation and innovative capacity is generated as an inherent part of learning within communities of practice, it also has the potential to travel beyond boundaries, being reinterpreted and integrated into practices as part of a broader landscape.

The chapter has developed a view of innovation as co-produced through processes of social learning and reflexive engagement across boundaries. In-depth engagement with Grow Sheffield revealed the ways in which this social learning is embodied, reflexive and forms a textured part of the lived experience of those participating. Learning occurs along multiple trajectories beyond the sites of engagement, as knowledge is negotiated in the different spheres of life and through multiple facets of identity. This yields challenges in incorporating new elements of practice into daily lives and routines creating a barrier in translating new meaning

beyond the sites of learning. In order to address this, both case studies develop an integrated approach to practice. Grow Sheffield has focused activities on generating a culture around food, enabling integration of multiple practice (including engagement through the arts). This approach aims to embed multiple practices within a community, creating connections through mutual engagement and facilitating shared learning that encompasses multiple key projects and the array of practices and values they promote. The Kindling Trust, working at a broader scale, attempts to develop a configuration of practices that constitute a small scale sustainable food system. However, developing such integrated approaches to practice requires time, resources and capacity building in order to develop the connections and competencies, and empowerment of those involved.

Both case studies demonstrated a multiplicity of trajectories of learning, with innovative practices developing in multiple and often interrelated directions. Within Grow Sheffield this was followed by tracking learning both at and from the sites of engagement (through the Community Growers case study), and within the organisation as learning contributed to its ongoing negotiation and development. The Feeding Manchester case study emphasised the sporadic nature of innovation arising from the space created by the initiative. This provides fertile ground through which connections can develop, with the unfolding of innovation in connection with the joint enterprises of those communities of practice involved. In both case studies, models and best practice develop overtime as learning accumulates and contributes to the collective knowledge and trajectories.

Innovation is presented as an experimental process, one which evolves from opportunities and can result in failure as well as success. Failure itself is identified as creating opportunity for learning and development of practice, despite the risk to resources and capacity it poses. Through this, innovation takes place as part of a reflective a “circle of learning and reviewing and amending, making change” (Interview GS, 15/7/2016). Underlying this cycle and mediating the innovative capacity of the organisations is the availability of resources. This can be in the form of time, energy and competencies of individuals involved, as well as material and financial resources (as exhibited in Grow Sheffield through dependence on grant funding). Described as a balancing act between people and resources, innovation can occur in positive cycles generative of opportunity and momentum. It also however can lead to negative cycles, or ‘chicken and egg’ situations, with lack of capacity leading to further drain on the financial and human resource of the initiatives. Underlying innovative capacity is the goodwill, empowerment and competencies of key members, who contribute to a sense of momentum and who enable progress to be made even when capacity is limited.

Innovation then requires experimentation and creativity, but also the capacity to implement what has been learnt as part of a reflective and iterative process. While funding (for example) can provide capacity, creating a successful and sustainable project requires drawing on collective knowledge and experience of the community, and the ability to move forward, recognising what works and responding accordingly.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the usefulness of a communities of practice approach for understanding the dynamics of innovation. It also demonstrates some of the limitations and challenges facing community food initiatives as they attempt to facilitate the development of innovative practice beyond the boundaries of the community of practice. The next chapter takes a broader perspective in examining the dynamics at the landscape level in the interaction between communities and broader systems of practice.

Chapter 7

Landscapes of Practice

7.1. Introduction

The focus of the previous empirical chapters has been on the internal processes of negotiation within the case studies, and the ways in which their work across boundaries has given rise to processes of innovation. While this has inevitably touched on the connections between different communities of practice and broader contexts in which they are situated, in order to understand the influence of community food initiatives beyond their boundaries it is necessary to examine the processes working at a broader level of analysis. This chapter addresses how community food initiatives navigate and negotiate what Wenger (1998) terms the *landscapes of practice* of which they are part. It follows each of the case study organisations, drawing on examples of processes working at different levels of analysis to examine how communities of practice influence and are influenced by the broader landscape. It also draws on the previous chapter to examine how innovations and innovative capacity travel beyond the boundaries of the community of practice.

So far the focus has been on the dynamics of learning within and between communities of practice. This chapter employs a wider analytical lens to examine the case studies more broadly, drawing on recent developments within communities of practice literature as well as elements of social practice theory more broadly. As outlined in the literature review section, communities of practice theory is distinct in relation to theories of social practice in that it places focus on the community as a meso-level structure through which practices are (re)produced (O'Reilly, 2009). Analysis concentrates on practice-as-performance, rather than practice-as-entity as the community negotiates and participates in *actual* (non-canonical) practice (as opposed to espoused (canonical) practice) (Brown and Duguid, 1991). Through this, what Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012) might term 'novel combinations' of elements are enacted and reproduced⁷⁵.

Viewed from this perspective, communities of practice can be understood as vehicles for change in social practice producing innovative reconfigurations in response to a wide range of factors (as has been discussed throughout the empirical section so far). Change occurs through ongoing negotiation, conceptualised through processes of social learning. Communities of practice as an

⁷⁵ Communities of practice also incorporates the dynamics between practices (and identities), rather than following the trajectories of single practices as in Shove and Pantzar (2010).

approach therefore highlights the centrality of both practitioner in producing the practice, and the role of learning in facilitating this process. Wenger (1998, p. 47) also states that practice is “doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do.” This acknowledges the broader contexts of practice that inform the negotiations of practitioners within the community⁷⁶. Building further on this Wenger (1998, p.103) argues that:

“Communities of practice cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the world, or understood independently of other practices. Their various enterprises are closely interconnected. Their members and their artefacts are not theirs alone. Their histories are not just internal; they are histories of articulation with the rest of the world”.

While the practices discussed belong in a fundamental way to the communities in which they are developed (as their negotiation response to the specific contexts in which they exist), as a performance they are also part of ‘practice-as-entity’ and so contribute to change on a broader scale of analysis. This section of the thesis aims to interrogate that dynamic by examining how elements of practice, through interaction between communities influence and are influenced by broader level interactions.

Turning now to developments in Communities of Practice theory, there has been a recent shift towards focus on learning in complex *landscapes of practice* (Wenger, 2010; Omidvar and Kislov, 2014)⁷⁷, an idea initially introduced in earlier communities of practice work as shown in the extract above (Wenger, 1998). In their more recent work, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015a, p. 13,15) define a ‘Landscape of Practice’ as a “complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them”, which “constitute[s] a complex social body of knowledge”. In the context of this chapter, the concept provides a useful analytical tool in describing configurations of practice shaped by interaction between communities of practice as they negotiate boundaries between regimes of competence. According to (Blackmore, 2012, p. 3) “Considering [communities of practice] together, as a social landscape, provides an opportunity to review what is occurring at their boundaries and peripheries and how learning and innovation occur.” I also follow (Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2015) in developing the concept as a metaphor which expresses connotations of territoriality, in describing the distribution and

⁷⁶ This has been touched on previously, for example by looking at the way elements of practice have been appropriated and reinvented through negotiation (e.g. the development of the concept of ‘land army’ from WW2, or the translation of the FarmStart model from the USA to the UK).

⁷⁷ “Instead of focusing centrally on a community of practice and membership in that community of practice, the focus is more on multiple communities and systems of practice, landscapes of practice, and identity as formed across practices and not just within practices.” Wenger-Trayner (2012, p. 270)

configurations of practice that emerge from the ways in which communities of practice interact and define themselves in relation to others.

Through this, a communities of practice approach has the potential to develop understanding of how the social world is configured in relation to social practice through the interaction between communities of practice. In earlier works, Wenger (1998) referred to “constellations of practice” to characterise the discontinuity between connected communities of practice. Social constellations of practice therefore “define relations of locality, proximity, and distance, which are not necessarily congruent with physical proximity, institutional affiliations, or even interactions” (Wenger, 1998, p. 130). In this way, engagement in practice shapes the social landscape, and means that “the geography of practice reflects histories of learning, but learning continues to reconfigure relations of proximity and distance” (Wenger, 1998, p. 130). Connections through practice therefore reconfigure relations of scale, with proximity in terms of practice helping to facilitate interaction through social learning. Feeding Manchester, conceptualised as a meta-community of practice provides a helpful example of this. As constituent members have closely aligned practices and enterprises, they are able to generate a sense of coherence and community (or even ‘movement’) despite limited and infrequent actual engagement in that shared practice. They are part of an overlapping regime of competence to which members are accountable, meaning they shared understanding, a sense of familiarity, enterprises and ways of working across the landscape. The work of Feeding Manchester as an initiative then is to draw on this proximity to reconfigure the landscape, by providing an overarching joint enterprise, platform for mutual engagement, and the development of a shared repertoire over time to contribute to its coherence.

Through this process, Wenger (1998, p.131) describes how “the landscape of practice is an emergent structure in which learning constantly creates localities that reconfigure the geography”. Within this, the local and the global are conceptualised as “related levels of participation that always coexist and shape each other” (Wenger, 1998, p.131). This means that whilst anchored through engagement in the local, communities of practice are also able to participate in the global. At the same time, whilst elements of reified practices can be exported from one practice to another, this occurs at the expense of context and texture from which that element draws meaning.

Individuals also navigate the landscape of practice, engaging and identifying with multiple communities of practice in different ways. The boundaries between communities represent discontinuity between perceived competence, values and meaning (all of which are locally negotiated), making them places of potential conflict and misunderstanding, but at the same

time places of learning and innovation. The concept of ‘knowledgeability’⁷⁸ is drawn upon to describe the ability to identify with a multiplicity of practices across the landscape (without needing to be competent or accountable to those practices). Navigating the complex landscape, and modulating the multi-facets of our identities is part of ‘the texture of everyday life’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015a). The chapter will examine how individuals through their journeys of multi-membership and personal trajectories carry elements of innovative practice and facilitate learning at the landscape level.

The final section of the chapter reflects on a piece of action research, which, as introduced in Chapter 3, works to bring together the two case study organisations to facilitate sharing of learning. Through intervening at the landscape level, and encouraging mutual engagement through the proximity generated by shared practice, the development of a network in Sheffield takes steps towards reconfiguring the local landscape of practice.

7.2. Grow Sheffield

So far focus on Grow Sheffield has been on exploring the processes of negotiation and learning from within the community of practice, examining how they negotiate their response to various opportunities and challenges that have arisen, or co-produce knowledge through cross-boundary working. While this has been underpinned by recognising inherent connections to and identification with the broader landscape, this section aims to interrogate landscape-level processes more explicitly. It will explore how Grow Sheffield as an organisation, as well as the individuals that constitute the community of practice, navigate the local landscape of practice. Processes working at multiple levels will be explored, including individual trajectories of multi-membership, management of expectations on the organisational level, and the strategic positioning of Grow Sheffield within the food landscape. Through this, it explores how the landscape of practice shaped, how knowledge and capacity travels through it, and how interactions and connections begin to shape relations of power, a theme that will be explored further in relation to Feeding Manchester.

Multi-membership and Personal Connections

This section explores the ways in which multi-membership facilitates connections across the broader landscapes of practice, and in turn how that can influence the trajectory and innovative capacity of the community of practice. Throughout its history, Grow Sheffield has attracted core members that have been highly skilled, capable and active across the various communities and

⁷⁸ As opposed to competence which is defined in relation to the community of practice.

landscapes of which they are part. As explored in Chapter 6, what counts as competence and the ways various competencies are assembled is negotiated within the community of practice. To join the core team as a director, one is expected to have certain skills or capacity that can be brought to the table, whether it be through expertise in a particular field, 'knowledgeability' about the landscape and/or connections to other communities of practice. Perceived competence at the landscape level is about meaningfully translating experience and learning from the wider world into the context of the community of practice. As described by Carol, in her reflections on her dual membership of Grow Sheffield and another community organisation (referred to as GreenDig), this functions as a two way exchange:

"I mean it's been very interesting, I mean when I think about, cause again with having this interview and the kind of transition we are going through at the moment, and the thinking I've been having, and where we are with GreenDig as well, you know, what are the parallels? What can I learn from each? and, erm, I would miss not being involved in Grow Sheffield, I mean somehow, I think it makes *me* hopefully better for being involved in GreenDig, because I've got a wider perspective of things that are going on, and just having that, yes I think having this kind of a balance and a sense of where GreenDig fits into that bigger picture, so as well as having that contact with other food growing projects and just kind of sharing those issues, kind of having that overview and, and I think to be fair, I mean it does give me access to contacts and emails that I wouldn't normally see. which again adds more on the workload but it does mean that, I mean like those student opportunities that we were talking about earlier, again, I probably wouldn't have known about that had it not been that they knew about Grow Sheffield."

Interview GS (15/7/2016)

Carol's description of her "wider perspective of things that are going on" as a result of membership in Grow Sheffield, as well as "a balance and a sense of where GreenDig fits into that bigger picture" indicates how her membership in Grow Sheffield influences her perspective of the broader landscape of practice. Through her active engagement with both Grow Sheffield and other food growing projects (a network of which GreenDig is part), Carol's knowledgeability⁷⁹ of the broader food landscape is expanded, increasing her capacity to contribute in each of the two communities. Furthermore, being connected to the broader Grow Sheffield network provides practical advantages, enabling her to tap into the exchange and circulation of information through various "contacts" and emails (even if tempered by limited capacity to respond to opportunities that arise).

The whole extract, as particularly evident at the beginning, is part of Carol's reflection of herself and her own identity and position within the landscape, thinking consciously about opportunities for learning, mutual advantages of her multi-membership, and what the parallels

⁷⁹ "Knowledgeability reflects a person's connection with a multiplicity of practice across the landscape." Kubiak et al (2015, p. 81)

are between the two communities in question. She goes on to focus on the positive aspects of the exchange, going into depth on how competence in one community can be translated meaningfully into the other, drawing on the example of knowledge around funding bids- a key common concern shared by community food growing projects:

“So I think, just around that whole thing about that whole funding thing and what’s available, I think there’s been a lot of you know, kind of two way exchange of information and ideas and how to do things, and erm, so like this last awards for all bid, I felt quite comfortable that Susan was happy to take the lead on it and write it, and but I actually then felt that I had got a contribution to make when she said right I’ll send it round and you sent your comments back. Because I’d got more of an idea between my experiences, of the sorts of things that needed to maybe be mentioned or pointed out or, so that kind of felt as though I’d got a more valid input to make, and I think things just like that, yeah things that communities just build up don’t they.”

Interview GS (15/7/2016)

The “two way exchange of information and ideas and how to do things” seems to translate relatively unproblematically from one context to the next. Carol has confidence in Susan’s ability - a trust gained from years of participating in the shared history of Grow Sheffield, and an awareness of each other’s competences. At the same time, through being an engaged and active member of GreenDig, Carol is able to complement Susan’s competencies by drawing on her own external experiences. Through this past learning experience, her input to the funding bid in question becomes more valid, prescribing a legitimacy to the way in which through experience of multi-membership (and the associated learning accumulated), competence is something described that “communities just build up”⁸⁰.

Although the encounter appears to be a relatively harmonious example of knowledge sharing between two communities of practice that are in many ways related, not least through Carol’s connections as part of the same network, the next extract gives a sense of the personal challenge of negotiating identity as a multi-member:

“One thing that I’ve been very careful about is that I’ve not confused the two. [...] had I had a different mind-set I could have probably made more of the Grow Sheffield link than I have, erm, for both our benefits. But it just seemed important... to try to keep that distance somehow, and if there’s been an opportunity or somebody has suggested it, then I’ve been happy to oblige [...]I’m not wanting to muddy the waters, I just want to maintain you know complete transparency and I don’t want any accusation, not that I think it would be forthcoming, but just don’t want to put myself in the position where there might be any accusation. I mean at our meetings we don’t put anything down in terms of conflict

⁸⁰ This is something reflected in my own experience within the community of practice, as my role developed in relation to the connections and outside knowledge I brought in. For example, my connections at the university and ability to engage them in relation to food growing, were counted as key capacities within the context of Grow Sheffield.

of interest, so in a way, I'm very much aware that there could potentially be that, and it's just better not to.. it's just simpler all round not to go there."

Interview GS (15/7/2016)

Carol is very cautious about the perceived conflict of interest between GreenDig and Grow Sheffield, and being deeply engaged in both appears to create a barrier for her. Her 'decision' not to "muddy the waters", by drawing a line between her roles as director of both GreenDig and Grow Sheffield - perhaps demonstrates how she attempts to reconcile her sense of responsibility and accountability to each of those roles, but perhaps also how she attempts to maintain legitimacy in the broader network of community growers by avoiding any perceived unfair or illegitimate advantage. Whereas in some situations Carol could act as a broker, and indeed has done in the past (for example organising a successful Allotment Soup event on the GreenDig site), here she purposefully limits potential crossover even though (as she admits) it could be of benefits to both organisations. This extract demonstrates then, that underlying attempts to broker exchanges between the multiple communities of which we may be part, is the challenge of, what Wenger (1998) terms, 'modulating' our identities across the landscape.

The example above illustrates that even when communities are relatively aligned in terms of what counts as competence and what is valued as meaning, reconciling identities requires work and can involve maintaining distance. While there is potential for learning there is also need for personal resilience and capacity to be able to develop competency and legitimacy across boundaries. However, more often than not, navigating a landscape involves crossing boundaries and moving between practices where both meanings developed and regimes of competences are discontinuous or contended. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015, p.19) describe how the journey through the landscape "incorporates the past and the future into our experience of identity in the present." We carry with us what we have learnt through a lifetime of experience, but also bring in imaginations of our engagement in future trajectories. Shaped by experience our identities come to 'embody' the landscape, becoming 'personalised reflections' of our journey through the boundaries and practices that constitute it (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, pp. 20, 120).

Managing expectations and reputation

A key achievement of Grow Sheffield, as identified by its core members, is the reputation it has developed and maintained over its years of development across the city. Despite being relatively small and under-resourced, Grow Sheffield has managed to continue to "punch above its weight" (Core team member, strategy meeting, 08/15) in terms of maintaining its perceived position in the city. Part of this relates to an underlying network of connections developed as

part of a shared history - with familiar faces, who are often only peripherally involved, contributing to consistent turn out of key events. At the same time, it also attracts new and interested individuals, who come with certain expectations and ideas of what Grow Sheffield is or should be about. With reputation then, comes the expectation (whether imagined or imposed) that it should live up to its name. This section will analyse this dynamic, exploring some of the ways in which individuals and/or communities relate to and identify with Grow Sheffield, and the challenges and opportunities it creates.

People identify with Grow Sheffield in a number of ways depending on their connection to it, from personal relationships developed over its history, and those with affiliation through past encounters, to those connected only peripherally through alignment with the mission and aims of the organisation. Many of these are part of personal networks of those involved, having developed over the lifetime and the organisation. Communities of practice theory provides a way to conceptualise different 'modes' of identification which can operate at a variety of scales. These include *engagement*, as direct participation in community or at the boundaries of it; *imagination*, which enables us to perceive our relation to and position within the landscape, without the constrictions of locality; and *alignment*, for example with perspectives, competences or meanings within a community or across broader systems (Wenger, 1998).

In the extract below Susan sets out the positive way in which key (resource-holding) organisations have identified with Grow Sheffield as a partner, an achievement which she links to the fact that Grow Sheffield upholds a certain "reputation". She also specifies some of the opportunities and challenges associated with this landscape connection:

"I think the fact that we.. [pause] have *attracted* some organisations coming to us to be partners, I mean if you think about, Sustain, who said we were the go-to place in Sheffield and then we participated with the Big Dig, and that, we got quite a lot of stuff going on, with volunteer stuff, it was not sustainable. [...] So we've attracted people coming in, so there was Big Dig, so there was, we were involved with the SoaP [Sheffield on a Plate] project with the local university, that was erm NUS funding. so the fact we've maintained an achievement of a *reputation*, that people come to us, to get involved in stuff, it is an achievement in itself, given our lack of resources. And of course getting the major funding from the local food fund, and setting up a good resource and a very very successful staff team, again I think that is an achievement, we've put a lot of effort into that."

Interview GS (19/7/2016)

Being seen as the "go-to" organisation in Sheffield is clearly significant for Susan, providing opportunities associated with partnering with large scale, well-resourced organisations. As well as funding, such partnerships can bring legitimacy and validation, demonstrating alignment of

competence and values⁸¹. It draws on, but also contributes to the reputation of Grow Sheffield, which is boosted, both through having been chosen as a partner, but also through the activity the extra resources enable. Interestingly, a key part of the achievement is the fact that the reputation has been “*maintained*” despite its “*lack of resources*”, which highlights the challenge of attempting to maintain position in the landscape, without the associated resources and activities that might be expected. Part of managing this has been an ongoing attempt to embed a level of professionalism which is likely above what would be expected of similar organisations of its size. Grow Sheffield also manages a wide variety of projects, addressing different audiences in different parts of the city which helps to add to its image as a city-wide organisation.

The value attached to Grow Sheffield’s reputation by Susan is shared by other members of the core team, although expressed at different levels of scale and in different ways. Below Richard, refers to reputation in relation to city wide organisations and institutions:

“Its [GS’s] main achievement is that it has embedded itself in the consciousness of the city council, most of the allotment associations, Heeley City Farm, everybody has this impression of Grow Sheffield, which actually goes *way beyond* what it actually is.”
Interview GS (14/6/2016)

Richard elaborates on how this sense of city wide consciousness developed:

“And so there have been certain loops within loops, so erm, the awareness of Grow Sheffield has grown. I hate to use the phrase, it’s always been a viral thing, there’s not been any *major* publicity or whatever. We’ve got a few things on the website, the website is a lot lot better now, we’ve got the social networking bit too. But prior to that I was amazed, when we said Grow Sheffield, people would go, oh yes Grow Sheffield, oh yes, you know and people were saying sort of ridiculous things like how many allotments, are you running now, and you know we don’t actually.. [...] And part of that came because when they got the big funding, and set up all of the community growing groups which were actually funded by Grow Sheffield, that of course left a lasting legacy in peoples’ minds, and we still get people phoning up and saying, [...] oh I want some help with this allotment, or we wanted.. these trees [you planted] here four or five years ago, they need pruning, are you gonna send some people along to do it?... No!”
Interview GS (14/6/2016)

Richard’s reference to “loops within loops” draws on a point earlier in the interview about Grow Sheffield connections to key individuals, and their links to various other organisations through an underlying web of connections across the food landscape in Sheffield. Although it is not reified as a network per se, connections function between community actors across the food

⁸¹ On the other hand, partnerships with large organisations whose aims do not align with the community might be more problematic - for example sponsorship from a large food retailer might be seen as compromising the integrity of the community.

landscape to enable essential “communicating, coordinating, representing and sharing grassroots innovation” (Smith et al, 2017, p. 25). However, this generates a potential conflict between attempting to preserve a reputation to the outside world, and to those who are part of your network and more aware of the local flow of resources, activities and practices. As Richard goes on to say, reputation is part of *legacy*, but also creates an expectation of continuity in a world of short term funding and resources. Carol’s comment below also alludes to the challenges of reputation:

“and that’s one of the slightly embarrassing things and I think people expect an awful lot of Grow Sheffield, because, and the name and they kind of think we’ve got this vast organisation”
Interview GS (15/7/2016)

Carol attributes the reputation of the organisation in part to its name, which suggests representation at the city scale. The fact that she finds this “slightly embarrassing” indicates a sense of responsibility to be able to fulfil expectations, or the limitations of being able to do so with extremely limited resources and power. From a practical point of view, maintaining a reputation calls for considerable resources - for example having an up-to-date website, a social media presence, being responsive to enquiries, being present at certain events throughout the year and maintaining key projects are a few of the responsibilities that need to be met. This work is often beyond the capacity of volunteers alone, and means that Grow Sheffield needs to be able to cover at least one part-time staff member as part of its basic core costs. Although reputation is a key part of Grow Sheffield’s organisational capacity, it also creates its own challenges, not least through its demand on resources and call for particular ways of working. This relates to the cycle of innovation discussed in the previous chapter in which forward momentum both creates capacity, but also requires resources (creating what is described as a ‘chicken and egg’ situation when not available).

Strategy - Positioning Grow Sheffield in the Food Landscape

The relationship between Grow Sheffield as a community of practice and the broader food landscape is complex and dynamic. As discussed in the previous section, maintaining a reputation as a “go-to” organisation creates significant opportunities and challenges, but it also implies competition for position and power across the landscape of local food actors. There is an ongoing theme of competition between organisations overlapping in terms of resource requirement, verses collaboration through focusing on shared aims and aligned meanings.

Unlike with Feeding Manchester, there have been no successful attempts to address this that have been successful at the landscape level (as will be discussed further in section 7.4).

This section focuses on how Grow Sheffield attempts to negotiate its position in relation to the broader landscape of which it is part. This will focus on one particular idea that has continued to (re)emerge throughout my involvement with Grow Sheffield - that of Grow Sheffield as an umbrella or network for local growing and/or sustainable food groups. While this is only a small part of Grow Sheffield's negotiation of trajectory, which interconnects multiple and diverse projects, it serves to expose some of the key themes under consideration. The extract from core team minutes below is a summary of discussion on the possibility of Grow Sheffield focusing on a networking role:

"GS as an umbrella/network -

Kelly and Susan pointed out that this is how many people see GS, both now and in the past. Filling this gap is a valuable role that GS could play, but it would need to be part of a longer term plan. This would not necessarily preclude running activities, and could give more credibility- with (continued) focus on bringing groups together. It was suggested that a networking role would have to be supported by a continued availability on the ground to communicate, facilitate, assist and provide expertise."

Core team meeting notes (13/06/16), part of discussion on 'Future Strategic Direction'

There are two key points here, each of which will be picked up on below. Firstly the reference to how "people see GS" again contributes to a sense of expectation that people have of Grow Sheffield (both within the local food movement and more generally). This leads to identification of a key "gap" or niche that Grow Sheffield could fill, and a perceived value that could be achieved by filling it. Secondly, the relationship between work at the network level and practical work on the ground is discussed, with "credibility" being gained through the combination of the two. This highlights the relationship between competence at the community level - gained through direct engagement; and knowledgeability at the landscape level, through being able to legitimately navigate and communicate across boundaries. The following field note describes further tension in negotiation:

"Kelly reported that she had started to make connections with key organisations (around 10), and had opened dialogues between some of them- identifying possible connections, as well as small practical ways they could support each other (e.g. setting up shared composting). She described how she was trying to take a 'positive' and 'fresh' approach in opening communications, to avoid politics and reviving past conflicts. While she was making progress, she was finding that she was 'uncovering gripes', with one organisation claiming that GS had not been doing 'what it should be doing'. Members of core team seemed unsurprised by this in relation to the organisation in question, and asked if a specific event had been mentioned- which presumably had contributed to the unforgotten tension."

Core team meeting field notes (13 June 2016)

The extract describes how Kelly, a relative newcomer to Grow Sheffield, through engagement in the landscape had been “uncovering gripes” that other organisations have with Grow Sheffield. In order to overcome this she brings in a fresh perspective, attempting to break down the personal barriers that have been created through a history of disconnect. This is part of the political nature of the local food landscape, and once established such barriers can be difficult to break down, at least as long as they are carried as part of the identities of those that constitute the communities in question. Susan elaborates on this in the interview extract below, providing further nuances for consideration:

“you see, if we were the sort of the umbrella thing, it wasn’t just the networking, well the networking but what does that mean, [...] if we set ourselves up as *that* organisation [...] the sort of stuff we can do, we are good at, have been good at in the past- is organising conferences and events and getting people. but it’s sort of a bit hit and miss, I mean [another local organisation has] done it in the past, and its mostly because they’ve got one person that’s good at that sort of thing, event management. They’ve done it really well. [...] you’d need to look at it in terms of having an external focus in terms of funds. This is the body that actually does this, let’s get everybody involved and get people together. It doesn’t come out of the council, because they’re not terribly good at it. They can *come along*, but you know it’s the voluntary organisations who, who can do it. So I can see some mileage in that, but at the moment I think [the other organisation] would say oh Grow Sheffield aren’t the people, they don’t actually have the expertise. So there we go. There are lots of things we’d have to talk about.. because a lot of people think they have the *ownership* of that sort of thing, I mean we’ve got [lists organisations, including GS], they’re the ones that actually know the stuff across the city, not an easy mix, when there are two parties in there who are competitive rather than collaborative, in my opinion”

Interview GS (19/7/2016)

Susan talks initially about the skills required in relation to a networking/umbrella role. While it is identified as something “we are good at” and “have been good at in the past”, she concedes that it is “a bit hit and miss”. While having the skills is therefore part of the repertoire of Grow Sheffield, she identifies another organisation that is perhaps more consistent in delivering. She then goes on to funding and the need to be able to identify where the resources are and to mobilise or “get people together” to try to leverage them. This is where she claims that other actors in the landscape might say that Grow Sheffield aren’t the people with the “expertise”. Competence then is about having the right assemblage of skills required to negotiate practice at this level, and going further still it is also about having the “ownership” of those assemblages (both practically and in terms of identity). It is clear that Susan views the negotiation that would be required between the organisations that “know the stuff” as highly challenging - particularly, as she mentions, in a climate of competition rather than collaboration.

This section has focused on relationships between key actors within a food landscape, which has been shaped by rivalry and competition as various actors vie for position. The landscape is fraught with tension as various communities of practice seek to assert their competencies in relation to the broader landscape of which they are part. The next section will examine the political nature of this dynamic in the context of Manchester.

7.3. Convening the Landscape: Feeding Manchester

Feeding Manchester offers a useful contrast to Grow Sheffield in terms of its positioning and engagement at the landscape level. Whereas Grow Sheffield has worked to position itself in relation to other organisations, and in relation to the needs and expectations of various actors it encounters, as a meta-community of practice Feeding Manchester offers a different configuration by attempting to cultivate connections and develop continuity across the local sustainable food landscape. While focus so far has been on engagement of the meta-community of practice and the benefits this offers, as they facilitate interaction between constituent groups and organisations, this section goes further to explore some of the limitations faced. It examines the challenges that arise in enabling broader engagement that goes beyond building cohesion within a relatively small part of the landscape, and how uneven power relations and politics shape the landscape.

Despite Feeding Manchester's successes in managing to maintain momentum and engagement over a relatively long time period and in facilitating engagement and sense of movement within its membership, the broader transformational impact of the initiative is recognised as limited. According to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015b), in order to transform practice there must be alignment of practice across multiple scales and landscapes. They suggest the role of 'landscape convenors' as being key to connecting broader ranging communities of practice, facilitating work across boundaries, and in bringing about transformative reconfigurations of practices. This section examines Feeding Manchester's position and progress in relation to its broader goals of bringing about landscape level change.

While in many ways Feeding Manchester can be viewed as successful, there is a self-awareness of its limitations, and the difficulties of maintaining a forum that brings diverse actors together. While members of multiple sectors have at points been involved, Feeding Manchester has largely become a forum for the community sector (with some involvement of small businesses). Although perhaps not fulfilling its transformative aims, Feeding Manchester gains value by providing a platform to support 'like-minded' communities of practice and developing a sense

of a collectively across a regional scale. The extract below gives a sense of how this begins to shape the landscape:

“I think what it has done, is that it has informed what people do, because they have found out what other people are doing. So the events aren’t so much, people aren’t, people don’t hold stuff back or are secretive. In fact sometime they are almost the opposite. They kind of like, We all kind of mark our territory, so we say, oh were going to do this, or we’re thinking about doing that, so you get a real clear idea of what, of what people would like to do.”

Interview FM1 (2015)

This gives a sense of how Feeding Manchester generates ‘knowledgeability’ amongst its members, creating a sense of awareness of the shape of the landscape of practice in terms of what “other people are doing”. By providing a platform in which they can “mark [their] territory” by claiming certain practices or ideas, boundaries are clearly drawn out. This, to some extent could be considered one way in which a climate of competition is avoided (as per Feeding Manchester’s original intention), by discouraging duplication of practice within the local area. In this sense, practice can be viewed as a kind of territory, with boundaries marked out in terms of competence. While collaboration is possible across these boundaries, it has to be approached in a way that respects the different competencies and power relations across it. The uneven power landscape is demonstrated in the extract below, when Rob is asked how he would like Feeding Manchester to be able to move forwards:

“I think to be *listened to* by the local authority. That would be nice. You know, us actually to get to influence something. Erm, but again, I think what has happened is er, there are some people in the city who are very political, and er are doing food stuff, and they come along to the Feeding Manchester events for a little bit, and then don’t stay engaged, and they are the ones who are engaging the council or influencing the council and its usually about their own, for their own needs really. Rather than a greater sustainable food...”

Interview FM1 (2015)

Here, a key challenge is highlighted in relation to having a political “influence” on the local authority. He sees other local food actors, who are identified as more political, as competing for that influence. Their lack of engagement with Feeding Manchester means that rather than communicating knowledge shared through the network, they are perceived as representing their own aspect of practice. Rob elaborates further on this dynamic in the extract below:

“I think we’ve suffered in some ways from people leaving the public sector. So we’ve built relationships of trust with somebody in the council and then they’ve moved position, or they’ve left the council. And then we’ve had to start again. so you know at times, there’ll be a period when a member of the council from Food Futures will attend like five in a row, and you build a real good relationship with them, and you know, then they leave, and then you have to, start again. but because we are not proactive between the meetings, its only at the meeting we build relationships, whereas other people who are, I don’t

know, always going to council meetings, they've got a constant relationship going on with the local authority."

Interview FM1 (2015)

Here, the perceived lack of connection is seen to arise as a result of transience within the local authority, meaning that relations have to be continually built and rebuilt as people move around the landscape. Building "relationships of trust" as described by Rob takes time, but also creates capacity, as that person can act as a broker translating knowledge from one community of practice (Feeding Manchester) into another. These figures are important in shaping the food landscape as they are able to bridge the divide between one knowledge regime and another, being recognised as competent members of both (Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2015). However, as the knowledge regimes (between the local authority and the community sector) are less proximate than those between members of the Feeding Manchester community of practice, more engagement is required to build trust and mutual understanding between the disparate communities of practice. This presents a barrier, which others have managed to overcome by attending council meetings and having what Rob describes as a "constant relationship" with the local authority. In the extract below, Lisa describes previous unsuccessful attempts of building such relationships:

"Feeding Manchester doesn't need to send representatives to things I don't think. I think people could just come and engage in Feeding Manchester and that would be great. But you know. If other people want to send representative then that's great. and we have tried it a few times but then everyone just came back a bit broken, just going it's really hard work and everyone else around the table is getting paid a salary. And we're all there, and nothings changing. there was someone that worked with us for a while, with Manchester Veg People and she went along to something, [...] and she was just like I can't do it, I can't do it."

Interview FM2 (2015)

Here Lisa describes the "really hard work" involved in attempting to work across two distinct knowledge domains, which left members feeling "broken". Here the landscape is uneven in terms of both power and capacity, with volunteer members spending time attempting to work with salaried council members, with little progress being made. It is in the context of this imbalance that Lisa believes engagement should be forthcoming from the council to Feeding Manchester (rather than Feeding Manchester having to send representative to the council). However, clear barriers persist in trying to reconcile work across an uneven landscape, a theme that has arisen through both case studies. Despite this, as discussed in the following extract, positive relations are possible:

"when I say council I'm talking about Manchester council, so its different with different boroughs. So like with Stockport, kindling and feeding Stockport has a really good

relationship with the council, and they meet almost monthly and we do influence a lot. [...] I mean Manchester are really difficult to work with, partly because they're not interested partly because there are so many different groups trying to get their interest. Erm, and erm yeah, I think we've had more influence in Stockport or Bolton, or Bury, or Oldham than we have in Manchester itself."

Interview FM 1(2015)

Here Rob describes how such barriers are possible to overcome. Building relationships through ongoing interaction can help to even out the landscape, and enable translation of knowledge or "influence" from one domain to another. This is exemplified through Feeding Stockport, which unlike Feeding Manchester has a funded worker (enabling monthly meetings) whose role is to broker across different knowledge regimes, working both in the council and as part of Kindling Trust. However, in the context of Manchester, barriers remain with the council not being "interested" (in Rob's words), and with that "interest" being competed for by multiple other sustainable/community food groups. Here the landscape remains uneven and the perceived distance large.

One major way in which Feeding Manchester has attempted to negotiate its influence and share knowledge across the landscape is through the creation of a Sustainable Food Strategy document. The food strategy was devised collaboratively over three feeding Manchester events (with a group working on it in between). It also drew from previous discussions and visioning, for example by incorporating a jointly negotiated definition of sustainable food. It represents key elements of Feeding Manchester's practices reified into a document, with the aim of creating a tool that can be used to negotiate with and convey learning to broad ranging actors.

Rob talks about the food strategy below:

" the reason we did was that we were thoroughly frustrated with the lack of one. Manchester city council said it was going to do one for years. Erm, every time it wrote something it was never a sustainable food strategy. It was sometimes a food strategy, but it was often focused in on very narrow things, like food poverty or obesity, it was never like looking at food in its entirety. so we just thought that we could write one, which involved more people and looked at food in its entirety. And the, and the two motivations for it I suppose, the two motivations for me anyway were to say that if you are going to talk about a food strategy it has to be all of these things, erm, so hoping that if someone else like the council or greater Manchester or whoever decided to write another one, or write one that they were going to act on, they would kind of go through the tick-box of oh it should include this this and this. and then the other reason was, we had our eye on the Sustainable Food Cities program. so we knew that SFC were looking to find 6 cities to fund, to support. And we had always wanted it, one of them to be within Greater Manchester, so if we wrote this strategy we felt like we'd be in a stronger position."

Interview FM1 (2015)

Here a number of themes are illustrated. Firstly, Feeding Manchester aims to fill what it perceives as a gap, with the lack of a broad ranging strategy from the local authority that tackles

sustainable food issues in their “entirety”. This perhaps highlights the distance in perceived competence, as previous attempts are viewed as inadequate to meet the demands of sustainability. A motivation was in filling that gap, so that future work would draw on the knowledge that is reified into the document to incorporate more broad ranging definitions of sustainable food. In addition to this, the document is viewed as a tool through which the organisation could align with a broader national programme (SFC), with the resources and power to be able to facilitate greater influence. It is through this route that Feeding Stockport, as mentioned earlier, emerges. Rob elaborates on how this proceeds in different directions:

“From Stockport council, they’ve got a really good sustainable food strategy and it is built on and complements this greater Manchester one that we wrote. [...] I think it wound up Manchester city council. it definitely wound up people at a Greater Manchester level, erm, you know. There were quite a few people who were. Well, people in the third sector who positioned themselves to be you know, sustainable food advocates, who were going around poo-pooing it, so you know, often Manchester city council would just hear from people they thought were sustainable food organisations saying, this isn’t a very good strategy, or we could do better, or you know, not many people were involve in writing it”
Interview FM1 (2015)

In Stockport, the strategy is reinvented to work in a new context, building on work of Feeding Manchester and demonstrating how knowledge can accumulate and develop. However, in contrast to this, the strategy is presented as largely ineffective in the context of Manchester, both in relation to competing local food actors and in relation to the council. Here the strategy is presented as almost antagonistic, winding up (as described by Rob), those in positions of influence that might be able to draw from it. However, rather than the council, Rob centres blame on other third sector actors, as is elaborated on further below:

“It wouldn’t be kind of obstructive person in the public sector, it would probably be someone in the third sector who was telling them something different, or offering them an easier solution. So you know we say, you need to revolutionise the food supply chain, or you know we need a food renaissance in this area. There is always, understandably a group who is saying, actually, all you need to do is deal with this, all you need to do is give us some money for our food bank, or you know, all you need to do some community allotment, or you know, you just need to plant some food on a road verge because their motivation is this kind of individual small change thing, and the council will always say, ok, we’ll fund you. Rather than listen to things they don’t want to hear about. They don’t want to hear about the fact that they are pissing money away to a multinational with their procurement, or there actually making kids ill because their school meals aren’t as good as they should be, or you know they shouldn’t sell that piece of land for half a million, they should turn it into like growing space. Most of the things we’ve got to tell them are things they don’t want to hear, or are really difficult so.”
Interview FM1 (2015)

Here, Rob describes the contrasting messages that arise from the third sector and the ways in which these messages are received by those deemed to be in power. He frames competition

between competing third sector voices as being responsible for difficulty in engaging with the council. This demonstrates that although Feeding Manchester has to some extent been successful in maintaining a network of practitioners through a collaborative platform, the broader landscape is still characterised by a climate of competition. He also describes how the council, when presented with a number of options from the third sector, take the easier route, allocating resources and therefore power to those who in Rob's eyes are working towards "individual small change". In contrast, he claims that in aiming for more systematic change, the council "don't want to hear", or avoid what might be "difficult" problems to address (such as public sector procurement or school meals). While this presents only one perspective and does not take into account the challenges facing the council who are also resources constrained, or the motivations of other third sector groups, it expresses the difficult relations and political nature of the landscape as forming a barrier to the spread of knowledge and innovative practice. This is contrasted with Feeding Stockport in the extract below:

"I mean with the Feeding Stockport thing it's all about systematic change, so every, er. So the meetings we have are at a particular level of the council. You know, so you are dealing with economic regen. officers, you're dealing with planning, you are dealing with a tier of people who actually are talking about the more strategic, economic stuff, not the community engagement or the PR side of things, so I think we have.. the Stockport seems to get it more I think."

Interview FM1 (2015)

Here, Feeding Stockport is perceived as having a higher level of access, dealing directly with those who have the power to create change and providing a conduit through which the knowledge of the third sector can be recognised and used to influence broader structures. The focus is on "systematic change" as opposed to relating to the council's (seemingly insincere) obligation towards PR and community engagement, giving a sense of a more instrumental role of the third sector. This demonstrates how bringing about change at a broader scale depends on the shape of the landscape and the ability of practitioners to navigate that landscape through the interactions and relationships they build. This example demonstrates how the role Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015b, p. 97) "systems convenors" can play out in practice, as they "act to reconfigure the landscape by forging new learning partnerships across traditional boundaries". The relationships that are build reconfigure the landscape of practice, and the influence of grassroots organisations on developing broader systems of practice.

This section has examined some of the difficult power relations surrounding Feeding Manchester, as characterised by an uneven political landscape. In contrast to Feeding Stockport which has the capacity and the relations through which negotiation across difficult boundaries can occur, Feeding Manchester is limited in the amount of influence it generates. While part of

this is due to a local authority that is perceived as lacking interest, emphasis is placed on relations across the third sector as different factions compete for control. While Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015b, p. 112) claim that landscape convenors are “are social innovators paving the way for solving complex problems, driven by a certainty that much can be achieved if they can just bring the right combination of people to the table,” the examples above illustrate the difficulty in negotiating uneven relations of power and resources and in establishing ways of working that are able to overcome these barriers.

7.4. Research in Practice - Facilitating Shared Learning

This final section of the chapter and of the empirical part of the thesis reflects on a piece of collaborative action research which brought together key case study organisations to facilitate sharing of knowledge, putting into practice some of the key insights from the research. As introduced in the methodology section, this final part of the project emerged out of the flexible research design, enabling me to draw on my position and capacities of my role to develop connections between the two projects and the broader network of food actors in Sheffield. This section reflects on considerations of putting a communities of practice framework into practice, highlighting key insights gathered from the events that took place. The aim of the section is to draw out some of the key findings as they crystallised in practice, and to begin to recognise and reflect on where a communities of practice framework might work in facilitating the generation of innovative capacity and fostering spaces of innovation and collaboration at the grassroots.

Towards the end of the research period, I helped to facilitate an event which brought together representatives of Grow Sheffield and the Kindling Trust, along with a range of actors from across Sheffield’s food landscape interested in sustainable food. The aim of the event, entitled ‘Sheffield - A Sustainable Food Capital in the Making?’, was to inspire and stimulate discussion around ways we could practically develop the food network in Sheffield, drawing on examples and lessons learnt in Manchester. The event was successful in attracting a broad range of sustainable food actors from across Sheffield, with around 50 participants - including growers, activists, academics, politicians, retailers, volunteers and organisers of various community food projects. It also catalysed an ongoing discussion (through a series of events, which continued to work with Kindling Trust beyond my involvement) about how to develop the network and food partnerships in the city.

I incorporated principles of a communities of practice approach into planning and facilitation of the event, in order to test as well as refine how such a framework might work in practice. While there are obvious limitations in employing this within the scope of a single event, it did generate

useful insights, as well as going some way to help verify key findings in relation to the broader food landscape. The following section will detail how a communities of practice framework was employed, highlighting key insights and challenges.

Putting a Communities of Practice Framework into Practice

Communities of practice theory has been used not only as a tool for analysis, but as a prescriptive way of managing and 'cultivating' a broad range of communities (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002). While a key focus of this thesis has been on developing an analytical framework to further understanding of the innovative capacities of communities of practice within the landscapes in which they are situated, this section aims to provide a small step towards exploring if and how such a framework might be useful in practice. A key aim of the event therefore was to draw on communities of practice principles to share learning from Kindling Trust/Feeding Manchester models, and stimulate discussion on what would work in the context of Sheffield and its landscape of food actors. Through this, I hoped to develop connections and knowledge of the broader landscape, both within Sheffield, and between Sheffield and Manchester. Rather than being a one off event, it was organised together with Grow Sheffield as part of a year-long network building project and was therefore followed up as part of a broader project. Some of the key themes that were considered are discussed below:

Building on Collectively Negotiated Trajectories and Shared Histories

Although the event was forward facing, aiming to build connections on which further interaction would be based by addressing the future of sustainable food in the city, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 it is important to consider the past history on which the present configuration of practice is based (Wenger, 1998). As a central aspect of the framework, this meant viewing the event not in isolation but as part of a host of broader and ongoing trajectories. Three identifiable levels of connection were identified including Grow Sheffield's own trajectories, the history of interconnections across the city, and broader national trends and movements that provide the general context of practices.

Grow Sheffield's Trajectory

As I was organising the event from the position of being a director of Grow Sheffield, (as well as in my capacity as a researcher), it was important that the event fitted in with Grow Sheffield's broader aims and objectives. This enabled me to facilitate collaborative working within the organisation and ensure the longevity of the project beyond my involvement. The proposed event was planned as part of an ongoing Grow Sheffield project, fitting into and drawing upon the Sheffield Food Network. During the time period of the research, a member of the core team

was funded (by a separate funding body) to work on the project, with the specific goal of developing a stronger network of connection in the city, building on the resource of the online SFN map. Having engaged with Feeding Manchester as a platform for networking, I wanted to create an opportunity for insight and knowledge to be shared in the context of Sheffield. This would both inform and contribute to the ongoing Grow Sheffield project, and provide a way of engaging the landscape of food actors more broadly. This approach, as part of the trajectory of a pre-existing project, also meant that there would be scope for the outcomes to be carried forward with the dedication of a funded volunteer.

Whilst the event was not as direct in terms of benefiting Feeding Manchester, it provided an opportunity for them to discuss and refine their model, and to make connections across the region. Further to this, the shared enterprise between the two projects, in relation to generating a more sustainable food system also provided an incentive. As discussed previously in the chapter, in terms of practice, the organisations are relatively proximate, which was conducive to facilitating the exchange of knowledge.

Trajectories across the Food Landscape:

When taking into account the context of the landscape of local food actors in Sheffield and previous attempts at network building, key challenges emerged. There had been several past attempts to develop a more unified network of food actors in the city, however, none of these has been particularly productive (at least not from the perspective of community food initiatives). Previous attempts have been led by the council as part of iterations of Food Strategies to which community actors have contributed. However lack of progress and follow up has generated a climate of scepticism towards this type of event. Adding to this, the political nature of relations between actors, which can include elements of rivalry, contributes to the generation of an atmosphere of competition.

Awareness of these challenges shaped the approach to dealing with them in a number of ways. Firstly, a collaborative approach to organisation meant working closely with a member of Grow Sheffield who had already begun networking and developing connections on which the event hoped to build. In addition to this, the involvement of a co-ordinator of Feeding Manchester in planning and running the events proved to be critical, in providing a neutral and highly competent facilitator who was able to maintain focus that moved beyond rivalries between

groups. Before the event we discussed the history and character of the food landscape as described in the following field note:

“Rob arrived early and was keen to talk about past events, and networking progress (or lack of) so far, including the Sheffield food strategy, and what the likely mood would be in the room in relation to local politics. We discussed some of the challenges that were expected to arise and rivalries that might become apparent, as well as a general feeling of scepticism towards previous food strategies.”

Field notes (October 2016)

Rob is able to bring his knowledge and understanding of dealing with local politics in relation to Feeding Manchester/Kindling Trust, to inform his approach in the context of Sheffield. He is aware of challenges that might persist across the uneven and political landscape of local food actors and is keen to talk about the likely atmosphere that this will generate. As a result of this, Rob began his presentation addressing the problem directly:

“He asked about the food strategy, people responded that nothing came out of it, and were generally negative towards it. After this, he said that this would be the most negative point of the event and the rest of the event would be positively focused on inspiring ways to move forward”

Field notes (October 2016)

By doing this, he addresses and draws a line under previous negativity, giving opportunity for individuals to express their experiences before moving forward. Through this, he tailors his approach in order to build on the past, rather than adding to any sense of negativity and scepticism. From this point, he goes on to talk about progress in Feeding Manchester, and other connected projects. He addresses both the successes and challenges that have been faced, recognising that he is speaking to an audience that will relate to experiences so far. This provides the basis for ongoing discussion.

National Trends

While a general trend towards focus on collaboration and development of partnerships (perhaps mediated by decrease in overall resource availability) might have influenced perceptions of the event, a key influence in relation to national trends was incorporating a Sustainable Food Cities (SFC) approach⁸². This aspect was introduced by Rob in relation to the Kindling Trust and Feeding

⁸² The sustainable food cities network focuses on building cross-sector partnerships bringing together a range of stakeholders, and aims to bridge the gap between those working towards sustainable food systems in civil society and local authorities: “The Sustainable Food Cities approach involves developing a cross-sector partnership of local public agencies, businesses, academics and NGOs committed to working together to make healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where they live.” *Sustainable Food Cities website (accessed Aug 2016)*

Stockport. While in the context of Manchester, participants are generally familiar with the background, principles, and opportunities provided by the SFC programme, this proved to be fairly new in Sheffield where only a few participants had heard of it. Rob used SFC as a potential framework through which to envisage moving forwards, as it provides principles to work towards, as well as a set of tools and resources including potential to apply for funding. In practice however, lack of familiarity with the concept made it difficult for people to relate to it (although it did come back into focus in later events).

Dimensions of Practice

As well as considering trajectories at different levels of analysis, the concepts of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire were useful as a tools for thinking about how to promote negotiation of a shared practice as part of the event and going forwards. Each of these elements will be discussed in turn below:

Facilitating Mutual Engagement

The rationale behind holding an event was to create a space where individuals from across the food landscape could come together and engage around a theme to which they are all connected through each of their individual trajectories or community enterprises. Promoting mutual engagement was therefore considered in the design and format of the event in a number of ways. Firstly it was held in a city centre location in a co-working space that aimed to provide a neutral platform. It was also designed as a drop-in style event, beginning in the afternoon and continuing into the event, with participants able to join or leave throughout, leaving contributions as part of discussion or adding their thoughts to a notice board. This meant that individuals could attend as part of their planned working day, or for those working in non-related fields, in their evening free time.

The format of the event also aimed to promote networking, beginning with introductions of participants (and their relevant role/organisations). Following each of the presentations, there were opportunities for questions, followed by small group discussions, with participants feeding back key outcomes to the rest of the group. This format picked up on ways of working exemplified in Feeding Manchester, and proved to be an effective way to produce, prioritise and document the knowledge outcomes of the event.

As well as the official agenda-ed business of the meeting, there were breaks for coffee, and for diner. This provided important opportunity for informal networking to take place. Significant emphasis was placed on the shared meal as an opportunity for engagement. The food was sustainably sourced, including vegetables from local organic growers, locally sourced wild meat,

and with donations of surplus foods, with a short talk from the chef about its origins. This provided a way of embodying the sustainable food theme of the event and further promoting discussion amongst participants. After the event, networking continued at a nearby local pub enabling participants to continue discussions from the event.

By engaging people both formally and informally, the event aimed to generate or build on a sense of cohesion which would be carried forward with committed participants returning for future events. Although the turnout was much lower at later events (reducing to around 15-20), there was enough interested and cohesion to build a continued sense of engagement.

Developing a Joint Enterprise

At the centre of maintaining mutual engagement is the need for a joint enterprise to which individuals can connect. The focus of the event was on developing a network in Sheffield, drawing on examples from Manchester, as well as giving practitioners in Sheffield an opportunity to speak about the challenges and opportunities they face. The event was experimental in the sense that we were unsure from the outset if there would be appetite for a renewed effort on network building and enough motivation to participate in the longer term. While the turnout and interest generated gave a sense of momentum that led to further events, a key challenge was in framing an enterprise in a way that would sustain engagement.

Key aspects to this framing, included drawing on positive examples from the context of Manchester. This gave participants the opportunity to see an example of good practice and examples of successful models of working, whilst also examining the challenges of operationalising these models in practice. The presentations were learning focused, with a shared awareness of difficulties and emphasis on finding shared solutions. The event also was framed in a way that presented a degree of novelty and invited ownership. The aim was to generate a sense of grassroots empowerment to overcome challenges that were perceived as connected to previous council led networking attempts, enabling participants to discuss their own ideas and solutions for moving forwards.

Shared Repertoire

In terms of developing a shared repertoire, or set of shared tools and resources, discussion of how to facilitate ongoing and inclusive communication was key. Grow Sheffield, through their ongoing work with the Sheffield Food Network offered to host the network using the online map as a platform and adding a 'forum' function, and webpage through which minutes and notes could be accessed. Whilst this was agreed as a positive way forward, most communication has been so far through an email list, over which information and updates are distributed. Finding

an open and inclusive way to promote online exchange continues to be a challenge in both Sheffield and Manchester (with Feeding Manchester's online 'forum' also having little practical use).

Beyond communication, learning from one meeting to the next was progressed through the taking of minutes and accumulation of discussion notes, and through reifying discussion into action points to be taken forwards. This once again emulates the way of working demonstrated in Feeding Manchester. A further challenge that arose however, was on agreeing on an effective form of governance, with tension between more traditional formats of having a 'core group' that takes on responsibility but has limited capacity, or the alternative of developing a more decentralised system using technology and crowd funding to resource the network democratically. These discussions form the basis of ongoing discussion.

Providing Capacity and Resources

Capacity has arisen as a key theme shaping innovation and practice throughout the empirical section of the thesis and so was a key consideration in planning the event. I was able to provide a financial input into the event, covering key expenses including travel costs, time of speakers, room hire and catering. This targeting of relatively small amount of resources was extremely cost-effective in bringing together a large number and large range of sustainable food actors to participant in generating and exchanging knowledge. Despite the benefits however, gaining funding for this kind of work is recognisability difficult within the sector. Beyond the scope of the initial event, the costs of ongoing events were necessarily reduced in a number of ways, including omitting the catering, reducing the length of events, and covering costs out of different budget. This clearly creates a challenge in terms of ongoing sustainability, particularly beyond the timescale of the overarching project which was funded for one year.

With such recognisable challenges around resources, and dependency on a single organisation and single funded worker in convening events, ongoing capacity was part of negotiation throughout discussion. This shaped the nature of ongoing events, which aligned more with the SFC model, in the aim of eventually applying for funding through developing a food partnership (in a similar model to Feeding Stockport). Emphasis was also placed on discussing the collective

assets of the network, including resources and capacities that can be shared in a mutually beneficial way.

7.5. Summary

This chapter has examined the dynamics between communities of practice as they interact across boundaries at a landscape level of analysis. Through this it has demonstrated how communities of practice and their regimes of competence are influenced by the broader landscape. It has also worked to show how communities of practice seek to reconfigure that landscape through relations of competence. While the extent of transformative social change demonstrated by the case studies has been limited, the effect of political unevenness and distribution of power and resources has demonstrated some of the key challenges faced. The concept of landscape convenors proves useful in conceptualising how progress might be made in reconfiguring the relations that shape and reproduce the unevenness of the landscape

In relation to Grow Sheffield, the chapter explored landscape level dynamics on a number of levels. It began by looking at how multi-membership across the landscape develops competencies of individual members. Part of these competencies relate to what Wenger (1998) terms knowledgeability, in being able to relate to and engage with a range of practices across the landscape. Competence, while defined within the community also depends on broader connections (and ability to utilise them) across the landscape.

Building further on this, the competencies and underlying connections of the community of practice help to shape its reputation, relating to the collective identity through which it is recognised in the city. This reputation helps reinforce Grow Sheffield's position as a 'go-to' organisation in the city. This creates opportunities and constitutes a form of capacity in terms of recognised competence and legitimacy, building on which partnerships with funders and resource holding organisations may be developed. At the same time however, it also generates expectations that the organisation must fulfil in order to maintain its position in the local food landscape. Considerable tension is created in managing connections with other food actors, institutions and in relation to sustaining practice with limited resources. This reveals a landscape characterised by rivalry and tension between groups and they seek to assert their position and the legitimacy of their competence within it.

Turning to Feeding Manchester, emphasis is placed on the political nature of relations, both within the third sector, and to local authorities. In a similar way to within Sheffield, the landscape is characterised by rivalry and competing competencies between groups. Without having the capacity to invest in building relationships with the local authority, and with perceived

disinterest from them, Feeding Manchester struggles to exert and influence politically. This contrasts to Feeding Stockport, which drawing on many similar tools, resources and competencies as Feeding Manchester, as had great success in convening at the landscape level.

The final part of the chapter reflected on the utility of a communities of practice approach in informing practice, through a piece of action research designed to facilitate engagement between the two case studies. Key concepts from the communities of practice framework were drawn upon to inform the approach. These included embedding trajectory and shared history into planning, attempting to build connections at the meta-level through negotiating an overarching enterprise, providing a platform for mutual engagement, and building shared ways of working, tools and resources. While limited in scope, the event was successful in engaging with the complexities of the landscape and generating a positive platform through which actors could negotiate a way to move forward collectively.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This chapter draws together and summarises the key findings and contributions of the thesis. It begins by returning to the three research questions set out in Chapter 3, evaluating how they have been addressed and highlighting the key findings. Drawing on what has been learnt through empirical engagement with case study organisations, the key contributions of the thesis in relation to theory and practice are then outlined and discussed. The next section then highlights some of the limitations of the research and potential avenues for further enquiry, before making final concluding remarks.

8.1. Research Findings

This thesis set out to examine the dynamics of grassroots innovation, through an in-depth qualitative investigation of the processes through which community food initiatives, Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester, have negotiated the landscape of opportunities and challenges they face. Through critical engagement with a communities of practice approach, the thesis answered three research questions, which are outlined in turn below. The ways in which each question was approached through empirical engagement are discussed with reference to broader empirical discussion covered in Chapters 4-7, and the key findings and lessons learnt are outlined. Section 8.2 builds on this to outline the main contributions of the thesis.

1.) How do communities of practice negotiate their trajectories over time in relation to the opportunities and challenges they face?

The first research question sets out to examine the processes and dynamics through which the case study initiatives have developed over time, both in terms of negotiation within the community of practice, and how this is shaped by broader external factors. Wenger's concept of trajectory is understood "not [as] a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion - one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences [with] a coherence through time that connects the past, the present and the future" (Wenger, 1998, p. 154). In order to explore how trajectories are negotiated, Chapter 4 begins with the analysis of how the case studies initially emerged as communities of practice, laying the foundations of joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoires on which their shared histories are based. It examined the initial formation of the shared identity, and the assemblage of various competencies as individuals came together to form the collective enterprise framed within a particular niche and in relation to broad ranging challenges and opportunities. Chapter 5 goes

on to demonstrate how understanding of the past can provide insight into ongoing negotiations and future trajectories, examining key points that mark turning points in their histories. It focuses on how the negotiation of practice is mediated by capacity - in relation to 'financial resources', 'people resources' and organisational capacity that is developed as part of shared repertoire.

Drawing on the communities of practice framework set out in Chapter 3, practice is understood as a product of community, being "produced over time by those who engage in it" (Wenger, 2010). Although external forces and structures exert an influence or might seek to direct the negotiation of practice, "in the end [practice] reflects the meanings arrived at by those engaged in it" and it "reflects their own engagement with their situation" (Wenger, 2010). In this sense, practice 'belongs' to community in a fundamental way, as "their negotiated response to their situation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 77). Although Wenger (1998, pp. 79-80) doesn't go into depth on the innovative potential of communities of practice, he does highlight 'creative resourcefulness', inventiveness and 'creating space' as part of the process of negotiation. Using the conceptual tools of community of practice approach this thesis develops understanding of innovation as an inherent part of negotiation of practice, in communities that focus on developing solutions to broad ranging problems and challenges (both local and global). As will be discussed later in the chapter, this reframing of innovation as inherent to practice forms a key contribution of the thesis, and in understanding the plurality of innovation and reflexivity that characterises the landscape of grassroots innovation movements.

Exploring the dynamics of negotiation in greater depth, a range of key themes emerge through empirical engagement with the case study organisations. Central to the stories surrounding the emergence and later development of Grow Sheffield is the mutual engagement of key 'characters', through which a joint enterprise and collective identity focusing on the arts and growing is developed. Individuals come together to form the collective, bringing with them their own personal trajectories of learning and the various skills and experiences they have gathered through personal journeys of multi-membership that constitute everyday lives. The skills and competencies that are assembled, through alignment of values and perspectives in the development of a shared vision, contribute to the collective capacity of the organisation, influencing the negotiations and trajectory of the community of practice.

Analysis of the changing role of the arts strand of Grow Sheffield's enterprise across Chapters 4, 5 and 6 facilitates exploration of the interplay between different dimensions of the community of practice, and negotiation of meaning and identity over time. The arts plays a key role in how Grow Sheffield envisages its model of change, through creatively influencing and developing a

culture connecting arts and growing. However, in practice this 'vision' has been shaped by both the opportunities available to, and capacities available within the community of practice. Grow Sheffield is constituted by its members, both past and present, and as people have come and gone, they have both contributed to lasting shared repertoire and participated in the negotiation and evolution of enterprise. Even with founding artistic members leaving the organisation (creating a gap in terms of artistic competence), the identity, enterprise and repertoire of Grow Sheffield as an arts organisation persisted. This demonstrates that the community of practice is more than the sum of its members, and that vision, connected to shared history and repertoire forms an identity that persists beyond the direct engagement of those that initially created it. Grow Sheffield is characterised as an arts and growing organisation, not just through its membership but in its styles, ways of working, network of connections, with the arts becoming embedded in practice.

Feeding Manchester is presented as a contrasting case study, aiming to facilitate mutual engagement at the landscape level, in pursuit of a joint enterprise around networking and strategic support of a sustainable food system at the regional scale. The initiative is framed in terms of facilitating co-operation (rather than competition) at the landscape level - providing a forum where practitioners can come together to work collaboratively towards solutions to shared challenges, and develop opportunities that are mutually beneficial. The term '*meta-community of practice*' is developed, to describe Feeding Manchester as an initiative that connects and creates a shared practice in which multiple related communities of practice participate. Although direct mutual engagement is infrequent, each individual and the communities of practice they represent are as practitioners frequently engaged in an overarching shared practice (ie in working towards a more sustainable food system). Members identify not only through *participation* but through *imagination* and *alignment*⁸³, as they envisage themselves as part of and contributing to a broader movement. Joint enterprise evolves over time in relation to the broader trends (such as developing food strategy, responding to political developments or the rise of food poverty), in an effort to maintain relevance and develop solutions to contemporary food issues.

In both case studies, the role of key individuals in catalysing the formation of the community of practice arises as a key theme (Chapter 4). Within Grow Sheffield, this is presented through the concept of 'brokering' with a key founding member participating in "translations, coordination,

⁸³ Imagination, alignment and direct participation are 'modes of belonging' outlined in the conceptual framework section, that describe the ways in which individuals identify with and conceptualise belonging to communities of practice that goes beyond direct experience, enabling them to align with broader perspectives.

and alignment between perspectives”, facilitating the mutual engagement of individuals to form the initial community. At the broader landscape level Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner’s (2015, p. 100) concept of ‘system conveners’ is applied to individuals coordinating Feeding Manchester, describing how they aim to create lasting change as “they seek to reconfigure social systems through partnerships that exploit mutual learning needs, possible synergies, various kinds of relationships, and common goals across traditional boundaries”. In both of the case studies key individuals are to some extent new to the landscape of practice, enabling them to bring a unique and fresh perspective in catalysing the formation of the community of practice. Within Feeding Manchester however, although the conveners are new to the community food sector, they are well known and well networked as competent sustainability activists, having founded various successful enterprises. The element of trust⁸⁴ that is generated through their perceived legitimacy is important in sustaining the Feeding Manchester community, despite infrequent mutual engagement. While key individuals prove to play an instrumental role in both case studies, they also have the support of a broader informal network of people connected through a shared practice and/or alignment of values. While a convenor or broker facilitates mutual engagement and formalises connections, a pre-existing network of people provides a foundation on which active engagement and collective negotiation of a joint enterprise can be developed.

Although initial focus has been on the internal processes of negotiation, and the dynamics of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, Chapters 4 and 5 also highlight the need to view communities of practice in context and as part of broader landscapes of practice. Part of the development of joint enterprise and the shared vision involves *imagining* positive future trajectories of and *aligning* with broader trends and movements. Although communities of practice are fundamentally anchored in the local and constituted through direct engagement, they also connect with broader transformative ideas and learning. Framing of the community of practice in a way that resonates locally⁸⁵, but also amplifies to broader imagined trajectories and movements is therefore key⁸⁶ to their positioning as grassroots innovations. Communities of practice theory can be useful in conceptualising the dynamics of how niche spaces are

⁸⁴ Kubiak *et al* (2015, p. 84) highlight the importance of developing a ‘micro-climate of trust’ for successful systems convening.

⁸⁵ Being “the right idea at the right time” (Interview GS, 3/3/2015) and therefore attracting enough members to form an active community.

⁸⁶ This is exemplified in both case studies, for example through references to global movements (e.g. food sovereignty, permaculture), guest speakers from well-known organisations, film screenings connecting to practices in different contexts but with some element of aligned vision (e.g. Cuban oil crisis), references to past times of crises or scarcity (e.g. Land Army, dig for victory), etc.

constructed and developed at multiple scales, and how they provide an environment in which new ideas and practices can be experimented with and developed.

Chapter 5 highlights that despite a tendency to concentrate on cohesion and instances of success conflict and tension is also inherent to communities of practice. The negotiation of practice involves resolving or at least reconciling tensions between multiple identities, perspectives and often conflicting viewpoints. However, as empirical engagement with Grow Sheffield has shown, difficulty in aligning perspectives can lead to defection, shaping membership, future trajectories and even the landscape of practice, as individuals move on to engage with parts of the landscape that are more aligned with their views. Being competent within a community of practice means not only having relevant skills and confidence to use them, but being able to relate to the shared set of meanings and values that underpin the shared enterprise. As Wenger (1998, p. 153) describes, “membership in a community of practice translates into an identity as a form of competence”. This is also reflected in Feeding Manchester, with tension arising in attempts to build a cohesive and supportive movement, whilst also connecting broad-ranging actors and reaching beyond traditional boundaries⁸⁷.

Through examining the broader trajectories of the organisations, Chapter 5 identifies some of the key challenges, not least that of ensuring survival and long-term sustainability despite ongoing insecurity and unsustainability of resources⁸⁸. Grow Sheffield’s history is shaped significantly through response to the availability of funding, with complex impacts on the dynamics and capacity of the organisation through the recruitment of staff, the negotiation of structures and ways of working, and strategies in place to manage people and resources. Whilst funding enables scaling up and formalisation, a key challenge is in maintaining capacity despite fluctuating resources, and consequently in being able to effectively scale down.

Many of the practitioners and organisations that constitute Feeding Manchester face similar resource-based challenges as Grow Sheffield in a climate of increasing resource scarcity. This impacts the functioning of the network in an indirect way, with individuals having less capacity for landscape-level engagement, and a greater need to focus on core activities and basic survival. Therefore, although Feeding Manchester itself has the stability and support of the Kindling Trust as its host organisation⁸⁹, it is still impacted in a fundamental way with its constituent members

⁸⁷ A tension that so far has contributed to limitation of success, particularly in terms of bringing on board those in positions of power.

⁸⁸ With basic survival (in challenging circumstances) being identified as a main achievement of each case study.

⁸⁹ As an intermediary that is relatively resource secure.

having limited capacity to engage with each other. Interconnected with this fundamental challenge of capacity Feeding Manchester faces an array of other barriers. Maintaining momentum and the ongoing engagement of an evolving network, and maintaining a sense of relevance in an ever changing landscape were highlighted as key challenges. Finally, as Feeding Manchester works strategically at the landscape level, challenges around power relations, and developing ways of influencing institutions and systems of practice were also highlighted as perceived barriers.

To summarise, in answering the first research question, Chapters 4 and 5 uncovered the dynamics of negotiation within the case study organisations as communities of practice. They examined how through the mutual engagement of various identities and competencies, joint enterprises are developed and framed within particular niche spaces. Shared histories develop over time, and ways of doing, language and styles (as part of shared repertoire), become part of and constitute the practice of the community. Through the communities of practice approach developed, initiatives are framed as inherently innovative, positioning themselves within particular niche spaces, and in relation to broader challenges and opportunities faced. Maintaining long-term organisational sustainability in a climate of insecure and often short-term resources arises as a key challenge facing both organisations, and a key part of the joint enterprise of communities of practice. The next chapter explores in greater depth how the case study organisations respond to this challenge, whilst fulfilling their drive towards developing innovative sustainable solutions.

2.) What constitutes innovative capacity, and how do community food initiatives innovate across boundaries?

Having examined the internal dynamics and processes of negotiation within communities of practice in answering the first research question, the second research question focuses on how innovative capacity is assembled within, and how innovation is produced across, boundaries of communities of practice. As outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, central to the joint enterprise of each case study is a drive to maintain capacity and sustain practice (in spite of persistent insecurity and short-term resources) *and* to generate long term impact through the generation and sharing of sustainable practice. Chapter 6 investigates how communities of practice through processes of innovation work to develop long term sustainable impact, as well as how this contributes to trajectories of learning within the organisation. It begins by looking at how the capacity for innovation is defined, before going on to examine how innovation is implemented both within communities of practice through their own learning trajectories, and beyond them, through collaboration across boundaries. The research question also seeks to evaluate the usefulness of

a communities of practice approach for understanding grassroots innovation, highlighting areas where it has the potential to further understanding of the dynamics of innovation.

Innovative capacity is found to be difficult to define both in theory and practice, relying on tacit knowledge, skills, and competencies of the community of practice. It is described in relation to trajectory in terms of the ability to generate opportunity and momentum, as the bank of 'goodwill' that is developed through positive mutual engagement. Critical to long-term sustainability of practices is the generation of a sense of empowerment and ownership within communities, facilitated by social learning and embedding of competencies. This contributes to long term sustainability as individuals take responsibility for projects and have the skills and confidence to ensure that the community of practice is maintained.

Processes of social learning are investigated further through a case study on community growing, with learning in this context found to occur in multiple directions. Grow Sheffield attempts to share its expertise in the field of growing through skilled community growers who work within and develop shared practice within external communities. Participants are encouraged to experience growing in a sensory and embodied way, engaging with the materiality of tools, soils, seeds, tastes and textures that form part of the practice. Through this embodied engagement, Grow Sheffield attempts to create unique new meanings and perceptions around growing and eating, including understanding of what counts as food and the ways it fits into to everyday practices. Integrating learning around food and growing beyond the allotment is however challenging, not least because of barriers of established sets of practices that shape everyday life.

At the same time as sharing knowledge the community grower also participates in learning through engagement with participants in that particular context. Newcomers to the practice share the questions and insights that arise from their own unique starting points and backgrounds; and through engagement with them the grower is able to find new ways of articulating their practice in a range of situations. By reflecting on success and failure and finding ways to overcome barriers, practice is developed week on week through ongoing engagement, and modes of sharing knowledge in that particular environment are developed. As the grower is also connected to the broader community of practice of Grow Sheffield, they are able to pass on learning and contribute to the collective knowledge of the organisation. Over time this enables the development of models, sharing of ideas between practitioners, and development of a repertoire of tools, techniques and resources for engaging people in practice in diverse

ways⁹⁰. Through this dynamic, learning is co-produced in the context of practice by working across boundaries with external communities. Knowledge and insight flows in both directions, developing the practices of the community but also developing the future potential of the organisation to share practice.

Each of Grow Sheffield's projects aims to develop specific sets of practice relating to food and growing. By bringing together elements of different projects and the practices they produce, Grow Sheffield aims to contribute to a 'culture' around food. Through embedded multiple interconnected practices in specific locations or with specific groups, shared learning across projects aims to facilitate development of an array of practices and the values they promote within food 'hubs'. However, the work of creating connections, developing competence, building infrastructure and the ownership required for long-term sustainability takes time, and is connected in part by the rhythm of annual cycles of growth.

While Grow Sheffield has developed its own unique models for sharing knowledge and practice, innovation is shaped by opportunity, but ultimately mediated by capacity. The process of innovation is inherently risky and experimental, with learning arising from instances of both success and failure. However, limited capacity has the potential to influence strategy and joint enterprise towards a focus on generating maximum impact with minimal resources. In the case of Grow Sheffield, this has led to a shift towards a partnership based model of working with pre-existing groups and organisations that already have a cohesive community in place, as well as infrastructure and common aims. Grow Sheffield often plays an enabling role, working with the communities that have the will to engage in social learning of necessary skills and confidence. While this has proven effective in generating impact within communities, it also perhaps limits transformative potential, and risks focusing on easier to access groups.

Capacity plays a critical role in the process of innovation. Dependence on funding for organisations like Grow Sheffield creates an inherent dependence on external economic climate beyond the control of the community of practice. It also creates a dynamic of accountability, with organisations needing to be able to convey their value to funders. As the intangible and tacit aspects of innovative capacity are hard to quantify, emphasis is often placed on the more easily measurable material outcomes, with effective monitoring and evaluation itself requiring

⁹⁰ As exemplified through the community growers project, which developed over time towards a partnership model of working, drawing on and bringing in outside capacities into the organisation.

capacity. This is an important and often overlooked relationship of accountability that influences the actions of organisations and the dynamics of innovation.

There is potential for innovation to occur as part of a positive cycle in which opportunities are created and acted upon, engaging new members and engendering commitment which leads to new opportunities. However, empirical engagement demonstrates how the reverse is also possible, with limited capacity meaning limited opportunities for engagement, and the risk of losing the commitment of individuals and the essential 'people' resource that forms part of the balance of capacity. The goodwill and empowerment identified as key to innovative capacity can be undermined by overburdening volunteers, contributing to undermining of long-term sustainability of the organisation. Strategy is therefore required as part of enterprise to ensure that as part of trajectory ongoing forward planning of capacity is maintained.

As a meta-community of practice, analysis of innovation in the context of Feeding Manchester takes a slightly different angle, although common themes do emerge. As a network of practitioners working on sustainable food, Feeding Manchester provides an important space for innovation in which members engage with each other to negotiate and pursue innovative solutions to mutual landscape level problems. Both formal and informal practices⁹¹ are identified as important for the development of relationships and generation of cohesion that contributes to the momentum of the initiative as a community of practice. This forms the basis from which collaborations can develop, facilitating cross-boundary working between practitioners from distinct communities of practice. Innovative practice can arise from these relations, although are sporadic and difficult to identify and track⁹². Focus, even for participants of the community of practice, is on the *process* through which such connections (and the potential for innovation) emerge. Having these connections and building strong relationships between members constitutes a form of innovative capacity, and contributes to a sense of resilience within the community of practice.

Analysis turns to the interconnected systems of innovative practice of which Feeding Manchester is part. In a similar way to how Grow Sheffield attempts to produce interconnected sets of practice (through developing culture around growing), Feeding Manchester is part of a

⁹¹ Formal practices are identified as the agenda-ed and minut-ed proceeding from events which structure activity during event; informal practice are identified as social and networking opportunities, including shared food and visits to the pub. Both contribute to the join enterprise of the community of practice and are instrumental in facilitating development of shared practice.

⁹² This is indicated through the language used to describe them- being 'sparked', having tendencies to 'veer' or 'spin off', for example.

network of projects that are hosted by the Kindling Trust. Analysis follows the trajectory of innovation, as ideas become experiments, which lead to iterative developments of practice as part of a process of unfolding trajectories of learning. Stories and visions of systems of practice are told in a way that overlooks many of the difficulties faced on the ground. This overlooks much of the learning that is produced, from a context which is often fraught with difficulty, and which leads to iterative development and ongoing negotiation of practice. Through this, new projects and ideas unfold, gradually contributing towards the aim of creating a 'small but perfectly formed food system' (KT website, accessed 2016). However, this doesn't represent a closed system. Ideas, learning, and capacity travel across both space and time, being reproduced and reinvented in new contexts⁹³.

In conclusion, innovation is found to be an ongoing, reflexive and incremental process of learning over time that is inherent to the processes of development within communities of practice as they participate in social learning across boundaries within the communities in which they work. It is an experimental process, which relies on tacit knowledge and competence, and requires risk taking, creativity and learning, but also critically resources, skills and capacities. In both case studies, innovation in practice is embedded, both in interconnections across the landscape, and as part of broader interconnected practices.

3.) How are the community food initiatives influenced by, and how do they influence broader landscapes of practice at different scales?

The third research question aimed to extend the scope of the analysis by examining how communities of practice function as part of broader landscapes of practice. Drawing on recent developments in communities of practice and grassroots innovation literature, this approach aimed to develop understanding of how innovation is negotiated at, and how innovative capacity travels across the broader landscape scale. As well as building on recent development in theory, this question also relates to development in practice with emphasis in the community food sector moving increasingly towards collaboration and development of partnerships (FEC, 2017).

As Wenger (1998) asserts, communities of practice should not be viewed in isolation but exist as part of interconnected systems and landscapes of practice. As such, awareness of context and connections of communities of practice provides a backdrop to each of the empirical chapters.

⁹³ For example, the Land Army as a project inspired by the women's land armies of wartime Britain, and the FarmStart project which was initiated after a trip to the USA from where it originated, with the idea progressing through the Kindling Trust to a variety of other organisations across the UK.

The purpose of this research question is to shift focus from internal processes of negotiation, to examine how interrelations between communities of practice shape the broader landscape. It builds on the previous research question focusing on innovation as co-produced across boundaries, and moves towards examining how alignment at the landscape level can help facilitate broader transformative change.

Chapter 7 investigates this through examining landscape relationships and dynamics at multiple scales. It begins by looking at Grow Sheffield's position within a city-wide context. While various informal networks exist, and encounters occur between different communities of practice, no reified network exists that is comparable to Feeding Manchester. The landscape of practice is shaped by both collaboration across boundaries; and competition, characterised by rivalry and struggle for position and power. Grow Sheffield positions itself carefully within this landscape, nurturing over the years a sense of legitimacy, building a network of personal connections and developing reputation as a professional and competent organisation. Within this context, capacity is generated and travels across the landscape in various ways as individuals become multi-members of different communities of practice, brokering and building connections in different ways. Grow Sheffield (as with other organisations) occupies both physical spaces across the city⁹⁴, but also a unique ideological, conceptual and practice-based space, defining boundaries that distinguish itself from other similar enterprises.

Feeding Manchester's position is distinct from Grow Sheffield in that it positions itself as a meta-community of practice by attempting to cultivate connections and develop continuity across the local sustainable food landscape. It discusses limitations that are well-recognised within the initiative, in relation to exerting an influence within the broader political food landscape of which it is part. Significant barriers to transformative change are identified, not least those relating to uneven distribution of power and resources. While building continuity and connection with more powerful actors (such as the local authority) are possible, it requires time and significant effort to develop relationships that overcome disparity between differing regimes of competence. However, as the example of Feeding Stockport shows, with the right approach and framework in place, individuals can play a decisive role in reconfiguring the landscape by facilitating partnerships through which diverse forms of knowledge can flow.

The final part of the chapter discusses a piece of collaborative action research conducted at the end of the data collection period, in the form of a networking event. The event brought together

⁹⁴ As well as actively mapping sustainable food communities, organisations, businesses and spaces through the Sheffield Food Network project.

the two case study organisations and invited actors from the broader community/sustainable food sector in Sheffield to participate in the development of a Sheffield-based network. A convenor of the Feeding Manchester network was invited to present progress in Manchester and co-facilitate (with a representative of Grow Sheffield) a workshop discussion on *if and how* a viable network could be developed in Sheffield. Principles of a communities of practice approach were implemented in the organisation and design of the event, as well as post-event analysis and evaluation. Although experimental in nature, it enabled the testing and validation of some of the key principles that have been discussed throughout the empirical chapters. Key lessons were learnt, including the importance of recognising and planning around trajectories at multiple scales- in a way that enables alignment and visioning of a positive future trajectory that reconciles the identities of the range of participants. Framing⁹⁵ is a key part of this, with emphasis on a forward-looking and action focused approach. Also important was awareness of pre-existing tensions and conflicts, maintaining neutrality and an open space for engagement, and learning from previous attempts at network or partnership development.

8.2. Contributions

The findings of this thesis draw on a communities of practice approach to advance understanding of the dynamics of grassroots innovation. Through empirical discussion and the summary of findings outlined above, a framing of community food initiatives has been developed that expresses the richness, complexity, and depth of interaction that constitutes them as communities of practice. It examines the shared histories, construction of identities, development of visions, models and theories of change that are negotiated within them; and examines how these influence their capacity to generate innovation from the grassroots towards a more sustainability society. Through the key contributions outlined below, this thesis advances understanding of ways in which community food initiatives have the potential to, in diverse, pluralised and creative ways, catalyse change towards more sustainable social practices.

Contribution 1: Reframing understanding of Grassroots Innovation.

This thesis challenges the framing of the debate surrounding grassroots innovation in a number of important ways, yielding implications for how we might understand, interact with and support grassroots community based initiatives.

Firstly, it reframes innovation in a way that focuses on *process* rather than outcome. Through this, it incorporates understanding of the dynamics of community, capacity, and identity as they

⁹⁵ With the event entitled “Sheffield - A Sustainable food capital in the making”

develop over time as part of trajectories of learning. Rather than focusing on examples of success as positive outcomes, it shifts focus towards the underlying processes of *social learning*, which incorporate the struggles, conflicts, and failures that are an inherent part of the creative and experimental process of innovation. From this perspective, thinking about how innovative processes of learning can be supported requires going beyond simplistic models of diffusion, towards more nuanced approaches that examine how interaction both within and across boundaries of the community of practice leads to co-production and development of shared practices.

Secondly, it conceptualises innovation as *inherent to* grassroots community food initiatives. It recognises that innovation occurs as part of the mundane core practices that maintain the community and ensure its long-term survival, *as well as* being part of the ongoing learning and negotiation that shapes more transformative societal aims and objectives. This shift in perspective places emphasis on the *capacities* (including both the 'financial-' and 'people-' based resources) that are required in negotiation of the dual challenges of - sustaining practice (despite often unsustainable resources) - and working towards generating long-term impact through the development and sharing of sustainable social practices. The term *innovative capacity* is used to describe tacit attributes underlying innovation, such as the development of goodwill, empowerment, confidence, ownership, and enabling the generation of competencies that underpin practices within the community and that are embedded in social learning. This approach recognises the centrality of learning for innovation, and the way in which locally produced knowledge is accumulated over time through shared histories, and embedded in practice through the collective efforts of members over the lifetime of the community of practice.

Thirdly, as well as being inherent to negotiation and learning within the community of practice, innovation is understood as being *co-produced* across boundaries through shared learning. Practice is understood as belonging to the community in a fundamental way, and therefore the thesis calls for a framing grassroots innovation that respects and empowers the communities within which it is negotiated. This reframing attempts to move away from discussion of innovation as something to be unleashed, exploited or diffused, and offers a way to promote more collaborative ways of learning and interacting that respect the locally generated knowledge and learning on which innovation is based.

The implications of the communities of practice approach to grassroots innovation outlined in the thesis means re-valuing community food initiatives and processes of learning through which their practices are negotiated and co-produced. It leads to a call for greater mutual support and

collaborative working that nurtures innovative capacity, and recognises the multiplicity of approaches that arise from the creative resourcefulness of communities of practice, as they work to respond to the challenges and opportunities with which they are faced. Through furthering understanding of the dynamics and nuances within innovative community food initiatives, the thesis therefore challenges current thinking around grassroots innovation as something that can or should be 'scaled-up' or diffused' and calls for a shift towards more collaborative forms of learning and co-production of knowledge.

Contribution 2: Developing a landscape level approach

By drawing on a communities of practice approach to grassroots innovation, the thesis advances understanding of how knowledge and capacity for innovation is generated and travels across the landscape level of analysis. This contributes to a recent shift towards a broader analytical focus in both grassroots innovations literature and communities of practice literature, bringing together conceptual developments in the two fields through empirical engagement with community food initiatives. The thesis demonstrates the considerable opportunities in moving between scales of interaction, through understanding the interrelated dynamics working both within and across communities of practice embedded in broader landscapes. Through this it also provides potential for furthering understanding of how through co-producing knowledge and reconfiguring landscapes of practice, grassroots innovation can contribute to broader transformative social change towards sustainability.

Conceptualising communities of practice as part of complex landscapes of practice enables understanding of how the practices that constitute grassroots innovation are configured as this broader analytical scale. As well as understanding internal dynamics of negotiation, the framework developed examines how communities interact with and articulate themselves in relation to one another and as part of broader systems of practice. The physical, intellectual, social, and ideological spaces they create provide opportunity for experimentation, and development of identities and regimes of competence as they form shared histories and trajectories of learning. They also form in a politically uneven landscape as some forms of knowledge are valued above others and communities compete for dominance and control. The term 'meta-community of practice' is coined to describe the role that Feeding Manchester plays, in forming a cohesive community of practice with an overarching enterprise, that connects multiple communities of practice in collaboration rather than completion. This conceptual configuration extends to a range of scales, offering understanding of the processes of negotiation through which cohesion is maintained, as well as extending the scope of analysis to implications for broader systems of practices. Further to this, the way in which innovation is

negotiated in bundles of practices that work to form local food *cultures*, demonstrates how innovation occurs not as isolated practice or through isolated communities but through processes of interconnection. Practices are intertwined and embedded in everyday lives in ways that are complex and thus innovation requires iterative, reflexive and ongoing negotiation over time in order to approach the significant challenges of catalysing change.

Through a nuanced understanding of relations between different communities and landscapes of practices, the framework developed also offers a way of addressing challenges associated with conceptualising uneven relations of power (thus addressing calls in communities of practice and practice theory more broadly). It conceptualises the role of competence and identity in producing and re-producing the uneven political landscape, through which boundaries between different knowledge regimes are enforced. Going a step further, it draws on Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) concept of system convenors to demonstrate the role individuals can play in reconfiguring that uneven landscape. As part of dynamic of negotiation, convenors are key in mediating between different regimes through facilitating partnerships, translating knowledge, generating trust, formalising connection through which diverse forms of knowledge can flow.

Employing a communities of practice approach for examining grassroots innovation at the landscape level means shifting understanding of how innovative practices emerge and the role of individuals, and the communities of which they are part, in facilitating broader scale change in practices. Going further, drawing on a practice-based approach enables understanding of how through ongoing interaction and social learning, the knowledge generated has the potential to permeate and persist as part of long-term trajectories of learning that transcend boundaries of communities of practice and influence broader systems of practice.

Contribution 3: Development of a communities of practice framework and methodology

The third key contribution of the thesis is the development of the framework itself, which presents a novel approach to understanding the complexities and dynamics of grassroots innovation at multiple scales, through a communities of practice perspective. The framework draws out key concepts from communities of practice theory and applies them in the context of community food initiatives, which has discussed throughout the thesis, enables interrogation of processes of negotiation both within and beyond the community of practice as they attempt to work towards generating social change. The approach tackles a range of critiques in the literature, by enabling analytical gaze to shift between scales, enabling conceptualisation of issues of power, and by refocusing on practice (rather than just community) by incorporating a practice theory approach. Through this the framework offers understanding of how innovation

both arises from the collective and can be carried by the individual, providing a set of analytical tools for conceptualising how competencies and innovative capacities travel across the landscape in space and time. Innovation is not confined to the community of practice or tied to its fate, but moves in diverse and dynamic ways, carried by individuals who internalise knowledge and meanings produced as part of their identities.

Communities of practice theory not only provided a valuable theoretical framework, but was also useful in forming the methodological approach in a number of ways. It supports a longitudinal approach to the research, which takes into account the trajectories of initiatives, and the ways in which they develop in relation to a range of internal and external factors (a gap identified particularly in relation to community food literature). It also provides a way of conceptualising and reflecting on the role of the researcher and their own learning trajectory within the communities of practice, as they become part of negotiations and of shared history. Further to this, as well as enabling analysis of one's own role and learning trajectory, it informs and supports practical intervention by conceptualising how learning can be collectively produced through action research.

The reframing of grassroots innovation and the development of the theoretical and methodological approach outlined in the thesis has implications for how we can and should engage with communities of practice as researchers. It enables us to envisage ourselves as part of the ongoing process of learning, and through interaction with communities become part of a process of co-production of practice. Recognising process and learning as central to grassroots innovation places the communities from which innovation arises at the centre of analysis. From this view, we can more easily recognise the nuanced but foundational struggle for capacity, the ongoing need for reflexivity, the resilience generated through empowerment, and develop respect for the autonomy and the creative resourcefulness that underpins the grassroots innovation they collectively produce.

8.3. Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This section highlights some of the limitations of the research, including areas of the study that could have been improved or done differently, or areas where there is scope for further research. It also makes recommendations for further research, pointing to areas where understanding could be advanced, and where the knowledge generated might be effectively applied.

Empirical engagement has largely been focused on in-depth ethnographic engagement with Grow Sheffield, with the majority of data collection taking place within this primary case study.

This enabled in-depth exploration of processes within the organisation, which was critical in informing a communities of practice approach to understanding innovation. However, significantly less data has been collected in relation to the Feeding Manchester creating an imbalance between the case studies that is apparent throughout the empirical section of the thesis. Despite this, Feeding Manchester has provided an extremely useful counterpoint, in examining processes at the landscape level and enabling conceptualisation of the initiative as a meta-community of practice. This added an extra dimension to the analysis, despite the fact that the processes working at the broader scale could have been explored in greater depth. A further advantage was in being able to bring the two case studies together, creating a platform for shared learning and ongoing connection between initiatives in the two cities.

A further challenge that is to some extent connected to the limitation in the research design highlighted above, was grappling with the rapidly developing field of the research, particularly in terms of engagement with landscape level theorising in grassroots innovation literature (i.e. Smith *et al.*, 2017), and in Wenger-Trayner *et al.*'s (2015) recent work on landscapes of practice. The importance of the landscape level of analysis emerged as the research progressed, and as such it is presented from the point of view of engagement in each of the case study initiatives, as they connect with and are influenced by (or influence) the landscape in various ways. In terms of ethnographic engagement, a reflexive research design allowed me to pursue such opportunities through emerging avenues in the field, enabling me frame my analysis in relation to unfolding developments in the field.

A recommendation for further research is to pursue analysis of landscape processes from a broader angle, incorporating interactions at various levels. In particular, the role of individuals as 'landscape convenors' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015) was useful in conceptualising how the landscape can be reconfigured by interaction and development of relationships across boundaries between different regimes of competence. This concept could be explored further in relation to grassroots innovation movements in examining the configuration of transformative and system level change. This thesis therefore echoes Wenger-Trayner *et al.* (2015), in calling for further empirical investigation into the role and dynamics of system convenors, including the ways in which they can be supported in building effective collaborations between actors from across the landscape.

Following the trend that seems to be emergent across the community food sector in promoting and building collaboration at a range of scales, a key emerging area of study is in the building of partnerships between grassroots innovators and other diverse actors. As well as pointing to this as an important emerging area for research, I also point to a communities of practice approach

in being useful in conceptualising the dynamics, and power relations within those emerging partnerships. Within this context, communities of practice theory can play an important role in making sure that different types of knowledge are valued, and building in an awareness of the role of power in defining what counts as competence (and vice versa). Furthermore, by focusing on boundary dynamics and the role of brokers, communities of practice theory has the potential to inform methodological approaches, and to be used as a tool to help in the communicating knowledge and learning across diverse communities. Practical applications of a communities of practice approach have been explored in various fields, but not yet applied to grassroots innovation.

In terms of methodological approach, while the thesis set out as a collaborative research project, the extent of collaboration with partners has been limited. Grow Sheffield played a key role in shaping the initial research design, highlighting some of the key challenges they faced as an organisation. However, the lack of capacity of organisations meant it was difficult to incorporate them as active partners in the research, which meant that while I was fully engaged with them, they played a passive rather than active role in the research design. This points to the need for awareness of the impact of the researcher, particularly when working with resource limited third sector organisations. I attempted to address this limitation in the later stages of the research by planning a piece of action research that incorporated the collaborative partners in the project. I would recommend this approach, and would recommend further research into applying a communities of practice approach in this context.

As well as providing a useful theoretical framework, the approach provides methodological advantages by conceptualising the role of the researcher, and placing a focus of knowledge, learning and competence at the centre of analysis. This is of particular value when working with grassroots organisations, and could be developed as a methodology that facilitates empowerment of communities and values diverse forms of knowledge.

8.4. Concluding Remarks

Set in a context of austerity and broad ranging social and environmental challenges, this thesis argues that innovation at the grassroots occurs not just in spite of, but as part of an engaged and ongoing response to the opportunities and challenges faced. The energy, enthusiasm and dedication of those involved drives the way forward for the development of innovative local solutions build on local knowledge and expertise generated through social learning. Innovation at the grassroots is built on shared histories and the legacy of collective stories, intertwining

with the lives of those who build capacity for innovation into their identities as they navigate the landscapes of practices of which they are part.

Engagement with both Grow Sheffield and Feeding Manchester has revealed a persistent struggle for resources and capacity, in which the very survival of the community of practice is considered an accomplishment. Despite this there remains an underlying and undeterred resilience. Capacity is carried by individuals through their goodwill, passion and ingenuity. While initiatives and innovations might sometimes falter, the learning generated permeates through the landscape, carried by those individuals and enhanced by the ongoing multi-membership that characterises the trajectories of their lives.

As a researcher working with and becoming part of the community food landscape over the last four years, I have had the privilege of witnessing and in a small way contributing to the drive for change that characterises grassroots initiatives; and in observing how challenging times provoke reflexivity, response and renegotiation of practice as part of an inherent and ongoing process of innovation. Through this thesis, I hope I have contributed in some way towards demonstrating the value and ingenuity of community food initiatives, and the innovative potential they demonstrate through their creative and passionate responses to the dynamic and changing landscape of which they are part.

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