Mobile Foodscapes: A Case Study of Food Carts on Madison’s Isthmus

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Abstract

Our research investigates the food cart scene on Madison’s isthmus. City policies and regulations focus the density of food carts on Library Mall on the UW-Madison campus; however we emphasize in our narrative the social and spatial interactions that factor into the area’s importance as a hub. Multiple interviews demonstrate that food cart location and design reflect the interactions of economics, policy, and producer-consumer dynamics as well as the constraints of physical geography. Ethnographic and landscape observations document the many social and spatial relationships tied to mobile food. These relationships include the close producer-consumer rapport encouraged by the carts, the social interaction fostered by the vibrant atmosphere, and the communal identities surrounding food, connected to the environment the carts create. The carts expand a culinary niche by bridging community and city involvement, and finally, encouraging food mobility, convenience, quality, and uniqueness.

Introduction

At the University of Wisconsin - Madison, Library Mall is a node of social activity on campus. Specifically during the lunch hour, and especially on fair weather days, the mall transforms from an open concrete pathway into a vibrant culinary landscape. Throughout the morning, food carts line up in rows, offering a variety of edible options for patrons, providing delicious food within minutes. As students and food lovers, who traverse this pathway daily, we were immediately drawn to the unique landscape located there for our own research. In a city where food largely shapes the social dynamics, we sought to understand how these carts specifically influence the interactions between consumer, producer, and community in the context of space. How these flows shift, change, come together, and diverge ultimately shape the
sense of place in Madison in respect to what people choose to eat and who they choose to purchase food from. We ultimately wanted to analyze the nature of the street food vending industry in Madison, why it attracts people, and how it is affected by the physical space.

We aim to answer our research question by discovering where food carts are located within Madison and specifically why they are located in those places, focusing on the key factors involved with the placement of the food carts. The theme of our research is analyzing the social and spatial dynamics that influence the food cart landscape in the context of the food cart narrative. To clarify, we utilize this term in our project to explain the social relationships and interactions that are fostered by certain spatial environments.

Focusing on external forces shaping food carts’ trajectories like economic incentives for the food cart industry, planning regulations oriented around street vending, and the internal social relationships which occur between food cart owners and customers, we will draw the connection to these forces in making sense of food carts’ role in Madison. In sum, our research question seeks to answer where food carts are located in Madison, why they are located in these places, and how food carts influence the edible landscape of the City. Carts are primarily located on Library Mall and Capitol Square, their location highly influenced by policy and regulation, in turn shaping the landscape through social dynamics of space.

Before we discuss in greater detail where these carts are located, we must first define the food cart. A food cart is a mobile distributor of food (Tangires 1990, 91). Often in the form of a truck, small pushcart, or as is the norm in Madison, a trailer (Refer to Image 6, Appendix), these mobile kitchens provide primarily the UW-Madison community with a convenient variety of quick lunch options. The food carts in Madison are often transported to Library Mall or Capitol Square before the lunch hour, offering people a quick food option. To fully define a food cart, it
is important to contextualize that definition within the historical development of mobile food across the United States. Street vending existed as form of exchange throughout history, both in the informal and formal sectors of the economy. Narrowing the focus to the United States, food carts as a form of street vending largely stemmed from the factory lifestyle prevailing during the industrial period of U.S. history, specifically the World War Two era (Tangires 1990, 95). In addition, influxes of immigrants looking for opportunity for attainable employment utilized the street vending industry as a means of living with low overhead cost and quick startup opportunity (Tangires 1990, 94).

Library Mall is an open area situated between Lake Street and Park Street, as the 700 block of State Street. It receives flows of people from various nodes, such as the Memorial Union, Bascom Hill, University Avenue, and State Street. Together with the Capitol Square, at the other end of State Street, Library Mall serves as a prime example of the Grand Manner style. Grand Manner is a style of city planning that was common during the formative years of Madison’s city planning development (Mollenhoff, 1982, 345). Employed by John Olin and John Nolen to create a spatial layout that facilitates the ideals of the City Beautiful, the space utilizes open spaces to promote and encourage social dynamics (Mollenhoff 1982, 345). Beyond that, this style of city planning is very top-down oriented, meaning that planners assert a strong influence on the physical form of the city. This is observable in the spatial layout of Madison, specifically in the gridded layout of the space, which links focal points (Robbins, 2010, 244-246). Madison is unique because it is one of the few cities that is located on an isthmus (Hansen, 2012). The isthmus focuses all of the people into spaces where they can find the two largest food cart areas. This brings a vibrant culture into the area, given the tight location and the variety of people in the city. It is important that the location of food carts is on this population dense
isthmus because it would not be as iconic or visited as much. The isthmus helps make the food cart culture what it is in Madison. The space is comprised of green space with a fountain, a raised stage area that serves as a sitting area for many of the Mall’s visitors, and a wide, open path leading to State Street that the food carts use to set up shop and sell their food. The flows of people from various locations on campus and in the downtown area towards Library Mall create a natural space to not only have a food cart but also to socialize (Sheinman 2012).

**Literature Review**

**Introduction:**

Our research focuses on the story of the food carts in Madison, where they are located in the city, and how they influence the culinary landscape. We discuss and understand the carts’ use of physical space, through observation of the food cart hubs in the city and analysis of the city infrastructure that affects their location. We also acknowledge that food carts influence the city on non-physical levels as well. The carts play a crucial role in economic dynamics, regulation and policy, as well as societal perceptions of food. Hence, we highlight multiple aspects of food carts to weave a narrative of their integration into the city’s landscape, both literally and figuratively.

In order to complete our research and obtain our data, we utilize multiple sources of information. Literature provides details on the history, economic role, and policy of carts, while suggesting various theoretical standpoints on food carts and descriptions of methodology techniques. Moreover, we look to different methods of data collection and assessment, including observation, interviewing, and mapping to further round out our approach to illustrating food carts’ place in Madison.
We examined both the history of Madison and its urban development, as well as the development and evolution of food carts in relation to their home cities across the United States. Initially, mobile food began as food baskets and with the evolution of technology, they emerged as their current form: food trucks or food carts (Tangires 1990, 92). In addition, mobile food serves as an integral part of multiple economic sectors in cities across the U.S. Mobile food not only exists as an industry of its own within American cities, where vendors sell food along the streets and on walkway corners, but also functioned historically within other industries, specifically in manufacturing sectors during World War Two era (Tangires 1990, 95). Beyond providing attainable employment opportunities for immigrants, food carts proved integral in providing fast, warm, freshly cooked food to manufacturing workers when most factories possessed inadequate kitchen space to match the shifting cultural demands experienced during the expansion of industry in WWII and the post-war era (Tangires 1990, 95). We use this history that Tangires provides to examine the changing roles of mobile food throughout history, and although her article discusses mostly New York City policies, apply that development to regulations adopted in the city of Madison.

Both the Wall St. Journal article (McLaughlin 2009), as well as the article from SmartMoney.com (Marte 2012), discuss the changing role of food carts - from providing basic meals to offering a wide variety of both ethnic foods as well as avant-garde catering styles (McLaughlin 2009, Marte 2012). Food carts embody both the historical cultural shift discussed in Tangires’ article (100,1990), where social expectations transitioned from bringing food from home to the factory to eating lunch out or “on-the-go,” as well as the newer cultural shift of consumer expectations. Consumers now prefer ethnic, specialty, local, as well as vegetarian options (McLaughlin 2009, 1 and Marte 2012). Finally, both the McLaughlin and the Marte
article highlight the use of recent social media developments, such as Twitter and Facebook, to inform consumers not only of cart location but menu items as well. This application proved to be both useful as well as interesting in our discussion of the current mobile food landscape in Madison.

**Theoretical Perspectives:**

As we continued with our research, we sought to understand and discuss different theoretical viewpoints of food carts and how such theories assert their influence on the dynamics of food carts in the cityscape. A common theoretical perspective in the literature we analyzed looks at the transition from modernist to postmodernist thinking, and how these theories shape opinions of street vendors’ contribution to the economy and physical sense of a place. Cross and Morales in the introduction of *Street Entrepreneurs: People, Place and Politics in Local and Global Perspective*, analyze the modern and postmodern dichotomy and illustrate how society’s shift from modernist to postmodernist ideals matches a general change from negative to positive perceptions of food carts in the community (2007, 4, 10). In the body of our research, we focus on defining, as well as contextualizing these definitions. In addition, we utilize their discussion of changing theory to demonstrate how cities increasingly view carts as opportunities for economic and community growth (Cross and Morales 2007, 2, 8). As Cross and Morales indicate in their book, street vendors increase social interaction between the product producer and also offer chances for community members to either participate in the local economy as small business owners or supporters of small business, like customers (2007, 7-10). By using the concept of theoretical shift, we view Madison’s landscape through various theoretical lenses as foundations for our own explanation covering the range of social and economic dynamics we observe when food carts sell their products to customers.
In addition, we discuss Madison’s policies to demonstrate how the city regulates food carts and the methods by which planners allocate space for carts. In order to illustrate the extent of regulation currently present in Madison, we compare the city to other examples of regulations in the United States. Both Crystal Williams in “A Hungry Industry on Rolling Regulations: A Look at Food Truck Regulations in Cities Across the United States” and Tester et al. in “An Analysis of Public Health Policy and Legal Issues Relevant to Mobile Food Vending” offer examples of city regulations, covering the extent from cities with stricter policies, to those with more relaxed stances. Cities such as Portland value infrastructure development as a resource for encouraging cart presence (Kapell 2008, 36), and the authors of “Food Cartology: Rethinking Urban Spaces as People Places” suggest that the city continue to develop spaces supporting the mobile food scene (Kapell 2008, 5). New York City possesses a more restrictive and limiting view on food carts, only allotting licensing for 3000 carts while the demand for permits surpasses this figure (Kettles, Morales 2009, 35). The research covering the various city policies implemented for mobile food around the country aids us in analyzing Madison’s stance from a policy perspective, highlighting the weaker points of regulation, and address the methods the city applies to encourage a growing food cart economy.

Moreover, Tester et al. examines beyond the typical discussion on regulation, which emphasizes factors such as sanitation and rules governing food cart parking, arguing that regulation could be utilized to improve food access to underprivileged communities (2010, 2038). In order to effectively capitalize on the mobility of food carts and their ability to access places restaurants cannot, cities may provide incentives for carts choosing to offer more nutritious, fresh options (2010, 2038). Another motivation to bring fresh foods into poor neighborhoods would also enable cities like Madison to provide healthy food to those who
cannot easily access balanced meals (Kettles, Morales 2009, 31). Nonetheless, challenges with this application exist, including the issue of keeping prices low in an effort to keep food affordable for those most in need (Tester et al. 2010, 2043-2044). Overall, the topic of food access provides the opportunity for us to explore the notion of mobility in respect to food carts and the benefits of this feature. However, since we ultimately chose not to focus too heavily on food inequality, we explain in more detail our wish to further research this subject if given additional time and resources to expand our project.

The subject of social interaction discussed in Cross and Morales’ chapter “Introduction: Locating Street Markets in the Modern/Postmodern World,” illustrates the concept of producer-consumer interaction in the marketplace (2007, 7-8). Colin Sage’s chapter “Trust in Markets: Economies of Regard and Spaces of Contestation in Alternative Food Networks,” further breaks down this feature of food landscapes by specifically highlighting the role of farmers’ markets in facilitating connections between those who purchase food and those who cultivate the produce (2007, 148-150, 153-154). According to Sage, as consumers grow more concerned with the gap between producers and consumers in an increasingly globalizing world, patrons often favor the directness of places such as farmers’ markets where one may personally connect and interact with the product producer (2007, 147-150). This idea possesses the potential to readily translate to the food cart scene in Madison, where cart owners often prepare their meals on-site, serving the food to customers within minutes of purchase. In the interview with Banzo, they stress this uniqueness to their cart, as well as the increasing importance to customers that food be prepared on-site. They also highlight the manner in which this preparation method increases customer and employee interaction (Sheinman, 2012). The connection between producer and consumer here
also alludes to another key concept relating to the food cart influence on the edible landscape: the notion of “fast food.”

To narrate the food carts’ unique culinary position, we found that Minjoo Oh’s definition and insights on the meaning of “fast food” and the way different societies perceive it (i.e., what makes food “fast”) lends insight into the cultural viewpoints of food’s role in people’s lives. It offers information applicable and pertinent to our discussion of food carts’ ability to balance quickly prepared food, with a variety of unique options. Although the standardization of food culture and the globalizing marketplace largely impact the concept of fast food in the United States (Oh 2009, 8), Oh argues that every individual possesses a unique mental construct of food (Oh 2009, 18). Therefore, we can argue that food carts fit into Madison as a developing category of fast food - they possess mobility and a quick turnover rate (Tester et al. 2010, 2038), yet they also embody the capacity to serve numerous fresh, nutritious options (Tester et al. 2010, 2038), alongside local and more personalized service (Oh 2009, 3), similar to that which a customer may find at a restaurant.

Literature Review Conclusions:

Maintaining our focus on Madison, we will synthesize the information we gather in the form of observation, interviews, photos, maps, and obviously, varied literature, to create a narrative that portrays the food cart landscape. Our research will also bring to the forefront the carts’ role in creating identities for not only customers and vendors, but also the city as a whole. In an era where cities market themselves based upon an identity they either draw out of current landscapes or attempt to create one, the food culture present in Madison serves as a prime example of the possibilities for food carts to become a viable marketing strategy. As Sims says in “Food, Place and Authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience,” a food based
identity - especially a sustainable one - functions as a creative and effective way to entice a tourist economy (Sims 2009, 321-322). Within the city, the University plays a large role in not only attracting new residents, but also new students. Madison - as both a city and a home to a globally-renowned university - could focus on the identities citizens draw from the city’s rich cultural landscape. The food cart landscape embodies this creation of identity, providing to prospective students, as well as other visitors, a window offering a view of the identities and landscapes established here.

Specifically, by observing landscape’s influence upon identity, we can draw on other city’s planning strategies and compare them to the spatial organization within Madison, given its strong history in city planning. Madison’s planning follows the “Grand Manner” style, including the focal centers of Library Mall and the Capitol Square, (Mollenhoff 1982, 345), both constructed with modernist ideals of the “city beautiful” and the “city functional” (Mollenhoff 1982, 345) in mind. However, the city and university now stress the importance of using these top-down planned areas as flexible social spaces that contribute to a post-modern society, where planning initiatives emphasize the concept of mobility as a key element in the urban landscape (Cross and Morales 2007, 4, 10). As researchers, we expect part of Madison’s identity, especially in the future, to intricately connect with the food cart industry as planners and policy-makers design for expanding mobile geographies.

**Research Body**

**Background and History:**

The history of mobile food vending in the United States is necessary. According to an article by Helen Tangires, mobile food vending acted an integral part of the economy in the U.S for most of its history. Initially, mobile food vendors sold their food from baskets, and typically
vended one type of certain food (Tangires 1990, 91). Food vendors sold lunches and saved money to acquire a pushcart once they could afford to do so. Vendors were frequently new immigrants to the U.S and, from Tangires’ chronicle, often were perceived as a problem for the city they inhabited (1990, 94). Since pushcarts were a cheap, easy way for immigrants to make money, they quickly gained popularity and began to crowd the streets, as well as frustrate brick and mortar shopkeepers and restaurant owners because they stole business (Tangires 1990, 93). Eventually cities like New York came up with various zoning and permit laws to restrict the vendors to certain areas in the city, instead of abolishing them, on the basis that the vendors, who were part of the lower class, would revolt. That would only cause more issues for the city, therefore rules were enacted, and food carts were allowed to stay (Tangires 1990, 94).

The next jump in mobile food vending’s role in society and in the landscape of the city occurred in the industrial boom during World War Two (Tangires 1990, 95). At this point, factories dealt with both a shift in the structure of the economy and workplace, which when combined with a shift in cultural values, offered a great opportunity for mobile food to prove its usefulness (Tangires 1990, 95). An expanding labor force, fluctuating orders, and the need to maintain short breaks due to the war, meant that factories could not easily predict how feasible building an entire kitchen and restaurant would be. Therefore, factory owners brought in food carts, which operated from a smaller kitchen and brought the food to the workers during their break, providing a quick, hot meal on-site (Tangires 1990, 99). Two campaigns initiated by the National Restaurant Association also influenced these decisions. First, the nutrition campaign, which emphasized the negative influence of hearty foods workers brought from home upon worker’s productivity, promoted sandwiches in sanitary packaging, as a healthier alternative (Tangires, 1990, 100). That, combined with the “eating-out” campaign, emphasized how eating
out freed up the housewife’s time because she did not have to make dinner or pack lunches. They portrayed eating lunch out as a privilege for everyone establishing the precedent for workers to eat out (Tangires 1990, 100). Thus, in tandem, the economic changes and considerations factory owners had in mind when bringing food carts into the workplace, were reinforced by the cultural shifts concerning food consumption, and overall, fostered workers’ preferences for the food carts, ultimately keeping the industry alive.

Today, due to the norms previously established by the Industrial Revolution and the National Restaurant Association, food carts are still a thriving piece of the economy, and have taken on various reincarnations. They continue to fit into the social expectations of our times, because workers of all types want to eat out for lunch, have time to socialize, and have a tasty, hot, convenient meal (Tangires 1990, 101). Mobile food has continued to modify its physical form according to the landscape it inhabits as well; in stadiums exist food baskets where vendors wander through the crowd selling snacks, Portland has stationary food stands, Minneapolis, food trucks, and, Madison food carts. Each form of mobile food plays a different role in its respective landscape, and this is where, we as a research group, became interested in the specific role of the food carts in the landscape we pass through and inhabit at Library Mall.

Library Mall serves as an effective example of a highly-planned space that welcomes the flexibility of uses. The open concrete walkway facilitates pedestrian traffic, while connecting the UW campus to State Street. Moreover, seating areas such as an amphitheater, tables, and steps included in the physical space foster social interaction and provide space for people to congregate and sit down. Hence, Library Mall offers a conducive area for the carts to serve the public given its naturally communal-oriented space. The carts that line up and down the Mall utilize the open space to their advantage to both serve customers but also allow enough space for
passerby and interaction between customers. Here, Modernist-Postmodernist theory is effective for analyzing the Mall’s ability to both adopt a planned layout yet attract a flexible social scene (Refer to Images 8,9,10, Appendix).

Modernist theory viewed street vending as very backwards and unattractive for cities, as discussed by Cross and Morales (2007, 1-2, 6). Modernism emphasized a system where systems such as Fordism thrived, where mass production thrived with a “economic centralization and regulation” (Cross and Morales 2007, 3). As Cross and Morales further explain, Modernism focused on the notion that “everything is ordered, efficient, and structured” (2007, 4). Tying planning figures in, such as Le Corbusier who planned cities (from a bird’s eye view) as if looking above the scene where each place’s use or purpose could be specifically designated in the context of the overall landscape, Modernism lacked an interest in street vending because it was viewed vending as deviating from their goals for planning (Cross and Morales 2007, 4). Cross and Morales also discuss Modernism’s role in globalization by facilitating production on a massive scale, yet creating an unevenness in economic opportunity for countries (2007, 5), which also created the perception of street vending as an unsightly part of the city and economy.

However, as cities like Madison share an increasing interest in street vending, more specifically with mobile food, planners and citizens alike begin acknowledging the positive role of carts in the community, which Cross and Morales, in part, contribute to a conceptual shift to postmodernism. As the authors explain, postmodernism emphasizes the individual’s role in society, as well as the individual’s purpose to lead one’s own life --- not governed by the influence of the modernist perspective which focused on the masses (2007, 7). Street vending brings the focus back to the local market, offering economic opportunity for those seeking to start up businesses with less cost, and gain the experience of working as an independent producer.
(Cross and Morales 2007, 8). Especially in a city like Madison, where one witnesses a strong emphasis on local markets and movements, street vending encourages this branch of Capitalism. In this sense, postmodernism applies to the discussion of food carts in the cityscape by highlighting the importance of self-sufficiency and opportunity, while indicating the importance of street vending’s role in attracting consumers to the local economy (2007, 7).

Library Mall links both modernist and postmodernist ideals for Madison’s mobile food scene, thus sitting in a unique position between two distinct theoretical viewpoints of planning. On one hand, the space follows modernist principles in its strictly organized layout and spatial attributes. Nonetheless, the space also fosters the flexibility of postmodernism capital activity, encouraging independent business ventures through the food carts. In addition to economic benefits from food carts, they also further emphasize social dynamics, which the Mall’s space helps facilitate. By purchasing food from a cart, the consumer chooses to purchase a meal directly from the producer, who typically prepares the food directly onsite. Similar to Sage’s discussion on farmers’ markets and their importance in bringing knowledge back to the consumer about where food comes from by encouraging transparency (2007, 148-150) of this information between farmer and customer, food carts also encourage this form of interaction (2007, 153-154). Furthermore, food carts rely on establishing “trust,” a point Sage highlights for farmers’ markets, due to the “human interaction” between the cart owner and customer, as well as the consumer’s individual choice determining where he/she decides to purchase food (2007, 147).

To further elaborate on this concept of “personal” choice emphasized by post-modernist theory, Minjoo Oh discusses the individual’s choice regarding “fast food” (2009, 18), which applies to the discussion of fast food in respect to the cart scene. Food carts emphasize
convenience, especially with service, yet can still serve a diversity of high quality and cultural options. Customers receive their food within minutes of placing an order, the food typically produced on-site by the owner and fellow cart workers, and consumers often interact with the cart owner while he/she prepares the food. Therefore, mobile food carts provide a prime example of food service in the postmodernist era, where place, culture, and society shape conceptions of foodscapes (Oh 2009, 2, 4, 18). As Oh (2009, 3, 7-8) notes, fast food exists in multiple forms including more standardized options like one observes through restaurant chains with set menus, as well as flexible options that offer variety, quality, and even locally-produced ingredients.

Library Mall provides both the open space for the carts, customers, and community to come together around food, as well as several unique options for the customer, including diet-specific, ethnic, and beverage choices, structured within a social scene (Oh 2009, 14).

**Methods in Research:**

Interviewing as a data collection method significantly contributed to our process of gathering information and characterized perspectives of professionals, such as owners and citizens, within the food cart culture. We utilized interviewing to gather insights about why Madison is an ideal location for food carts and why the trend is growing (Secor, 2010, 199-201). To inform ourselves about interviewing we researched articles that give instructions and suggestions to enrich the interviewing process. For example, we read C.H. Sin’s article discussing the importance of place while conducting an interview. Sin emphasizes how place plays an important role in the attitude of the interviewee and the manner with which he or she responds to questions (Sin, C.H 2003, 306). Additionally, Sin (2003, 308) describes how subjects tend to feel more relaxed and open to questions when they interview in familiar spaces. This information helped us understand how different spaces affect interview dynamics and how place
impacts the interviewees’ reactions to those environments. To accommodate these findings, we conducted our interviews in places like the “Der Rathskeller” at the UW Memorial Union, where both we, as interviewers, as well as our subjects could feel at ease in a familiar location. In turn, we sought to synthesize this knowledge into our own interview process as we obtain our data and apply our findings. Another topic within interviewing we researched centers on the difference between male and female interviewees, as well as how nonverbal communication plays a crucial part in the interviewing process (Metzler 1997). Metzler notes the importance of the interviewer’s body language and relaxed attitude, as these factors further promote an atmosphere conducive to productive interviews (1997). Using these tools, we can ensure that our interviews are more efficient and helpful to the interviewee as well as our group. Our interviews drew from this knowledge of techniques and setting as we continued our data collection and integrated personal interviews with a food cart owner, an urban food specialist, and the city mobile vending coordinator.

We include photography as a method of gathering information to paint the food cart landscape in Madison, maintaining consideration of photography’s risks and limitations. According to the chapter taken from Collier’s book on photography in anthropology, photography serves as a useful tool both in analyzing larger spatial patterns and when examining a city’s cultural landscape (1986). However, Collier also highlights the limitations of a photo. For example, photos only show the viewer the surface interactions in a given landscape; therefore, researchers must be careful not to merely make assumptions based solely on a photo (1986). Beyond considering the photography’s limitations, James’ chapter in The Cultural Life of Images: Visual Representation in Archeology examines the role of imagery in academic work. He discusses discursive versus presentational information and their differences. Mainly,
presentational information possesses less control over how the viewer interprets the information and perhaps more importantly, runs the risk of appearing less credible because of the prejudices that academics often maintain concerning imagery (James 1997, 24-25). In addition, James warns readers that humans in images often evoke an emotion reaction from viewers and that, therefore, the photographer should minimize the presence of humans in photos as viewers tend to falsely assume details about the information and subjects presented in the photo or image (1997, 26). Despite the fact that this author maintained that humans in photos can be a negative aspect, we feel that human subjects in photos lend important details pertaining to producer-consumer interactions in the physical space of Library Mall.

As for actually using photos within our own project, we focus our photography on the food carts and space of Library Mall in Madison. We seek to present the landscape’s visual aspects to enhance the reader’s understanding of the dynamics involved in mobile landscapes. Beyond that, we include photos, of Library Mall, as well as of previous food cart forms, to give accurate, historically-contextual evidence. Primarily, photos portraying old food cart forms from the Tangesire article provided visual contextualization of the food cart development process. Current photos of Library Mall, as well as those from our interview with Warren Hansen (the City’s street vending coordinator) lent perspective on Madison’s specific landscape. We maintain awareness of subjects’ personal space in photos, while clearly indicating our intentions to only use the photo evidence and examples most pertinent to our work, simultaneously avoiding the inclusion of excess images and therefore appearing less credible.

As a method in action, photography proved to be very useful for understanding the Library Mall as a dynamic space. We also used photography to better analyze the food carts’ visual aspects in conjunction with cultural stereotypes. For example, we photographed the space
with two foci. The first set of photos we took concentrated upon Library Mall’s basic physical layout. These photos enabled us, as researchers, to gain stronger perspective and analyze the dynamics and the flows within the space from a more or less objective point of view. Clearly, as photographers, our images are biased; however, we maintain confidence that they provide a clear perspective for us. We avoided emphasizing people in the photos, if possible, and focused on the objects within and around the Mall instead, to ascertain that, in analysis, the physical space’s impact on the interactions there would be clear. The second photo set focused on the food carts as a body of work. Instead of focusing on the food cart’s placement within Library Mall, we used these images to focus on the visual cues food carts employ to attract customers. For example, we photographed each cart (on the Library Mall), from multiple angles, to show the design and colors used in each one. The third set focused on each food cart’s menu, to accompany our photos highlighting the visual design, and to better create an understanding of the cultural implications and stereotypes employed by food cart owners to create a customer base.

Maps also play a role in our methodology. To ensure they appear visually striking and effectively display information, we looked to sources for techniques and tools to help develop our maps in an informative, yet clear manner. In a chapter about the human eye and how viewers perceive maps through the eye system, we learned about techniques pertaining to the choice of colors and patterns that attract the viewer and display the information in a format favoring comprehension of visual data (MacEachren, 1995). We also researched how to incorporate factors of space and time to depict changes in the food cart landscape. MacEachren includes blinking features on an interactive interface, or the color yellow highlighting smaller objects, as effective tools to show changes in time and space (1995, 417, 419). We apply some of the tools
discussed in these chapters to our process of creating a map, in an effort to tell a visual story about the landscapes of Madison food carts, specifically in respect to their location in the City.

As a group, we decided an effective manner to conceptualize, and also describe the food cart scene in Madison would be mapping. Maps are an effective way of visually explaining a landscape, as well as its context (Hanna, 2010, 267-268). A map of the food cart locations and hot spots such as Library Mall and the Capitol Square, as well as the various carts located around the downtown area, serve as a helpful way to emphasize how the food carts physically fit into the city’s spatial pattern (Refer to Image 22 in appendix). We desired to show the carts in the contextual light of the city and how they highlight certain hot spots of capital as well as of residence and employment. This was done through our map by showing the two main locations in the downtown area where food carts become a focus at peak lunch time. Our map highlights how two of the largest concentrations of food carts are located at the center of downtown, right next to the capitol and also near the campus. Both of these visually show centers of social concentrations of two large populations within Madison, the government employees and students, respectively. Both Library Mall and the Capitol Square are places that have identities that are often associated with food and food carts. These areas can be noted as spaces of high population when visited, after seeing how much food carts have contributed to the use of these space it is easy to see how food carts could be positive additions to other areas in Madison.

In addition, we propose two peripheral spaces in Madison that, using information we have gathered from interviews and articles, would be successful food cart locations. These two peripheral spaces are Oscar Meyer and the Research Park (Alfonso Morales Interview, 1 November 2012). As the map shows, the food carts currently do not exist much beyond the center of Madison (Refer to Image 22 in appendix). Oscar Meyer has great potential due to the
large number of employees that need food. Similar to the industrial boom, incorporating food carts into the existing food system would generate profits, while providing the plant employees with an alternative, fresh food option. It would also allow employees to conveniently explore multiple menu options, without leaving the factory, encouraging and allowing for more socialization. Research Park on the west side of Madison could also largely benefit from the food carts. This area would particularly benefit because few other food options exist within the area. Research Park also contains multiple businesses, offering a new, potentially very lucrative expansion option to food cart owners. Having the mobility of food carts, or perhaps food trucks, in this more expansive area further promotes them to Research Park. Moreover, these two places offer an interesting business advantage because they are farther away from the center of Madison, where most of the food carts are. This would be a possible way to get the food carts to more corners of the city, giving food cart owners a means to expand their business, trying out new, different menu options, as well as expanding their customer base.

Observation supplements our other research methods. Both participant observation as well as non-participant observation identify the economic, cultural, historical, political and technological landscapes that combine to form the food cart landscape across America and specifically in Madison. A group member works at one of the food carts located at Library Mall and her participant observation will aid in our analysis process. In addition, we compiled a checklist during group observation sessions of the food carts and customers. Both observation forms give us a general picture of the interactions and dynamics that rule the food cart landscape and will lend to our predictions about food carts’ future cultural and economic roles. Observing the two food cart locations will also help our group examine how city planning plays an important role in creating a space conducive to mobile food industries. This allows us to compare
our observations to those we will examine from our literature research, which often concern the food cart geographies in cities.

**Results, Discussion, and Preliminary Conclusions:**

Initially, in trying to characterize the food cart narrative in Madison, we conceived a project in which we focused our attention and research on the food cart customers. We examined three subjective categories: sex, broken down into male, female, and other; race, categorized as Indian, Asian, African American, Caucasian, Hispanic and other; and lastly, age, divided into young (0-30), middle aged (30-60), and elderly (60 and above) (Refer to Image 23 in appendix). We also created a chart identifying the carts physically present, as well as the number of people in line at four distinct times. After two periods of observation, we quickly realized that although the data proved interesting, and with perhaps more research and time, we might garner more insights, given our research’s short lifespan, the data would not provide a solid argument for our narrative. In effect, the observations mainly told us something we previously hypothesized, that the main customers at the Library Mall located appeared to come from the university community. This is significant because, despite the fact that we felt it presented pertinent data to study, it wasn’t giving us a strong enough narrative about the landscape and dynamics associated with the social space there.

In lieu of observations forming our study’s primary focus, we shifted our intentions toward a different part of the narrative, thereby highlighting the social and spatial interactions facilitated through Library Mall. In addition, when considering alternative options, such as surveys, we elected interviews as our main primary data source to ascertain information regarding Library Mall’s spatial dynamics. Lastly, to note for the sake of time, rather than surveying individual cart customers, we decided our own previous experiences as participant
observers and consumers would lend substantial perspective in that direction. This path allowed us to maintain our focus on creating a narrative, while incorporating important perspectives concerning the food cart presence in Madison.

Personal Interview: Alfonso Morales, 1 November 2012:

Consequently, we conducted three interviews in the course of our research. The first, with Alfonso Morales, an Urban Planning professor at UW-Madison in the graduate studies program. He focuses on many topics pertinent to contextualizing the food cart scene in Madison. His academic research involves analyzing market dynamics, specifically within food systems, as well as highlighting a minority perspective, specifically in regards to food security. We chose to seek him out based on multiple factors. Firstly, one of our group members had previously worked with him as an advisor for her Slow Food internship. Beyond the personal connection, he also works for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which means that he, as a food systems researcher in the city, would have a unique perspective concerning the relationship of food carts and mobile food systems in Madison’s culture and landscape.

Our interview with Professor Morales proved both informative and interesting, and we gained not only an academic perspective of Morales’ experience studying street vending, but also his personal view of the Madison mobile food scene. In particular, we sought to understand through his perspective how the food carts in the city shape the culinary landscape. In response to a question concerning food carts’ placement in the landscape, Morales emphasized the role carts play in adding life and activity to “underutilized” space, while offering financial opportunities to immigrant populations seeking to achieve independence and success in a new country. Moreover, carts experiment with a variety of menu options, while catering to temporal flows of space, i.e. taking advantage of peak lunch hour and evening food rushes to sell their
When asked about the relationship between carts and local restaurants, Morales pointed out that food carts act as a form of menu experimentation for restaurants interested in selling new options, yet allowing them to test such items out in a more temporary setting. Moreover, carts give customers a chance to experience restaurant-style food with convenience, without the wait or expectation to spend more time sitting down at the physical location of the brick and mortar primary restaurant. Morales focused on food carts as a part of the whole system, more so than solely emphasizing carts in Madison, which enabled us to make connections to how carts play a role in cities in general. This “systems” approach offered us an overarching perspective, which provided the information we needed to subsequently address our additional interviews with questions more centered on Madison’s specific relationships with carts. Hence, although the Morales interview did touch on how Madison’s landscape interacts with the cart scene and vice versa, he primarily offered insightful thoughts concerning how the carts increasingly occupy an important role in the mobile food scene, both in the United States and abroad (Alfonso Morales Interview, 1 November 2012).

Personal Interview: Warren Hansen, 14 November 2012:

We came upon our second interview, both through our interest to meet with someone from the City Planning department, but also due to encouragement from Alfonso Morales. In visiting the city municipal building, we were informed that the city has a specific position dedicated to street vending coordination and therefore, contacted Warren Hansen, the street vending coordinator. We suspected that Hansen would offer a planning perspective regarding food carts, their role in the city, and the regulations and processes dictating their presence in the
city. Moreover, we sought to gather information from an authoritative as opposed to scholarly opinion, to ensure that our narrative encompassed a diverse collection of experiences relating to mobile food in Madison. We understood, as researchers, that we could easily gather many of these facts concerning policy online. However, we also valued including a personal approach to policy-making, specifically hoping to discuss the narrative concerning why the food cart landscape exists in its current state here in Madison. Rather than emphasizing the technical language of ordinances and policies, we prefer to include a more accessible description to the regulations behind food carts.

In order to tie in a more centralized perspective of the carts in Madison, we asked Hansen several questions highlighting specific details surrounding Madison’s landscape in shaping the food cart scene as a part of the City’s identity. During our interview with Hansen, he led us through a PowerPoint he presented at San Francisco conferences on food cart culture. Hansen, as an actor within the planning community, solidified the Street Vending Coordinator position, becoming a presence at conferences focusing on food carts as part of street vending activities. This further demonstrates the growing awareness of the food cart culture in cities across the U.S., including Madison’s position as a leading example of a successful food cart hub. To begin, Hansen reiterated our research findings which discuss how the street grid of the Isthmus emphasizes the connection of key focal points, and translates into our current culinary landscape by providing the structure enabling the current food cart scene culture to thrive. To elaborate, the well-defined street grid offers a conducive structure for food carts, since, according to Hansen all the carts must “all fit on the sidewalk” and be “self-contained” (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012). Therefore, the cart structure must fit the constraints of the city sidewalks, as well as meeting the size limit of 56 square feet (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012).
Therefore, Madison does not allow food trucks due to their size which Hansen argued tends to obstruct the flow of the landscape, as opposed to carts which meld into the landscape more effectively, due to their more human scale (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012) (Refer to Images 1-5, Appendix).

In addition to size restraints, Hansen indicated that carts must follow design regulations meaning carts must be built by owners or individually designed by a food cart company. Moreover, Hansen heavily emphasized the importance of cart design in attracting customers, while also conveying to the community the style of food, specifically tying the carts back as icons in the Madison’s landscape. Hansen actively reinforces this emphasis on design through the annual food cart reviews, which is unique characteristic of the Madison food cart scene. The food cart review is a checklist of many factors that each cart has to go through and is graded on items such as creativity, and their food’s originality and quality. This is effective on many levels, because it not only involves the community in actively deciding which carts fit best into the limited space on Library Mall and other locales, but it also promotes commitment to an enduring food cart scene by honoring seniority as well as creativity (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012).

Nonetheless, although Hansen sees the benefits of including and fostering the role of food carts in Madison’s social and economic landscape, Hansen also notes that food carts need regulation. Overall, Hansen believes that the expansion of food carts needs to be carefully monitored, acknowledging the importance of growth in the industry, but at a steady pace, striving to maintain balance with the needs of the community and the city. Therefore, the city actively advocates food carts to immigrant populations, like the Latino community, as a viable start-up business opportunity, while also keeping in mind areas of building development where
food carts could possibly be successful. Hansen also considers the conflicts carts can cause with brick and mortar restaurants, which also explains their stationary placement on Library Mall, instead of being permitted to travel throughout the city. Library Mall establishes enough distance from restaurants in the surrounding area to lessen tensions between these businesses and the carts, while also offering substantial open space for the carts to move with relative ease following service hours (Refer to Images 9 and 10 in appendix). Moreover, the carts exist as semi-stationary units primarily for aesthetic purposes, as Hansen and other planning members seek to keep the Mall clean and also open for other communal activities (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012)

Personal Interview (via email): Netalee Lev Sheinman, 17 November 2012:

Finally, in order to bring our narrative full circle, we contacted the owners of a food cart to bring the producer perspective into our project. We chose Banzo, a Mediterranean-style cart, specifically because one of our group members works as an employee there; therefore, we felt this relationship offered a beneficial and unique viewpoint of a cart owner’s role in the mobile food scene. Moreover, during the observation phase of our research, we noticed that Banzo is particularly attractive to lunchtime customers, and we wished to better understand the reasons behind their success in Madison while also learning their story behind how they initially became involved in the mobile food industry. This interview is unique because, due to scheduling conflicts, we were forced to conduct it via email. Despite losing the conversational component and setting that previously allowed us to gather additional information without directly inquiring, we felt that the owners would nevertheless offer a crucial component to the narrative we intended to create.
From a research perspective, Banzo’s piece in the food cart narrative offers an interesting component to the overall story. Banzo is a special case because the owners chose to return to Madison after spending time working in New York City and witnessing the growing industry there. In addition, one of the owners is from Madison, so they decided it would be a better place to start off than in a more competitive area like New York City. Beyond having an interesting background, Banzo also has a rather unique position within the food cart industry in Madison. They have been vending for just over a year now, and have been extremely successful. Netalee Lev-Sheinman, one of the owners, cites multiple reasons for their success. Firstly, Banzo fills a niche in Madison’s culinary scene, offering Tel-Aviv style Mediterranean food, which, unlike other carts, is all cooked when the order is placed. Another factor Sheinman cites is the unique food culture that exists in Madison. The attitudes towards other cultures and styles of food is unique here, and as she puts it:

“Culturally, Madison is a University city which brings people from all over the world, whether they leave after school or decide to stay. Madison has more restaurants per capita than any other city in the US, people in Madison love and respect different types of cuisine” (Netalee Sheinman Interview, 17 November 2012).

This identity not only fosters food cart’s popularity in Madison overall, but also has a direct influence on the success of Banzo and its identity within the food cart scene (Netalee Sheinman Interview, 17 November 2012).

There are other more hidden parts within the food cart culture, however, that aren’t as easily perceived through the scope of board directors and academics. Emphasizing their uniqueness as a cart option has worked in Banzo’s favor--Sheinman noted that, though they were concerned the variety would cause negative tension and competition, they have been fortunate. Instead, they, as owners, and the employees as well, have formed a strong camaraderie with the other carts, fostering a stronger food cart community in Madison. This community feel makes
Madison’s scene unique, and the tight-knit nature gives it an identity within Madison that likely brings people back for more. To Sheinman, other factors beyond simply having a unique menu and cart are equally important to incorporating themselves successfully into the food cart landscape here. Good customer-employee interaction is key at a food cart, not only to bring back customers for the sake of money, but to involve the cart in the Madison community on a personal scale (Refer to Image 7 in appendix). Beyond that, considering the tensions they could create with brick and mortar restaurants, and instead of ignoring them, working around them, is important to the owners in creating a positive identity within the culinary community (Netalee Sheinman Interview, 17 November 2012).

Conclusions from Results:

As food carts gain popularity throughout the country, cities respond with various regulations, many of them based upon varying perspectives concerning the food carts. Frequently, food carts are restricted to specific areas where they are allowed to sell food. As Morales and Kettles discuss, controlling where food carts can sell their food is as different as the cities that employ them. For example, both Portland and New York permit food cart vending on sidewalks, but have vastly differing policies. In Portland, they can vend, but only given that they maintain a position within eight feet of the building line. Conversely, in New York City, they can only occupy the sidewalks on designated streets (Morales and Kettles 2009, 34-35).

Another regulation frequently imposed upon food carts is the amount of time a food cart can stay in one place. This usually limits a food cart in terms of where they can sell and for how long. For example in Dallas, a food cart cannot stay in a spot longer than one hour, and their restrictions were expanded to ensure a food cart cannot sell from a specific spot for more than three hours within a day (Morales and Kettles 2009, 35-36). This greatly contrasts with the scene
in Madison, where food carts are brought to their vending position and remain there temporarily. Unlike Dallas, or perhaps New York City, where food carts are required to move, the food carts in Madison are required to remain stationed, save to be brought out and returned to their garages (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012).

In addition, food carts are regulated based on the type of foods they sell. Increasingly, the city government takes interest in the nutritional value of the food sold from the carts, and creating regulations benefitting carts selling healthier food (Morales and Kettles, 2009, 32). This encourages certain cuisines and preparation methods, which in turn shapes the food landscape within different cities. In their article, Morales and Kettles discuss the rising trend to create separate regulations catering to vendors who sell nutritious foods. Specifically, Missouri has a reduced fee when obtaining a food cart license if they agree to sell more nutritional food. New York also now sets aside 1000 licenses to carts who sell fruits and vegetables, which provides a large incentive in the city, where food cart licenses are already sparse and difficult to obtain (Morales and Kettles, 2009, 45). This incentive is mostly void in Madison’s food market culture. While carts exist that generally offer more healthy options, there are, as of yet, no regulations that encourage food cart vendors to sell more nutritious options.

Throughout our research, we find that city policy is frequently a decisive and controlling factor in the way food carts meld and work into the city landscape. This is especially true for Madison, where the food carts work well with regulations in place to make the city one of the mobile food hot spots in the country (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012). A unique policy in Madison that we learned about was the City’s focus on making the menus and carts themselves as vibrant and different as possible. This is instigated through the food cart review process where the carts are scored on various factors. They are graded each year based on how
the exterior of the carts are designed, the look of the interior and the menu itself (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012). This process is not conducted in any other city and makes the scene in Madison one that is always evolving and bringing new culinary experiences to those who frequent the carts. Another way that Madison is unique is that the food carts do not move constantly throughout the day as other carts are made to. This makes the food carts more of a fixture in Madison’s landscape; they become part of the city’s identity because of the areas where the food carts are a fixture. The carts in the City are also trailers instead of push carts or trucks. This is a deliberate decision because the City wanted to make sure the food vendors matched the scale of the City. Having a large truck on Library Mall and the Capitol Square would contrast with the scale of the City, and a small pushcart would not be conducive to the semi-permanent style of the carts, as regulated according to city codes (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012).

**Future Research Proposal**

Due to the short period of time we were given to conduct our research, as well as lack of monetary resources, we will briefly discuss here additional topics and components we wish to include in further research to better describe the food cart narrative. Beyond that, we will also address flaws in our current methods techniques and results due to this lack of time and resources.

Firstly, as previously stated in our results, we initially tried to include demographics in our research, but due to nature of what is in our opinion a relatively homogenous university community in respect to demographics, we feel that use of surveys may provide more detail regarding customers’ relationship to food carts in a spatial way, as opposed to a highly subjective assessment of personal characteristics of individuals. Composing a survey in which we would
directly ask customers why they personally choose to eat at a food cart rather than a brick and mortar restaurant, fast food, or campus offerings was something we were greatly interested in carrying out to achieve a more intimate side to our narrative. Moreover, since our focus revolved more around the community’s interaction and its connection to the space in which those interactions were carried out, personal data lacked pertinence to our specific topic. In regards to time constraints, we also felt confined to emphasizing one location of carts (Library Mall), as opposed to several locations, such as the Capitol Square and Broom Street loci. Furthermore, because we realized personal data, including subjective assessment of race, age, etc., carries more power and sensitivity as a form of information, we didn’t feel comfortable utilizing it, unless we had more time to carry it out with the highest degree of respect and care, as possible.

Given that interviews are integral to our research and information acquisition, with more time, we would emphasize and elaborate upon their strength as a form of information, by conducting more interviews, as well as possibly follow-up interviews. Ideally, we would interview several individuals involved in the mobile food industry including customers and additional cart owners, to bring in a greater balance of perspectives. Moreover, tying in brick and mortar business owners’ views could demonstrate the tensions, as well as positive relationships, that exist between carts and nearby businesses, as well as the food carts associated with a brick and mortar establishment elsewhere in Madison. It would be interesting to research certain food carts and investigate the difficulties in starting a food cart, as well as how many carts have since expanded into a traditional brick and mortar business following their initial success of their food cart. Since several carts currently operate and so many individuals purchase food from carts, surveys might perhaps enable us to gauge more opinions without having extensive interviews with every subject.
Another branch of research that we initially sought to pursue but ultimately phased out centered on the topic of food access in relation to food cart mobility. Since food carts possess the flexibility to move from place to place, we found ourselves intrigued by the idea of carts providing healthy options to communities in need. Moreover, in our interview with Alfonso Morales, the topic of potential sites for food carts came up when discussing bringing in food to areas defined as “deserts” (Alfonso Morales Interview, 1 November 2012), as a way for carts to help the community with this concern. Beyond this subject, we were interested in pursuing research pertaining to the sustainability of food carts, as well as the feasibility of incorporating sustainable practices into the food cart world. However, given both time constraints, and our concern for damaging the reputations of the food carts owners we would have to interview in the process, we chose to avoid further investigation. Finally, given the extensive opportunities to explore several angles of food cart culture, we found comparison of cities’ food cart scenes as beneficial in the sense that it expands the geographic scope of our research. However, this topic especially requires money and time to conduct in-depth observations of demographics, policies, incentives, and design characteristics distinct to each city. Nonetheless, the topic brings up many interesting points that could both demonstrate Madison’s own success as a food cart city, as well as illustrate how space plays a defining role in how mobile food scenes function from place to place.

Conclusion

We started this research with simple curiosity. We were interested in local food movements, especially the mobile food scene in Madison, due to its personal connection to our lives as students at UW-Madison. Our goal to create the story of a food cart meant starting with
the simplest of questions: Where are food carts located in Madison and why, and finally, how does the landscape of Madison facilitate the mobile food scene?

Madison is unique because it is one of the few cities located on an isthmus (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012), and having this spatial structure enables centers of culinary culture to thrive in downtown Madison, most specifically on Library Mall and the Capitol Square. The constricting spatial layout of the isthmus fosters a high density environment of people, businesses, and culture, effectively creating a Petri dish of activity, further facilitated by regulations deliberately placing carts in very structured foci of the city like Library Mall. These structured areas reflect the Grand Manner planning defining the landscape of the Isthmus. Moreover, the city government utilizes this deliberately planned open space as a clustering point for the carts, where they can sit together and attract customers with their concentrated diversity, while still fitting in the shape of the city. Planners embrace the integration of the flexible dynamic of the carts, and the temporal changes of their serving hours in the context of this highly defined space, bridging modernist and post-modernist influences. City officials also take into account carts’ relationships with brick and mortar restaurants, doubling the Mall’s spatial function to physically separate the carts from other food businesses. This simultaneously minimizes business conflict while maximizing the use of a the Mall’s wide, open space (Warren Hansen Interview, 14 November 2012). Overall, this allows for a vibrant culinary culture to blossom into the area, given the tight location and the variety of people who pass through and use the space. The isthmus shapes the geography within which the food cart culture blooms in Madison to the extent that carts exist as landmarks in the cityscape.

Through their mobile properties, food carts utilize space and the concept of “landscape” and transform them in a unique way, attracting community and activity to their location. They
allow for individuality and self-expression of food culture and preferences, ultimately providing citizens with a convenient variety of choices. Furthermore, the unique colors and design of each food cart not only adds visual aesthetics to the landscape, but also visually cues their identity and the type of food they sell. The collage of designs and colors not only enhances customers’ experiences, but reinforces the identity of the carts and further defines the landscape as a cultural and culinary hub throughout the lunch hours. Food carts provide the high quality of food found in a brick and mortar restaurant, but on smaller scale, with much more variety, and catered to a faster pace. In addition, they still provide a gathering point for communal activity over the lunch hour, as well as more intimate contact with food producers -- an attitude food carts encourage. Physical aspects of the carts, like the wide service windows and the time required for food preparation encourages this customer-producer closeness, sparking conversation and removing the barrier that typically exists between cook and client in a brick and mortar establishment. As we learned from all our interviewees, especially Netalee Sheinman, the owner of Banzo, a deep connection exists between the cart owners and the food they make (Netalee Sheinman Interview, 17 November 2012). The drive owners possess to prepare this food day in and out, travel to cart sites, set up, and take the time to interact with customers, further emphasizes and strengthens this connection. This intimate interaction offers an alternative or additional option for restaurant dining, a special niche, by enabling cooks to connect to consumers on a more personal level than they would in an industrial kitchen.

Carts have value to the community, and the community has value to the carts. The success of food carts represents the strong relationship between consumers, carts, and the city, and how all of these roles come together to enable the mobile food industry to thrive. Every character in this story plays an important part, and each individual can ultimately affect the
culinary landscape in some way. People go to food carts everyday and interact with their food producers -- they see the food prepared, they talk to the owner, the owner learns their name, their preferences, and the customer perhaps learns the owner’s name. Through that relationship building experience and process, the producer and customer create and invest their identities in an activity that occurs in one space for a short time period. Though time was not our focus in our research, time is integral in distinguishing the identity of food carts, and their role within in the Library Mall landscape. Food carts are stationed temporarily and the act of missing a food cart during winter or off hours shows a special association that people construct with food. Students can walk through Library Mall and the absence of the food carts makes them think of a certain time of day, where the Mall is not just a thoroughfare but a place for community and relaxation.

Our research on the Madison food carts accumulates in the understanding of the distinctive role food carts play as a character within the larger story of the food experience. Food is a primary linking or dividing force between people. Food serves as a symbol of social activity, privilege, culture, and more, and the food carts sit in the middle of this exchange: they encourage activity, yet strive to bring food to people in a convenient and inexpensive way. There is great potential that exists for the food cart scene to grow and expand in more directions. Overall, the cart scene provides great opportunity for encouraging further research, and we hope through our effort to better understand the mobile food scene, that others as well, will continue to investigate this continuously unfolding story.
Bibliography:


The main concentration of food carts on Library Mall, facing the Wisconsin State Capitol.
Image 5: Library Mall, Oct. 29, 2012, by Chloë Quinn

Images 11-21: Food Cart Menus (for comparison) Nov. 5, 2012, by Chloë Quinn
THE DANDELION

SWEET POTATO WRAP
Southern baked sweet potato with peppers and onions, text, and salsa. Served hot... $12.00

SETAN BROTHERLY LOVE STYLE
Seasoned setan on a wheat hoagie with Swiss cheese, bell peppers and onions. Served cold... $10.00 or sets a meal... $10.00 or special... $15.00 or vegan... $10.00

MUSHROOM AND SETAN REUBEN SANDWICH
On rye bread, with sauerkraut, swiss cheese, roasted, mushrooms, and Swiss cheese. Served hot... $7.00 or vegan cheese... $6.00

EL MATADOR
Breaded seasoned tofu on a wheat hoagie with organic lettuce, tomato, mustard, ketchup, starts, and relish. Served hot... $8.00

COLORADO SETAN PAJITAS
Mashed potatoes, sauteed with diced Colorado pepper, hot pepper, and onion. Served with rice and beans... $7.00

CHICKPEA SPREAD WRAP
On a flour tortilla with cheese pepper spread, lettuce, tomato, onions, tomatoes, and whole wheat flour. Served hot... $8.00

CHICKPEA SPREAD & CHIPS
With black olives, cucumbers, bell peppers, and pickles. Served cold... $4.50

DESSERTS
PEANUT BUTTER CUPS... $1.00

BEVERAGES
Blue Sky Tea... $1.00
Blue Sky Detox Tea... $1.00
Recovery Lemonade... $2.00
Sparkling Raspberry Lemonade... $3.00
Tomato Juice... $1.00
Orange Juice... $1.00
Lemonade... $1.00
Pineapple Juice... $2.00

VEGANS, ASK QUESTIONS. YOU’LL LIKE THE ANSWERS.

Welcome. At The Dandelion, we offer you the choice to create your own unique combination from our list of fresh fruits and vegetables.

JUICES:
Apple Juice
Raspberry Juice
Watermelon Juice
Lemonade
Orange Juice
Pineapple Juice
Grape Juice
Cranberry Juice
Tomato Juice
Watermelon Juice

SMOOTHIES:
Natural
Apple, Lemon
Watermelon, Pineapple
Strawberry, Banana
Peach, Salsa
Mango, Orange
Lemonade, Pineapple
Lemonade, Orange
Strawberry, Pineapple
Grape, Banana
Raspberry, Lemon
Watermelon, Orange

Enjoy & Have a Good Day!!
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Image 23: Demographics Chart (screenshot), Oct. 5, 2012, by Olivia Prendergast (included for reference, see Methods section)

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Image 24: General Food Cart Presence Chart (screenshot), Oct. 5, 2012, by Olivia Prendergast (included for reference, see Methods section)
Reference Image 1: Library Mall Spatial Flows, Nov. 29, 2012, by Olivia Prendergast
Interviews

Interview 1: Alfonso Morales questions

Alfonso Morales Interview:
1) What does your current research involve?
2) What made you passionate about street vending?
3) What role do you think food carts play in the culinary landscape of Madison, as well as other cities across the U.S.?
4) How would describe a typical food cart customer?
5) Why do you think people choose to eat at food carts?
6) How do you think the landscape of Madison constraints as well as facilitates the success of food carts? If you could, please answer the two topics separately.
7) Why do you think the Library Mall space is especially conducive to the success of food carts?
8) Are there other areas in the city where food carts currently don’t serve, you think would make for successful locations for more food carts?
9) How do you think the public and city perceive food carts?
10) What do you think the relationship between local restaurants and the food carts is like?
11) Do you think food carts give Madison a uniqueness, perhaps a tourist attraction?
12) Do you believe that food carts have an impact on the residents of Madison’s identity?
13) Do you have suggestions or ideas for the city of Madison on how it could better work with food carts?
14) What do you think lies in the future for food cart vendors in Madison?

Interview 2: Warren Hansen questions

Warren Hansen:
1. What does your job as the Street Vending Coordinator for Madison entail?
2. How did you become Street Vending Coordinator for the City?
3. Why was the position created?
4. What role do you think food carts play in the culinary landscape of Madison?
5. How have policy makers in Madison made regulations conducive to food carts?
6. Are there potential regulations that Madison is considering for food carts?
7. Why does Madison have mostly stationary carts as opposed to ones that are moving all of the time?
8. What potential do food carts have for increasing food access in the City? (mention food deserts in south, southwest and northeast Madison)
9. Where are additional places you could see food carts within the City? (such as Oscar Meyer, Research Park, etc.)
10. How do you see social media playing a role in street vending?
11. How do the spatial layouts of Library Mall and Capitol Square cater to street vending?
12. What is the reasoning behind the City’s choice to mandate the location of carts in certain areas (such as Library Mall and Capitol Square)?
13. Do you think there are tensions that exist between the carts and nearby business owners?
14. Follow up ?: Also, do tensions occur between the carts themselves?
Banzo Interview (Answers taken directly from email correspondence):

1. Why did you choose to own a food cart?
   To be honest it just kind of happened, I am from Israel and Aaron is from Madison, WI. While we were living in NYC, I was working at an Israeli restaurant. Mediterranean food in NYC was on every other block and people from all cultures seemed to really take a liking to it. When we would come visit Madison we found ourselves missing those options. Both of us had wanted to own our own business (as a future goal down the road...), and this seemed to be something that could work. Initially we planned on a location on State St., and our target customers was students. Unfortunately we couldn't afford anything in that area- the food truck phenomenon was exploding in NYC and other cities around the US, so it made sense to give it a shot.

2. Why did you choose Madison as your place of business?
   Aaron is from Madison, that made it clear that we would have support from family and friends. More importantly, it seemed there was a niche we could fill.

3. Why do you think Library Mall is such a critical location?
   Library Mall- there are many students there, it's the heart of campus and its right by State St.

4. Why expand business to the Capitol Square?
   Capital Square-the heart of the city, gov. buildings and high traffic- a great way to expand our customer base. Especially since we do delivery, takeout and dine in at our Sherman Av. location.

5. How does the landscape of Madison facilitate food cart vending?
   Culturally, Madison is a University city which brings people from all over the world, whether they leave after school or decide to stay. Madison has more restaurants per capita than any other city in the US, people in Madison love and respect different types of cuisine.

6. How does the landscape of Madison constrain food cart vending?
   Some may say that there are so many different food carts which create competition, but we have been very lucky- we've made friends with many vendors and formed a camaraderie.

7. How do the City’s policies facilitate food cart vending?
   It actually doesn't necessarily facilitate since the idea of the food carts are that they are mobile, and Madison vending laws are that you stay in one location.

8. How do the City’s policies constrain food cart vending?
   Considering these restrictions the areas chosen for vending are very high traffic which helps business. Also the city is very particular about keeping the carts unique- this helps decrease the competition and increase the different options of cuisine.

9. What do you think attracts customers to your food truck in particular?
   Banzo's food is different in the sense that our falafel is cooked to order as is the rest of our food. Everyone that is a part of Banzo is a huge key to it's success, everyone working does their best to interact with customers and give them personal attention.

10. What does a food cart need to stand out (design of cart, uniqueness of menu, etc.)?
    The cart itself needs to be appealing in terms of design. The concept needs to be clear as does the menu. The food cart has to be clean, some people are already uncomfortable with street
food...all sanitary regulations (gloves, hats) need to be followed. Good customer interaction.

Involvement in the Madison community.

11. Do you feel that there is tension between food carts and local business owners? Initially we didn't feel any tension, on the contrary we support many local businesses and they support us (we give a discount for deliveries to local businesses). Unfortunately there was an incident from a particular business when we attempted to vend late night on Broom St. Since we do like keeping good relationships with everyone and don’t want to cause any aggression- we stopped vending during late night hours, for the time being.

Privacy Statement

To Whomever it Concerns:

We are Chloë Quinn, Samuel Grosenick, and Olivia Prendergast, a student research group in the Fall 2012 class of Geography 565 (Undergraduate Colloquium course), researching the mobile food landscape in Madison, specifically through the food carts that exist here. We agree to maintain the privacy of information through any interviews or observations conducted. We will withhold any use of personal names or identifiers, unless given explicit permission to do so, and if given permission, will only use identifiers that the subject(s) agree to. Beyond that, any statements made by the subject will not be released unless we are given explicit permission. Also, subjects may opt out of any question at any time, we will review our notes on your responses with you so that you may revise any answers, as well as including you in the process of putting your responses into our final paper. Everything in our power will be done to maintain the highest degree of respect to individual privacy. In addition, we invite you to come to our final presentation on December 14th, and to request a copy of our paper if you wish. Finally, thank you for participating and feel free to contact us with further questions, concerns, or revisions at caquinn2@wisc.edu, oprendergast@wisc.edu, and srsgrosenick@wisc.edu.

Thank you,

Olivia Prendergast, Chloë Quinn, and Samuel Grosenick