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Local Capitalism and Civic Engagement: The Potential of Locally Facing Firms

Abstract: *The twin forces of globalization and devolution have created administrative circumstances that strain the problem-solving capacity of local governments and increase the importance of nongovernmental processes and institutions. The literature suggests that locally owned firms are more likely to engender higher levels of civic engagement critical to buttressing that problem-solving capacity. This research adds an additional dimension, investigating to whom those firms sell and through which supply channels. Using survey results from hundreds of local firms across five study sites, this research demonstrates that locally facing firms—that is, firms that intentionally interface with community members and other local businesses—are associated with greater levels of civic and political engagement compared with locally owned firms that sell their products to customers elsewhere. Findings suggest that local governments should look beyond the local/nonlocal ownership binary to consider how private firms can be partners in serving and supporting their communities.*

Practitioner Points

- Local governance efforts to build community engagement might benefit more from specific collaborations with locally owned businesses that intentionally serve local community members rather than locally owned businesses generally.
- Owners of local business who are affirmatively motivated by serving the needs of their community have higher levels of civic and political engagement than business owners who are motivated exclusively by conventional economic incentives.
- Civic engagement of local business owners may provide a framework for understanding and perhaps even predicting whether some communities are better prepared for the benefits and burdens that come with devolution and privatization of services.

In a 2000 special issue of *Public Administration Review*, Donald F. Kettl asserted that the twin forces of globalization and devolution created administrative circumstances that strained the problem-solving capacity of local governmental actors and greatly increased the importance of nongovernmental processes and institutions, such as the nonprofit and business sectors. This reasoning brings the field of public administration directly in line with decades of sociological literature suggesting that the nature and configuration of a community's private firms have a direct association with the health of that community's civic life and the prosperity of its citizens.

A principal argument in favor of returning processes from the collective (through governmental organizations and institutions) to individuals and private citizens (through the market) is that it engenders an increased sense of efficacy and enhances

community engagement, but those impacts have not necessarily manifested as the theory suggests (Champlin 1999). Moreover, the nature and behaviors of the private and semiprivate institutions that make up a community in a post-devolution/globalization society vary widely from community to community, with commensurately varied impacts.

A robust literature exists illustrating the deleterious impacts of nonlocal business ownership on communities, including economic instability and concentration of wealth. "Delocalized" or absentee ownership serves to divorce the health and viability of a business from the community in which it operates (Goldschmidt 1946; Heying 1997; Mills and Ulmer 1946; Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin 1998; Tolbert et al. 2002). However, these studies have primarily examined the structure of businesses (specifically whether they are locally owned), not the activities in which those businesses engage. The fact that a

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business is locally owned may not necessarily engender engagement with that business's local community, particularly if the firm's supply chain is global in nature, with nonlocal suppliers and nonlocal customers. This article adds to the literature on local capitalism and its ties to local civic engagement broadly by examining behavioral and motivational aspects of business owners. In addition to business structure, the nature of supply chains is examined to determine the impacts of locally owned and locally facing firms—in which business owners interface with community members and other local businesses—on civic engagement.

The backdrop of this research is an environment in which the economic order of globalization has more fully matured. Much of the research on local capitalism focuses on an environment nearer to Kettl's original 2000 pronouncement than the present environment. Today, not only has the transition to this new economy matured, but so, too, have political and social reactions to its impacts, exemplified by the rising populism of the last U.S. election.

Thus, the primary questions of this research are as follows: (1) Are the owners of local, independent firms that are engaged with their local markets also more engaged as citizens, both politically and civically, than owners of local, independent firms that sell in nonlocal markets? (2) If so, is the nature of the supply chain that a business owner utilizes correlated with levels of civic and political engagement? (3) Finally, are higher levels of social embeddedness in business decision making correlated with higher levels of civic and political engagement?

A survey of local farm business owners is used to answer these research questions. Local farms offer an opportunity to address the interactions between locally owned businesses and the communities in which they operate. In part, this is a result of the increased attention to local foods and the related growth of firms that sell directly to consumers and those that work with other local businesses through intermediated supply chains to reach local consumers (Low et al. 2015). Another reason is the purported benefits of local food networks, which include more engaged consumers (Lyson 2000, 2004).

This article begins by placing this research in the broader context of local market networks operating in a globalized environment, pointing to a long-established literature on local ownership and local capitalism and positing a theoretical connection between a robust local market and that market's capacity to respond to global demands. The larger framework is tied specifically to literature on civic agriculture while pointing out gaps in existing research on local ownership, farming, and food networks.

Globalization, Devolution, and Civic Welfare

Globalization has several relevant impacts on local communities that undergird and motivate this research. Globalization results in corporate delocalization and reduction of engagement by elites, which has a ripple effect across a community (Heying 1997). Globalization results in a “democratic disconnect,” or a failure of

citizens and local governments to share an understanding of how governance should address local problems (Barnes 2010), and a wider variety of citizen preferences regarding local problem-resolution strategies (Adres, Vashdi, and Zalmanovitch 2016). Globalizing/devolutionary forces have increasingly led to local governments retreating from direct service provision, shifting the burden of community welfare to nonprofits and private organizations in the “neoadministrative” state (Durant 2000; Howlett 2000; Kettl 2000; Milward and Provan 2000; Sclar 2000). The economic structure of a local market also impacts community policy capacity (Paarlberg and Yoshioka 2016). By shifting problem-solving burdens from governments to private actors, communities, and individuals, civic engagement, or collectively working to solve community problems, becomes all the more important.

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As a result, the configuration of a local community's market structure can have noticeable impacts on the overall engagement of its residents (Blanchard and Matthews 2006). Economic concentration in a given local market is positively associated with high levels of civic apathy (Blanchard and Matthews 2006). Implicitly, the more responsive a business is to a citizen's consumer needs, the more empowered and efficaciously that consumer will act as a citizen. A natural extension of this theory is that in the context of a diffuse, robust, and responsive local market, firms that direct their business at the local community most directly are associated with higher levels of civic engagement. With devolution of public and governmental services shifting problem-solving burdens to local governments, civic engagement is increasingly identified as a central indicator of community problem-solving capacity (de Souza Briggs 2008).

As such, the capacity of a community to respond to local needs has been a subject of discussion in public administration for several decades (Wolch 1999), and concern over this “uneven capacity” has been reiterated recently (Paarlberg and Yoshioka 2016). Public administration scholars have suggested that connecting elected leadership, bureaucratic management, and an engaged public is one of the primary challenges to effective governance in the coming decades. In this way, civic engagement is a component of the governance process (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005; Boyte 2005; Cooper, Bryer, and Meek 2006). Existing work often cites a *lack* of engagement as an obstacle to effective governance. A well-engaged populace can, conversely, increase community problem-solving capacity (Bryson et al. 2013; Fung 2015). Moreover, scholars have been publishing on the promise of collaborative and deliberative participation processes to increase governance capacity (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005; Fung 2003; Nabatchi and Amsler 2014). Others have focused on the role of the private, for-profit sector in providing forums for engagement and civic leadership to make needed connections. It is this stream of literature that is the focus of the next section.

Local Capitalism and Civic Agriculture

Globalization is not the only massive upheaval the U.S. economy has experienced in its recent history. In the aftermath of World

War II, the federal government became concerned with the impacts of the concentration of economic power on local communities. It commissioned two studies to examine these relationships that today stand as seminal works on local capitalism. Mills and Ulmer's (1946) study of American urban centers found that large-scale industrial operations were associated with wage labor, absenteeism, tenancy, and diminished investment in the economic and social welfare of the community. Small-scale operation engendered dependence between small businesses, livelihood, and the welfare of the community. They reasoned that economically independent middle-class business owners had more frequent contact with their community's administrators and political figures and were embedded in institutional and organizational networks (Mills and Ulmer 1946; Piore and Sabel 1984). An independent businessperson's livelihood, they asserted, was inextricably linked to the welfare of the community, thereby incentivizing these businesses people to engage in leadership roles and contribute to the betterment of place. Their businesses provided a more balanced economic life, a greater diversity of jobs, and greater overall stability.

During the same period, Goldschmidt (1946) studied large-scale farming operations and produced similar findings. He asserted that there was little shared fate between large-scale business and the community, the producers and the consumers, and the owners of capital and labor. Goldschmidt argued that economic and social returns were greater for locally owned and operated farms, which tended to be smaller-scale versus absentee-owned farms. The work of Mills and Ulmer and Goldschmidt provided the basis for sociological research linking industrial organization and local economic structure to the civic health of a community (e.g., Fowler 1958; Hunter 1953). Decades later, further study resting on this same foundation demonstrated that delocalization can lead to a loss of dense local enterprise networks, undermining the connective tissue that adds additional layers of community cohesion (Rae 2005).

The research of Mills and Ulmer and Goldschmidt also laid the foundation for local capitalism and the extension of this concept to civic agriculture. According to Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin (1998), local capitalism is characterized by production and capital rooted in place through socially embedded economic relationships. These networks of small and midsize firms are embedded not only in the community through production but also in community organizations and institutions such as churches, clubs, and small retailers (e.g., cafés, barbershops, and pubs). The need to make a profit is filtered through community-oriented motivations. Capital, Block (1990) argues, is a social relationship, and firms exist along a spectrum of social and economic embeddedness. At one end is high marketness, where little interferes with price considerations when making firm decisions; this is where Goldschmidt would likely place absentee-owned farms. As one moves along the spectrum toward less marketness, nonprice considerations take on greater importance in decision making. Even at lower levels of marketness, prices are still relevant to decision making, but other factors carry weight (Block 1990). In the local capitalism literature, the channel through which broad community characteristics connect with economic outcomes is implicitly civic engagement.

The local food movement, with the aim of localizing and democratizing supply chains, embodies local capitalism (DuPuis, Goodman, and Harrison 2006; Starr and Adams 2003). Not only are firms locally based and independently owned, but also they serve local consumers—in other words, these firms are locally facing. Following Polanyi, Lyson (2004) argues that the economy, including economic development, is the mechanism to meet the needs of society—that for local food, the economy is embedded in social relations. Indeed, following Block (1990), Hinrichs (2000) highlights the relationship between economic instrumentalism and marketness in order to flesh out how social embeddedness in economic decision making informs motives along the marketness spectrum. Motives of economic self-interest dominate high marketness, and motives focused on morality and relationships with community and family dominate lower levels of marketness. Researchers have found that farmers engaging in local food systems have community-oriented motivations that, in addition to price, drive decision making and are embedded in the social relationships that are rooted in their supply chains (Hinrichs 2000; Izumi, Wright, and Hamm 2010).

Within this space, Lyson (2000) extends local capitalism to food and farming by coining the term “civic agriculture,” which is community based, meets the needs of community members, and provides both alternatives to globalized markets and opportunities for greater social bonds within the community. Civic agriculture envisions the actors engaging in the food system as “food citizens” rather than as producers and consumers. Lyson suggests that the place-based nature of these supply chains results in more civic engagement and, in turn, increased capacity for community problem solving.

In practice, civic agriculture includes farmers' markets, organic farms, small wineries, community kitchens, small-scale food processors, community-supported agriculture (CSA), farm-to-school programs, and direct marketing. While there is a heavy focus on direct producer–consumer relationships, civic agriculture can include “intermediated” markets in which a farmer's product is sold as local but passes through one or more steps to reach the consumer through, for example, restaurants or grocers that sell local products (Low and Vogel 2011).

Obach and Tobin (2014) examine civic agriculture from the consumer perspective, asking whether consumers who engage in civic agriculture are more civically and politically engaged. They find that engagement in the local food system is associated with a greater likelihood of engagement with civic and political activities. However, they also find that the less direct contact consumers have with farmers, the less likely they are to be engaged. Direct markets, they posit, are more socially embedded forums of exchange than intermediated markets.

Combining the motivation articulated in the previous section with the research reviewed in this section, figure 1 illustrates the focus of this study. Layer 1 provides the motivation to study subsequent layers by illustrating the shift that Kettl (2000) articulates, the

Civic agriculture envisions the actors engaging in the food system as “food citizens” rather than as producers and consumers.

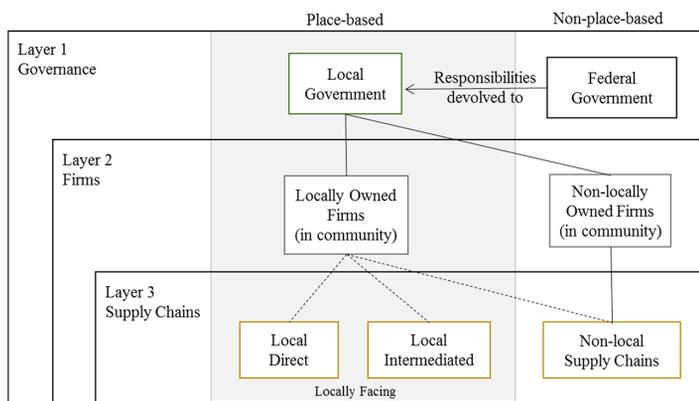


Figure 1 Conceptual Model of Locally Facing Firms

resultant pressure on local governments, and the need for broader governance structures to address local problem solving. Previous research has focused layer 1 and the firms that make up layer 2. Previous research has focused on whether a firm is locally owned (see the separate boxes for locally owned and non-locally owned firms in the community) and the impact that local ownership has on the community broadly and local government (the lines drawn between local government and the firms in layer 2) (Fowler 1958; Goldschmidt 1946; Hunter 1953; Humphries 2001; Mills and Ulmer 1946; Rae 2005). Local ownership suggests that a firm is embedded in its community. This research adds a layer (layer 3, supply chains) to examine whether additional characteristics of a firm (via the dashed lines) impact civic engagement outcomes. Specifically, this research investigates a firm’s market geography (whether it is a local farm selling local product) and the supply chain used to get goods to market—in other words, how locally facing the firm is.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework rests on several premises and relationships established in the literature and offers one novel consideration that adds a dimension to the existing theory on the civic benefits of local capitalism. First, it is assumed that physical places are a critical facet necessary for building a healthy and robust civic life so that citizens can congregate, associate, converse, and build connections with fellow citizens (Kohn 2004; Mattson 2002). Private businesses can play a role in developing civic connections required for civic health in a community—particularly what Granovetter (1973) calls “weak ties” that are critical to embeddedness in a social context. The literature highlights locally owned firms as one actor in a network ecosystem that allows for the persistent contact necessary to maintain these weak ties. These firms create forums for developing and maintaining ties to place.

Where smaller, local retail outlets are replaced by larger, more anonymous, and spatially distant shopping centers, the weak ties that customers build with the workers and owners of local stores are often undercut (Ehrenhalt 1996). To wit, Goetz and Rupasingha (2006) find that stocks of social capital experience material declines within any community that gets a new Wal-Mart. The very design of shopping malls is not to create spaces amenable to potential connection but to move consumers from store to store as quickly as possible (Farrell 2003; Hopkins 2004). Explorations of the impacts of “local capitalism” reveal generalized associations between local

ownership of firms in a community and beneficial civic welfare and socioeconomic outcomes (Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin 1998; Tolbert et al. 2002).

The research of Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin (1998) draws on Oldenburg’s notion of “third places,” specifically highlighting pubs, drugstores, coffee shops, barbershops, and grocery stores and asserting that these businesses “provide an institutional basis for informal public life” (1999, 407). Consider the common traits of these businesses: each of these firms directly provides goods and services to a consumer base and through a supply chain tied to place. However, as the technology and mores of a globalized world allow for an ostensibly “locally owned” business to utilize supply chains that are regional, national, or global in nature, it is thus possible for a “locally owned” business to have little shared fate with its geographic neighbors. Most often, the existing literature on local capitalism either assumes that locally owned firms are largely serving a local consumer base or fails to make the distinction explicit. This research explores this previously implicit facet of local capitalism and ascertains whether there are material differences in motivations and civic engagement among business owners on the basis of their supply chains.

Much of this literature argues that dense networks of local institutions serve as a glue that binds people to place (Barber 1995; Rae 2005). This conception of local institutions as network hubs accords well with work that conceptualizes institutions, such as locally owned firms, as suitable forums for civic engagement (Lyson 2004; Oldenburg 1999; Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin 1998; Tolbert et al. 2002; Zimmer and Hawley 1959). All firms have profit-seeking motives, but economic activity is embedded in and regulated by institutional anchoring in a community (Beckert 2009; Gemici 2008), and human economic behavior has mixed motivations (Granovetter 1984). The literature on civic agriculture has adopted this perspective by modeling profit motivations side by side with social considerations that inform, augment, and occasionally compete with, but never outright replace, profit motivations (Block 1990; Hinrichs 2000; Izumi, Wright, and Hamm 2010).

This research hypothesizes that among locally owned firms, by virtue of denser connections to people and institutions within a specific place and a greater embedding of social motivations in economic decisions, a firm’s ownership will be more civically engaged with its local community the less it utilizes nonlocal, regional, or national supply chains. In other words, the more directly connected a firm is to citizens through direct sales or to other local firms through local intermediated supply chains, the more engaged with civic life in its community it will be.

Figure 2 provides four illustrations of the framework. Following Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin’s (1998) characterization of Barber (1995), the theoretical framework for this research conceptualizes local capitalism as a network located in a specific place. The black nodes (consumers/citizens) and white nodes (firms) within the gray box are considered to be within a given location, and the nodes outside the gray box are considered to be outside that location. In this conceptualization, it is assumed that the firms within the gray square are locally owned. Those nodes that have denser networks of

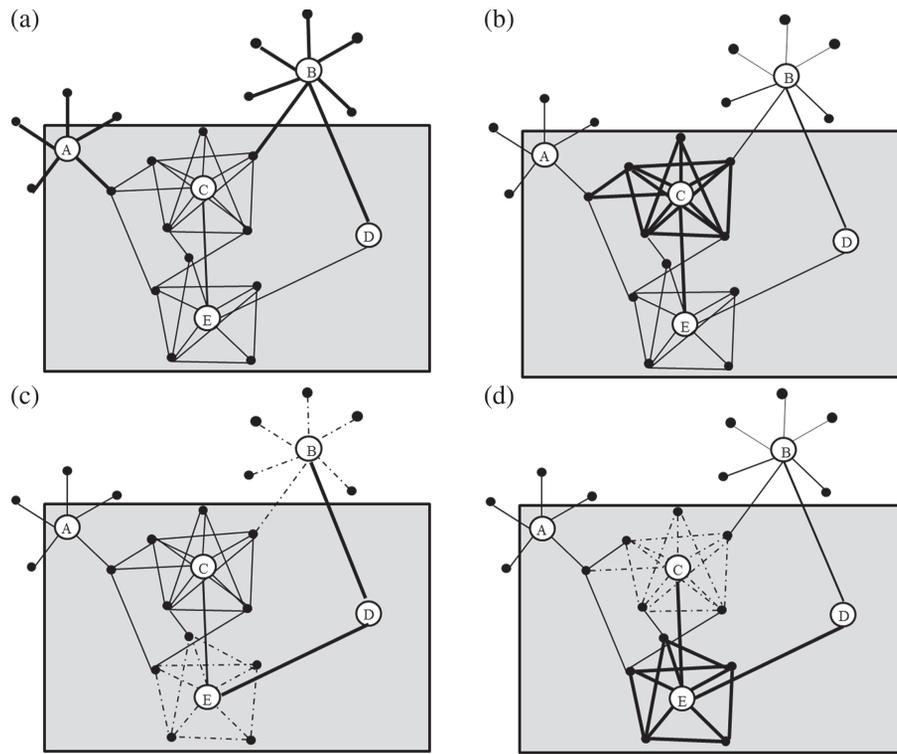


Figure 2 Theoretical Framework in Four Illustrations. Notes: Black nodes = consumers/citizens; white nodes = firms; gray boxes = community; thicker lines = connections of the focus points to other nodes in the four illustrations; dashed lines = second-order relationships.

connections within a place are considered to have a higher level of embeddedness. The thicker lines connect the focus points to other nodes in the four illustrations. In the first illustration, figure 2a, consider firm A and firm B. Both firms primarily serve consumers outside the locale under consideration, but because firm A is locally owned (within the box) and firm B is not, the existing theory would assume that businesses like firm A would be associated with broadly improved outcomes for its location despite each firm having few connections within the location.

Next, in figure 2b, consider firm C, which is a locally owned, locally facing firm that only directly serves consumers within the location and, further, serves as a forum for those consumers to make weak, persistent connections to each other. Explicitly theorizing a distinction between firm C and firm A is this work's primary contribution to the literature. Previous literature would have conceptualized them as roughly equivalent in terms of their embeddedness by virtue of both firms being locally owned. However, this framework considers firm C part of a much denser network of connections within the location in question, which will manifest, this research hypothesizes, in higher levels of civic engagement among the firm's ownership.

For further clarification of the supply chain distinctions this research makes, consider firm D in figure 2c, which utilizes intermediated supply chains exclusively. While the firm has a relatively thin direct network within the location, it still shares a fate with the consumers of the firms it supplies. These indirect, second-order connections (represented by the dashed lines) thus make it more embedded in the location than, for example, firm B. However, this framework

assumes that firm D would be less embedded in the location than a firm that engaged in direct sales.

Finally, this framework considers firm E in figure 2d, which utilizes mixed supply chains. Firm E is likely to have the highest levels of embeddedness of all, as it has connections to consumers it sells to directly, in addition to indirect, second-order connections to the consumers of the firms it supplies. Therefore, it is expected that the owner of firm E has the highest level of civic engagement.

Data and Methods

Study sites were selected using several criteria. First, firms that market their food as local are primarily found in metropolitan areas (Inwood and Clark 2013). Therefore, site selection was limited to metropolitan counties. Farms engaged in these local markets tend to be situated on smaller acreages, so metropolitan areas with a greater than regional average of small and midsize farms were selected. Further, sites were selected that exhibited a healthy agriculture sector. This was operationalized by selecting counties that were in the top three quartiles of agricultural sales (Jackson-Smith and Jensen 2009). A variety of commodity histories were deemed important to reflect different farming systems in the United States. Finally, to capture a diversity of farm operators, metropolitan areas with a higher than regional average presence of farmer diversity, as measured by women, minority, and beginning farmers, were selected. The following five metropolitan areas were selected: Burlington, Vermont (predominantly a dairy region); Columbus, Ohio (dominated by grain production); Honolulu, Hawaii (fruit and vegetables); Miami–Fort Lauderdale–Pompano Beach, Florida (high sales in nursery, greenhouse, and floriculture);

and Portland–Lewiston–South Portland, Maine (high sales from orchards and livestock).

The data were collected using a farm survey that was built from over 100 interviews with farmers and key informants in each of the five study sites (local agricultural leaders, local cooperative extension, local federal agency staff, and business owners in local and regional food markets). The overall purpose of the survey was to describe motivations, firm decision making, and engagement in the community. Lists of farmers were developed using two dozen sources, including key informants and publicly available information from county farm-oriented websites, Localharvest.org, Foodmarketmaker.com, farm associations, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Organic Program website, and Blue Book Online Services.

Because of growing seasons, the survey took place in two stages. The first stage included Ohio, Vermont, and Maine in March and April 2014. The second stage included the remaining sites in Florida and Hawaii in May and June 2014. Approximately 400 farmers were sent surveys at each site, totaling 2,044 surveys mailed. A modified tailored design method was used (Dillman 2000) for four waves of mailings. Each potential respondent was mailed an advance notification letter, followed four days later by the first survey mailing, which included a cover letter with informed consent, the survey, a prepaid return envelope, and a \$1 bill. Nonrespondents received a postcard a week later, then a replacement survey two weeks later, and, finally, another replacement survey two weeks later.

Using Dillman’s tailored design method, social exchange theory, and multiple contacts, the final response rate was 43.5 percent (Connelly, Brown, and Decker 2003; Dillman 2000). Of the 2,044 surveys mailed, 248 were returned as a result of a business closing, change in ownership, or wrong listing. Of the 782 responses, 124 respondents said no to the screening question asking whether they owned a local farm, leaving 658 local farm owners. Comparing this population with the farm and farmer demographics in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s 2012 Census of Agriculture, average farm sales were greater for respondents. Respondents also owned more land, which could be a result of using mailing lists focused on addresses within the study sites, which might reduce the number of land renters and increase the number of landowners. Demographically, respondents were more likely to be female, minorities, and younger and more likely to be using alternative practices. This was all expected, as it was part of the design, namely, the overemphasis on the types of farms and farmers typically engaged in local markets to make sure there were enough cases to statistically test relationships.

The survey questions were closed-ended and included many included ordered responses. Questions germane to this study included whether any farm product was sold or marketed as “local” and, if so, what types of supply chain were used—direct sales to consumers (e.g., a farmers’ market, U-pick, CSA, farm stand) or intermediated sales to an institution or business (e.g., a school, hospital, grocery, restaurant) or distributor or broker that then sells the product as “local.” As a result, three mutually exclusive categories were developed for supply chains: direct markets,

intermediated markets, and mixed markets (firms that use both direct and intermediated).

Respondents were asked about motivations for their business models and making decisions on their farms. Motivations were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Two motivators, in line with civic agriculture, were providing good food to the community and contributing to a sustainable food system. These two factors were scaled together to create a “civic motivation” variable (Cronbach’s alpha = .906). Civic motivation can be considered a measure of social embeddedness of a firm. Two other motivators were maximizing income and providing adequate household income. These two factors were scaled together to create a “profit motivation” variable (Cronbach’s alpha = .740). Other data of interest that have been shown to be related to engagement are total household income, age, sex, and education level. Finally, total farm sales provides an indication of firm size. Table 1 offers a listing of the variables utilized in the study and their measurement. Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for independent variables used.

To assess levels of civic and political engagement, standard measures were used (Prewitt, Mackie, and Habermann 2014). For civic engagement, a question was included regarding self-efficacy. The question “Overall, how much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live?” was measured on a seven-point Likert scale. Next, respondents were asked whether they had participated in a series of civic engagement activities within the last 12 months, and if they had not, whether they had ever participated in the activity. These activities included working with others to solve a problem in the community; being a member of a local club, community organization, or institution (such as a church, softball league, chamber of commerce, etc.); and volunteering with a nonpolitical group (such as a youth, health, or environmental group).

For political engagement, respondents were asked how often they follow what is going on in local government and public affairs and about their political efficacy, both measured on a seven-point Likert-scale (from never, to sometimes, to all the time). Like the civic engagement activities, respondents were asked whether they had participated in local politics by working or volunteering for political groups, voting in elections, or writing letters to legislators or policy makers. It should be noted that national statistics suggest that the respondents in this survey are more civically and politically engaged than the general U.S. population (U.S. Department of Commerce et al. 2010).

Civic and political engagement are the dependent variables. They are modeled separately, as previous research has demonstrated that they are distinct concepts (Zukin et al. 2006). To develop the dependent variables, indices were created by scaling the *z*-scores of the aforementioned questions to a civic engagement index and a political engagement index. Tests for internal reliability demonstrate that all indices are relatively reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = .715 for civic engagement and .710 for political engagement). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for the three indices.

We return to the three research questions: (1) Are the owners of local, independent firms that are engaged with their local markets

Table 1 Variables and Measurements

Variable	Measurement from Survey
Engaged in local sales	Is any of your product sold or marketed as "local"? yes = 1, no = 0
Direct markets only	Direct sales to consumers (e.g., farmers' market, U-pick, CSA, farm stand) yes = 1, no = 0
Intermediated markets only	Sales to an institution or business (e.g., school, hospital, grocery, restaurant) or to a distributor or broker who then sells your product as "local." yes = 1, no = 0
Mixed direct/intermediated	Yes to both direct and intermediated market questions above. yes = 1, no = 0
Civic agriculture motivation	People farm for a variety of different reasons and these motivations affect how they manage their land. On a scale of 1 to 5, please tell us how important each of the following goals is for you when making decisions about your farm. (1 = not important to 5 = extremely important) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide good food to my community • Contribute to a sustainable food system
Profit motivation	People farm for a variety of different reasons and these motivations affect how they manage their land. On a scale of 1 to 5, please tell us how important each of the following goals are for you when making decisions about your farm. (1 = not important to 5 = extremely important) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximize net farm income • Ensure household income is adequate
Sex	Male = 0, female = 1
Total farm sales	1 = < \$1,000, 2 = \$1,000–\$9,999, 3 = \$10,000–\$24,999, 4 = \$25,000–\$49,999, 5 = \$50,000–\$99,999, 6 = \$100,000–\$249,999, 7 = \$250,000–\$499,999, 8 = \$500,000+
Total household income	1 = < \$10,000, 2 = \$10,000–\$29,999, 3 = \$30,000–\$49,999, 4 = \$50,000–\$69,999, 5 = \$70,000–\$89,999, 6 = \$90,000–\$149,999, 7 = \$150,000+
Education	1 = < 9th grade, 2 = 9th–12th grade, no diploma, 3 = high school graduate, 4 = associate's degree or technical school, 5 = bachelor's degree, 6 = graduate or professional degree
Age	Number of years
Civic engagement scaled index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, how much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live?" Likert scale, 0 = no impact, 4 = neutral, 7 = big impact • Have you participated in the following activities? 0 = no, never; 1 = yes but not in the last 12 months; 2 = yes, within the last 12 months <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Working with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community ◦ Being a member of a local club, community organization, or institution (such as a church, softball league, chamber of commerce, etc.) ◦ Volunteering with a local nonpolitical group (such as a youth, health, or environmental group)
Political engagement scaled index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "How often they follow what's going on in local government and public affairs." Likert scale, 0 = never, 4 = sometimes, 7 = all the time • "I consider myself well-qualified to participate in the political process." Likert scale, 0 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, 7 = strongly agree • Have you participated in the following activities? 0 = no, never; 1 = yes but not in the last 12 months; 2 = yes, within the last 12 months <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Volunteering for local political groups ◦ Voting in local elections ◦ Writing a letter to a local legislator or policy maker

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics, Independent Variables

Variables	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Engaged in local sales	640	0	1	.81	.39
Direct markets only	640	0	1	.27	.44
Intermediated markets only	640	0	1	.08	.26
Mixed direct/intermediated	640	0	1	.45	.50
Civic motivation	625	2	10	8.05	2.34
Profit motivation	633	2	10	8.37	1.69
Sex	647	0	1	.41	.49
Total farm sales	630	1	8	4.64	2.15
Total household income	608	1	7	4.20	1.63
Education	645	1	6	4.51	1.17
Age	645	18	90	54.72	13.08

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics, Dependent Variables

Civic Engagement Index	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Impact you have on community	645	1.0	7.0	5.60	1.26
Worked with others	639	.0	2.0	1.25	.78
Member of an organization	641	.0	2.0	1.53	.72
Volunteered	638	.0	2.0	1.27	.79
<u>Civic engagement index (z-scores)</u>	626	-9.0	3.6	.00	2.94
Political Engagement Index					
Follow local government and public affairs	641	1.0	7.0	5.37	1.36
Qualified to participate	640	1.0	7.0	5.11	1.69
Worked for a political group	638	.0	2.0	.53	.74
Voted	644	.0	2.0	1.77	.55
Letter or e-mail to legislator	642	.0	2.0	1.18	.84
<u>Political engagement index (z-scores)</u>	624	-11.0	5.7	-0.01	3.41

does not address the relationship between the type of local supply chain of a business and the levels of civic and political engagement, no a priori expectations are formulated for the second research question. Finally, it is expected that higher levels of civic motivation for business decision making, accounting for the level of economic motivation, will be correlated with higher levels of civic and political engagement.

To answer these questions, the bivariate relationships between farms that sell locally marketed products and the nature of the local supply chain and civic and political engagement indices are analyzed using one-way ANOVAs and simple correlations. Next, these relationships are tested including controls for firm size (farm sales) and other socioeconomic factors demonstrated in previous research to be related to engagement, namely, household income, age, sex, and education level (equation 1). Four models were run for each dependent variable. There is one model for each of the three research questions (markets model, supply chain model, and motivations model), and a fourth model incorporates both business decision-making motivations and local supply chain types (supply chain and motivations model).

$$Engagement = f(\text{local markets/local supply chain, motivations for business decision making, firm size, household income, age, sex, education}) \quad (1)$$

Several robustness checks were included. In addition to the indexed results presented, each individual indicator of civic and political engagement was tested individually as a dependent variable. The results were consistent in direction and significance to scaled indices, but with a lower overall model fit. Civic and

more engaged as citizens, both politically and civically, than owners of local, independent firms that sell in nonlocal markets? (2) If so, is the nature of the supply chain correlated with levels of civic and political engagement? (3) Finally, are higher levels of social embeddedness in business decision making correlated with higher levels of civic and political engagement? The expectation is that firm operators engaged in local markets are more civically and politically engaged than those that are not. Because the literature

political engagement are considered latent variables, and therefore the results are presented using the scaled indices. In addition, a seemingly unrelated regression model was considered because the error terms may be correlated between the three regressions. However, because the independent variables are identical in each estimation, ordinary least squares provides the same results. The ordinal household income and farms sales data was run as dummies and as a continuous variable with the same results. Finally, the models were run with dummy variables for study site to control for community-level differences among the sites. None of the dummy variables was significant, and therefore they were all left out of the model.

Results

The bivariate results are presented and discussed for all three research questions, followed by the multivariate results. The first research question was whether the owners of local, independent firms that are engaged with their local markets are also more engaged as citizens, both politically and civically, than owners of local, independent firms that sell in nonlocal markets. When examining the bivariate relationships in table 4, the answer is yes. The owners of firms that sell products marketed as local are more likely to be civically and politically engaged, and the differences are significant across both dependent variables (table 3). The ANOVA results are significant, and the means of the civic and political engagement indices are higher for farms selling in local markets.

The second research question asked whether the nature of the supply chain that a business owner utilizes is correlated with levels of civic and political engagement. Here again, when examining bivariate relationships, the answer is yes. The ANOVA results in table 5 demonstrate that “mixed” firms with both direct and intermediated supply chains are significantly more civically and politically engaged than other types of local supply chains and firms not marketing any local product. After “mixed” firms, firms that sell directly are more civically and politically engaged than the nonlocal farmers. The number of intermediated-only farms is low at 47, which is likely the reason why post hoc comparisons

Table 4 Results of ANOVA, Local Sales by Civic and Political Engagement

Local Market Type	Civic Engagement			Political Engagement		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Local	498	2.89	.99	498	3.29	1.03
Nonlocal	116	2.56	1.05	113	2.99	1.06
Total	614	2.83	1.01	611	3.24	1.04
	$(F_{613} = 9.733, p = .00)$			$(F_{610} = 7.667, p = .00)$		

Table 5 Results of ANOVA, Local Supply Chain by Civic and Political Engagement

Local Supply Chain	Civic Engagement			Political Engagement		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Nonlocal	128	2.56	1.07	124	2.98	1.07
Direct	161	2.81	1.06	162	3.17	1.10
Intermediated	47	2.44	1.00	48	3.20	1.17
Mixed	278	3.02	.91	277	3.40	.93
Total	614	2.83	1.01	611	3.24	1.04
	$(F_{613} = 9.226, p = .00)$			$(F_{610} = 5.233, p = .001)$		

Table 6 Results of Bivariate Correlation, Business Decision Motivations by Engagement

	Civic Index	Political Index	Profit	Civic Agriculture
Civic engagement index	1.000			
Political engagement index	.446**	1.000		
Profit motivation	.066	.021	1.000	
Civic motivation	.225**	.053	.138**	1.000

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

of intermediated sales with other types of supply chains show no significant difference.

The final research question asked whether the higher levels of social embeddedness in business decision making are correlated with higher levels of civic and political engagement. Table 6 presents the bivariate correlations between motivations and engagement. The civic motivation is significantly correlated with the civic engagement index but not the political engagement index. The profit motivation is not significantly correlated with either dependent variable.

Next, the three research questions are addressed in a multivariate analysis. Tables 7 and 8 provide the results of the four multivariate models examining the relationship between local sales, local supply chains, business decision motivations, and the dependent variables, controlling for age, income, sex, education and firm size. Results are stable across all models. Errors are normally distributed. No indications of multicollinearity problems between independent variables were found (all variance inflation factors were less than 0.10).

The first model in both tables, the markets model, presents the relationship between the binary variable of local sales and the dependent variable and aims to address the first research question. As with the bivariate findings, local sales has a significant and positive relationship with both civic and political engagement. The controls for sex and education are significant and positive for both outcome variables, meaning that being female and having a higher education level are both significantly related to increased civic and political engagement. Age is positively and significantly correlated with political engagement but not civic engagement.

The second model in both tables, the supply chain model, disaggregates local sales into the different supply chains. In this model, the omitted variable for local supply chain is no local sales. The findings further support the bivariate findings for the second research question. Mixed and direct sales are positively and significantly correlated with civic and political engagement, with mixed sales having a greater effect on engagement. The relationship between the control variables and the dependent variables is the same in this model as in the markets model.

The third model in tables 7 and 8 is the motivations model, which includes the civic motivation as the focal independent variable and controls for profit motivation; it aims to address the third research question. As with the bivariate relationships, civic motivation is positively and significantly correlated with both civic and political engagement. Profit motivation is not significantly correlated with

Table 7 Regression Results, Civic Engagement

Independent Variables	Markets Model			Supply Chain Model			Motivations Model			Supply Chain and Motivations		
	B	Beta	SE	B	Beta	SE	B	Beta	SE	B	Beta	SE
Engaged in local sales	1.010***	.139	.307									
<u>Local supply chain</u>												
Direct	.855**	.129	.362	.858**	.131	.358	.858**	.131	.358	.858**	.131	.358
Intermediated	.006	.001	.498	.006	.001	.498	.006	.001	.498	.006	.001	.498
Mixed	1.312***	.228	.312	1.312***	.196	.313	1.112***	.196	.313	1.112***	.196	.313
<u>Motivation</u>												
Civic				.295***	.238	.052	.295***	.238	.052	.266***	.214	.053
Profit				.052	.030	.075	.052	.030	.075	.063	.037	.074
<u>Controls</u>												
Sex	.878***	.151	.244	.883***	.152	.242	.816***	.141	.243	.786***	.137	.240
Age	-.015	-.070	.009	-.012	-.052	.009	-.002	-.010	.009	.001	.006	.009
Total farm sales	.032	.024	.057	.027	.020	.059	.021	.016	.057	.051	.038	.060
Total household income	.045	.025	.075	.054	.030	.075	.041	.024	.075	.062	.036	.074
Education	.369***	.150	.104	.345***	.141	.104	.438***	.179	.102	.385***	.158	.103
R ² /Adj. R ²	0.088/0.079			0.105/0.092			0.124/0.112			0.152/0.136		

Table 8 Regression Results, Political Engagement

Independent Variables	Markets Model			Supply Chain Model			Motivations Model			Supply Chain and Motivations		
	B	Beta	SE	B	Beta	SE	B	Beta	SE	B	Beta	SE
Engaged in local sales	.786**	.092	.360									
<u>Local supply chain</u>												
Direct	.805*	.104	.424	.805*	.104	.424	.832*	.107	.436	.832*	.107	.436
Intermediated	.133	.010	.582	.133	.010	.582	-.080	-.006	.616	-.080	-.006	.616
Mixed	1.222***	.182	.366	1.222***	.182	.366	1.131***	.168	.383	1.131***	.168	.383
<u>Motivation</u>												
Civic				.164***	.113	.062	.164***	.113	.062	.124**	.085	.063
Profit				-.006	-.003	.088	-.006	-.003	.088	-.014	-.007	.089
<u>Controls</u>												
Sex	.786***	.116	.284	.784***	.115	.283	.771***	.112	.292	.749**	.110	.292
Age	.038***	.148	.011	.042***	.161	.011	.046***	.179	.011	.048***	.186	.011
Total farm sales	.093	.059	.067	.091	.058	.070	.049	.031	.069	.100	.063	.073
Total household income	.015	.007	.087	.023	.011	.087	.008	.004	.090	.018	.009	.090
Education	.649***	.226	.121	.619***	.216	.121	.687***	.237	.122	.643***	.222	.125
R ² /Adj. R ²	.097/.087			.109/.096			.102/.090			.121/.104		

engagement. The controls of sex and education continue to be significant for both types of engagement and age for political engagement.

Finally, the fourth model in tables 7 and 8, the supply chain and motivations model, incorporates both the business decision motivations and the local supply chain types so that the effects on engagement can be examined while controlling for the impacts of both types of independent variables. The supply chain and motivations model addresses the second and third research questions, which ask whether the supply chain and motivations for business decision making are correlated with higher levels of civic and political engagement. Mixed markets and direct markets, along with civic motivation, continue to have positive and significant effects on both civic and political engagement.

Discussion

Previous literature broadly supports the assertion that locally owned firms contribute to civically healthier communities. In a community with, for example, two screen-printing companies—one that is locally owned and one that is not—it is assumed that the locally owned business will contribute more to local civic welfare. But what if the locally owned business is conducting its transactions over the internet with customers around the globe? The owner of this business may be socially embedded in the community, but not economically. This distinction, which we find has nontrivial associations with higher levels of civic engagement, has not been specifically explored within this subfield's literature.

Setting the businesses' market geography aside, owners may still be more engaged in their own community, but perhaps less than if the owner more directly shared the economic fate of the community or made socially embedded business decisions. A primary difference between the current economic environment and the environment when much of the foundational research on firm ownership, firm scale and civic welfare was conducted is the mass globalization of capital and the business structures that have codeveloped with this shift. The findings presented here clarify and make explicit tacit assumptions in the existing literature, adding to the understanding of what qualities of the local economic structure—and the firms and firm owners therein—contribute to local civic health and community problem-solving capacity.

All the survey respondents in this research own local firms. Therefore, in this analysis, the extent to which firms are locally owned is held constant and other aspects of the firm and the firm's owner can be examined, namely, whether the owner has a locally facing firm, the type of supply chain used to reach local customers, and business decision making. Locally owned firms continue to be important actors in communities, but these findings suggest that specific consideration should be given to those that serve local customers, engage locally facing supply chains, and conduct business decision making with community-oriented motivations in mind.

Farmers who sell in both direct and intermediated markets are significantly more civically and politically engaged than those who sell in direct markets only.

As expected, the findings of the bivariate analysis demonstrate that owners of local farms that are locally facing, or sell to local customers, are more engaged civically and politically. The findings also suggest that the nature of the local supply chain is related to how civically and politically engaged a farmer is. Somewhat surprising is the finding that farmers who sell in both direct and intermediated markets are significantly more civically and politically engaged than those who sell in direct markets only, which suggests that engaging directly with customers is meaningful, but it is not

necessary to do so to the exclusion of engaging with other local business owners to achieve the socially desirable outcome. When controlling for the civic and profit motivations of business decision making, farmers who utilize local direct and mixed local supply chains remain significantly more engaged, with mixed local supply chains more strongly correlated with both civic and political engagement than direct only.

Findings related to firm owners who engage in only intermediated markets are mixed. Firm owners utilizing only intermediating markets demonstrated lower levels of civic engagement compared with firm owners engaging in only nonlocal markets and are more politically engaged than firms utilizing nonlocal and local direct markets. When controlling for other factors, firm owners in these supply chains are not significantly different from nonlocal firm owners. However, this could be attributable to having too few cases of intermediated-only sales.

Focusing just on the relationship between business decision making and engagement, no significant differences are found between firms' profit motivation and levels of engagement. The bivariate analysis demonstrates that civic motivation is correlated with the civic engagement index, but not the political engagement index. Once controls are introduced, the civic motivation is significantly correlated with both civic and political engagement. Firm owners who are motivated in their business to provide good food to their community and contribute to a sustainable food system are significantly more engaged outside of their business. They are not just doing "good" through their daily work but are committed to the civic and political welfare of their communities.

Lyson (2004) argues that, from a civic agriculture perspective, farmers engaged in direct markets are already civically engaged through socially embedded economic exchanges, in addition to contributing to the development of community-based food systems. Typical civic engagement surveys, however, do not ask questions related to business practices, such as are you building social capital with consumers? Working to bring good food to neighbors? Contributing to sustainability of food systems? These business practices, both in the motivations of the firm owner and the markets within which they sell, are correlated with standard measures of civic and political engagement, suggesting that local capitalism can contribute to community problem solving.

The concept of civic agriculture has always emphasized direct-only markets, not intermediated supply chains. From the consumer side, previous research has shown that consumers

purchasing in direct local food markets are more engaged civically and politically engagement (Obach and Tobin 2014). From the producer side, all local producers are more engaged outside their businesses. What is different about this analysis is the clear demonstration that it is the firm owners who sell in both direct and intermediated markets that are more engaged, civically and politically. This finding suggests that socially embedded economic transactions are not just between the producer and the consumer; they are also between the producer and intermediaries specifically operating locally facing businesses. In other words, social capital is built not just directly with consumers but can be a component of locally facing supply chains.

Locally facing firms make economic and social investments in place. While globally oriented firms compete through economic efficiency, locally facing businesses and supply chains may be most efficient for civic and political engagement. These firms' responsiveness to the needs of a complex and globalizing market is associated with their embeddedness in and responsiveness to their local consumer bases and the move toward local markets (Renting, Marsen, and Banks 2003). What might be included in prices of goods from local firms is increased local problem-solving capacity.

Additionally, locally facing businesses provide engagement for local community members who may patronize firms that intentionally orient themselves toward the community. In this case, community members are more than just "consumers," as exchanges may build and strengthen local connections. As a result, these relationships can leverage other resources through networks, increasing the capacity for local problem solving. These total supply chains, including the consumer and producer, can be seen as an ecology of firms that is much better equipped to respond to local needs. Zeitlan (1989) sees a role for local government to support and coordinate these small business ecologies, such as providing services that coordinate relationships between actors, which can compensate for inefficiencies.

Finally, these findings suggest a note of caution. "Local" is not a panacea that can be utilized to resolve many of the complex problems of modern governance (Born and Purcell 2006). These findings demonstrate variation in engagement and community embeddedness among firms that can be seen as relatively homogeneous under a broader paradigm of "local."

The findings imply that practitioners and local government officials who want to build or leverage the benefits of social embeddedness and civic engagement in a local community could use key information to identify potentially fruitful partners in the private sector. For example, local government efforts to build community engagement might benefit more from specific collaborations with locally owned businesses that intentionally serve local community members rather than locally owned businesses generally. Whether it is business attraction, retention, or expansion strategies employed locally, efforts may be more beneficial from a civic welfare perspective if locally facing firms are the focus. Further, local government economic development strategies may look to promote the formation of community-based supply chains through incentivizing and facilitating connections between entrepreneurs and locally facing businesses (Dillemuth and Hodgson 2016).

Conclusion

The increasingly frictionless movement of capital on a global scale commensurately decreases the costs of shifting supply chains. Thus, market actors have little incentive to participate in developing the market infrastructure of any specific location (Abonyi and Van Slyke 2010). The measure of an attractive local market is its capacity to respond to complex market needs. Inasmuch as local capitalism and, particularly, civic engagement may point to why some firms and supply chains show greater problem-solving capacity than others, it may be, somewhat ironically, that a firm's responsiveness to the needs of a complex and globalizing market is associated with its embeddedness in, and responsiveness to, its hyperlocal consumer base.

The research presented here suggests that, although existing literature examines relationships between local ownership of firms and positive civic engagement outcomes, there may be factors other than a simple local/nonlocal dichotomy at play. This article demonstrates that a locally owned, locally facing firm—one in which business owners interface with community members and other local businesses—is associated with greater levels of civic and political engagement when compared with locally owned firms that sell their products exclusively through indirect and/or intermediated supply chain or to nonlocal customers. These findings indicate a possible shift to a broader research program regarding local capitalism and the benefits of engagement for community members. To this point, existing research on this topic has focused on local ownership as a cohort. However, these findings imply that theory may benefit from exploring further dimensions of local ownership to gain a more granular understanding of the channels through which it exerts positive effects on the community.

Future research may be well served by theorizing more broadly than a local/nonlocal binary as to how private firms can be partners in serving and supporting their communities and exploring whether these findings hold in rural areas where market relationships are dealing with different spatial geographies and population levels. Moreover, in the same way that differences among supply chains may point to nontrivial differences in levels of civic engagement, so, too, might differences in firm size, type of industry, public–private contracts, and local ordinances and regulations. Exploring these differences may provide further theoretical insight in future research. Finally, given that the language of local capitalism and social embeddedness is so deeply tied to the conceptual language of networks, the use of network analysis methods may provide additional insights with regard to the specific channels through which local capitalism is associated with civic engagement.

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