

The Reproduction of Neoliberal Urbanism Via an Idealised Cultural Amenity: The Farmers' Market¹

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The research presented in this article explores a farmers' market's role in downtown redevelopment in a medium-sized post-industrial city located in the Midwest region of the United States. My primary focus is on processes of neoliberal urbanism and the reproduction of socio-spatial inequality via a highly idealised space. I describe the articulation of neoliberal processes and subject formation with a space that is represented and thought of by many as an authentic and fun community amenity that is benevolently offered to give residents the option to 'do the right thing.' This is one example of neoliberalism's capacity to adapt, transform, and merge with a variety of beliefs, values, and lifestyles.

Keywords: Downtown redevelopment, farmers' markets, green creative class, neoliberal subjectivities, neoliberal urbanism.

Introduction

Farmers' markets have grown rapidly in number and popularity in United States cities since the 1990s and are much more than places to buy food (MacLachlan 2012). Contemporary farmers' markets are places where people relax and listen to live music, take part in educational programs for children and adults, and pay a premium for fruits and vegetables marketed as heirloom and organic. They are described by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as 'community centrepieces' (Alonzo 2013: 1) and shopping at them is often understood to be an expression of one's commitment to the community and of one's ethics. In short, spending time and money at farmers' markets, learning about their benefits, and buying locally produced food and crafts are often thought of as both enjoyable and the right thing to do.

Farmers' markets in the United States all but disappeared with the arrival of industrial agriculture and the supermarket. Their rebirth, which began in the late 1990s, gained steam in the 2000s as farmers' markets were implemented in thousands of cities across the United States (United States Department of Agriculture 2019). This revival of farmers' markets occurred alongside and cannot be disentangled from ongoing patterns of urban growth and redevelopment in the neoliberal era. Neoliberal urbanism, in practice, has involved the reorientation and devolution of state functions in ways that privilege and prioritise free-market ideology and unfettered capital accumulation (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Harvey 2005). Responsibility for social services and infrastructure was passed from national to local governments, beginning in the late 1970s, as federal funding declined precipitously in subsequent decades (Harvey 2005). In this context, competition among cash-strapped cities for private investment soared. Tax breaks for corporations, privatisation or elimination of services, and cultural and image building projects, all justified by neoliberal ideology, became widely

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adopted urban development strategies and remain dominant today (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Hackworth 2007, Harvey 2005). In this context, economic inequality has intensified while ideas about the causes of poverty placed the blame squarely on individuals themselves. Inscribed in neoliberal thought is the role of the autonomous, individualised, self-directing subject (Harvey 2005, Rose 1999). This normalises the notion that those impacted by neoliberalisation processes, whether positively or negatively, are in the driver's seat and are simply getting what they deserve.

As highly idealised spaces of community conviviality where shoppers can purchase ethically produced items from small-scale local vendors, farmers' markets do not stand out as bastions of neoliberalism. However, as neoliberalism continues to evolve (Peck et al. 2013, Pinson and Journal 2016), it has extended '[private] market mechanisms, relations, discipline and ethos to an ever-expanding spectrum of spheres of social activities' (Pinson and Journal 2016: 137). Contemporary farmers' markets are complex, but in subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways, they are used as tools to promote neoliberal redevelopment and are spaces that reproduce neoliberal subjectivities. The production and reproduction of new neoliberal subjects, who could also be described as a green creative class, support entrepreneurial urban governance and favour consumption and lifestyle opportunities that allow them, as individuals, to 'do the right thing' to address larger social and environmental issues, thus relieving the government from responsibility and also averting collective action.

The capacity of neoliberalism to penetrate everyday life and converge with seemingly unrelated or contradictory ideas, ideologies, and political rationalities has been crucial to the formation of subjectivities that help sustain it (Harvey 2005, Peck et al. 2013, Ward and England 2007). The farmers' market is one site where this kind of convergence is occurring. The dominant view of farmers' markets as democratic and culturally progressive renders them ideal venues for neoliberal political use. Their popularity and the positive feelings they evoke both lend to and simultaneously obscure their contribution to neoliberal governance, and the inequalities that it reproduces. In other words, a local government's association with this kind of idealised space can influence citizens' perceptions of broader municipal plans and practices, thus helping establish their perceived legitimacy (Pardo and Prato 2019). In this study, I examine the ways in which a large farmers' market in a formerly industrial medium-sized city in the Midwestern United States fits into neoliberal redevelopment plans and interrogate the processes through which farmers' markets may be complicit with the normalisation and legitimisation of neoliberalism via its spread to unexpected spheres and its further entrenchment in everyday life and dominant worldviews.

Neoliberalism, Urban Entrepreneurialism, and the Eco-ethical City

As Brenner and Theodore explain, 'The linchpin of neoliberal ideology is the belief that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development' (2002: 350). However, neoliberalism is rarely, if ever, actualised in accordance to this ideology (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Harvey 2005, Jessop 2002). The state does not withdraw, but instead typically shifts its patterns of

intervention (Harvey 2005). Across the United States, governance has shifted away from addressing human welfare concerns in favour of promoting the interests of capital (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Harvey 2005, MacLeod 2002).

Urban entrepreneurialism emerged in the 1970s as a localised reaction to neoliberal restructuring at the national level, which was itself a response to the sustained global recession of the preceding decade (Harvey 2005). Harvey (1989, 2005) describes urban entrepreneurialism as a strategy developed with the purpose of attracting an economically active population back to the city at a time when funds for services and infrastructure had been drastically reduced, unemployment was rising, and social need was high. As a mode of adaptation, energy and resources were redirected away from social programs and toward pro-growth and pro-business strategies such as tax breaks, privatisation, the creation of public-private ventures, cultural development, and image building (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Hackworth 2007, Harvey 2005). Post-industrial cities have been particularly eager to project an image that is pleasing and pristine (Short 1999). A goal has been and continues to be for cities and neighbourhoods that have experienced disinvestment, decline, and middle-class flight to be perceived as safe and welcoming not only for business investment, but also for middle- and upper-class consumers. DeSena and Krase (2015) chronicle Brooklyn, New York's transformation from an epicentre of extreme disinvestment, decay, and hopelessness in the 1970s to its rebirth as one of the world's most fashionable and exciting destinations. They highlight the role of concerted efforts to attract high-end retailers and developers and re-brand New York as a luxury city that appeals to global élites in this rebranding and revitalisation. More recently, the entrepreneurial approach to urban development has gained dominance in cities of all sizes across the United States (albeit, typically in a toned-down form compared to New York), and is often taken for granted as the best, or only, policy strategy, usually to the detriment of social services and affordable housing (Hackworth 2007).

A particular brand of entrepreneurial governance was popularised in the 2000s by Richard Florida (2000, 2002, 2005, 2014) and remains highly influential. Promoting competitiveness and the type of redevelopment projects thought to attract the young, professional, and high earning demographic that Florida has termed the 'creative class' are prioritised over other urban needs in many municipalities. The results of neoliberal redevelopment catering to business interests and this demographic slice can be observed in cities. Gentrification, upscale shopping districts, and nightlife districts have exploded across downtowns (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Smith 2002, Zimmerman 2008). Downtown areas have become foci for investment as cities struggle to effectively play the game of inter-urban competition by promoting development geared toward attracting and retaining the creative class. For Florida (2000, 2002, 2005, 2014), this population is the saviour of cities, bringing not only their own dollars, but also kinds of companies that want to hire them. Florida has a long list of amenities that make cities attractive to young 'knowledge workers' who are looking for places with what Florida calls the three Ts – technology, talent, and tolerance (Florida 2002). In order to develop these three Ts and attract the creative class, cities are encouraged to create a 'teeming blend of cafes, sidewalk musicians, and small galleries and bistros' (Florida 2002: 166). The natural environment also plays an

important role, Florida suggests, and is ‘a key component of the total package required to attract talent and in doing so generate economic growth’ (Florida 2000: 5).

Florida’s ideas have been adopted by many politically powerful individuals and organisations. They continue to operate out of the notion that if they prioritise redevelopment and imaging projects geared toward attracting and retaining this ‘creative’ population with money to spend, the result will be economic growth and prosperity. Thus, fostering an eco-ethical and community-centred urban identity has become a marketing tool (Kruger 2007, Quastel 2009, Madden 2013). One outcome of this approach has been to allow urban growth and development to continue in the wake of ecological crises and through the rise of popular environmentalism (Hagerman 2007, Kear 2007, Laidley 2007, Quastal 2009, While et al. 2004, Whitehead 2003).

The redevelopment plans, policies, and projects that are associated with the creative class approach are typically framed by a concern with ‘quality of life’ (McCann 2004). However, the question of ‘quality of life for whom?’ and the needs of the poor and others who do not fit in the category of the creative class tend to go unaddressed as resources are directed toward creating a good business climate and the types of places that will attract middle- and upper-class creative consumers (MacLeod 2002, Wilson 2006, Zimmerman 2008). The result is an intensely uneven landscape in which members of the creative class spend their time in showcase city centres and vibrant neighbourhoods while the poor continue to be warehoused in increasingly neglected and deprived parts of cities (Wilson 2006). The right to the city, as conceptualised by Lefebvre (1996; see also Mitchell 2003 and Harvey 2008) as the right to access urban life and to cities that meet human needs, is not offered to those who do not meet the criteria for what are seen as desirable urban citizens — for example, the creative class, or more specifically, middle-class and wealthy consumers.

While many urban redevelopment projects confer a new community-focused civic life, the notion of community that is applied is not an inclusive one. Public spaces are now viewed as ‘avenues to increased accumulation rather than as having use value in their own right’ (Clough and Vanderbeck 2006: 2262). Thus it is with farmers’ markets, which have become incorporated into redevelopment plans as a central initiative to promote city liveability and a robust entrepreneurial physical component meant to be attractive to developers and the creative class. The neoliberalised conceptualisation of space privileges profitability of capital investments to the exclusion of meanings and publics that do not fit with this notion of what and whom public space is for. The association of farmers’ markets with ethical consumption, authenticity, and community helps mask the exclusivity of what is perceived to be a public space provided for the benefit of all.

Research Site and Methodology

The farmers’ market that served as a case study for this project was implemented in 2008 to be a focal point of the downtown redevelopment plan and has become quite a popular and crowded outdoor event. Over 100 vendors sell their wares from tidy stalls to crowds of people who stroll through the aisles of this well-organised and regulated market each Saturday, Spring through

Fall. Educational opportunities for all ages related to food, environment, and well-being and entertainment such as live music and balloon animal vendors are also commonplace and contribute to the market's festival-like atmosphere.

The market is located in a post-industrial city with a population of about 110,000 in the Midwest region of the U.S. The decision to focus on a medium-sized city rather than a large city stems from two things. First, I chose to diverge from the majority of urban research, which focuses on cities characterised as World Cities or Global Cities. Following Robinson (2006) and Pardo and Prato (2018), my research does not rest on hierarchical divisions or generalizing models of cities and recognises cities of all sizes and types as worthy of being studied and included in the development of urban theory. Second, the use of a farmers' market as a redevelopment tool is of more political, economic, cultural, and material consequence in a city with fewer resources and fewer large redevelopment projects happening concurrently than is likely to be the case in a large city. My intention is to provide an in-depth account of a farmers' market's relationship to neoliberal urbanism and subject formation in an 'ordinary city' (Robinson 2006).

The majority of the data for this research comes from participant observation I conducted at the market and from semi-formal interviews with current and previous city officials, the market manager, and farmers' market patrons. Interviews lasted from about five minutes to over one hour, depending on the availability and interest of interviewees. For each interview, I worked from a set of prepared questions (see appendix). However, I occasionally skipped one or two questions and typically added several follow-up questions that varied depending on the direction the interviewee took the conversation.

The interviews I conducted with city officials took place in their workplaces, usually in their personal office space or in a conference room. When I felt it was appropriate to ask and consent was given, interviews were recorded and fully transcribed later, usually on the same day as the interviews. During interviews that I did not record, including those conducted with the market manager, vendors, and shoppers, I took notes and immediately after the interview added to the notes. In general, participants were remarkably eager to help with the research. I approached shoppers randomly and nearly everyone I approached was willing to respond to my questions. Because I felt recording conversations would detract from the feeling of informality and comfort that I hoped to maintain with farmers' market shoppers, many quotations in this article are paraphrased. I took care to maintain interviewees' overall tone and intent. I am also not using names in order to maintain confidentiality.

I also examined strategic planning documents and advertising and media materials. The websites, brochures, and documents analysed deal with downtown redevelopment and/or the farmers' market specifically. I explored discussions about the market and the downtown on websites and social media sites of the chamber of commerce, the convention and visitor's bureau, the downtown business association, city government, and for the market itself. I also read newspaper articles and examined other local media sources for farmers' market coverage. When I examined the websites, documents, and promotional materials, I looked for indications of the kind of image being projected or cultivated and the kind of desired citizen being

forwarded. I also considered how the market was portrayed, the kinds of goals ascribed to it, and how it was suggested the market contributes to urban development.

The Farmers' Market as an Imaging and Redevelopment Tool

Planners and other decision makers that I spoke to who are involved in downtown redevelopment were forthcoming about their use of the farmers' market to help promote the kind of image that will attract tourists and residents downtown while also providing support for local farmers, crafters, and artists. One development director was particularly emphatic about the connection between the farmers' market and redevelopment of the area under his charge:

‘The City has supported the farmers market as sort of an incubator for redeveloping a larger market district. It has been wildly successful and it’s a huge draw for people downtown and down to the riverfront to see the exciting changes that are happening.’

This planner noted he had learned about the successful use of farmers' markets as redevelopment tools in other cities and has acted aggressively to operationalise this connection in his city.

The redevelopment plan document indicates that the farmers' market is to be a focal point for an area of new development, which has been labelled the ‘market district.’ Beyond the market, the market district will include high rent converted loft apartments and condominiums, retail shops, and a riverfront recreational path that runs through what are described as ‘naturalised’ green spaces. The farmers' market is slated to help anchor the upgrading of nearby parks, retail, restaurants, housing, and a potential hotel. This plan is an example of new neoliberal redevelopment based on culture, consumption, and recreation, with an element of environmental consciousness running through it. The plan describes the production of an image and a lifestyle offered to middle and upper-class consumers who have the free time and expendable income to spend Saturday mornings leisurely shopping at the farmers' market and afternoons strolling through parks. It also appeals, through the indicated green spaces and conservation efforts as well as the farmers' market, to the ethical sensibility of protecting the environment.

A neighbourhood that adjoins the area slated for upscale redevelopment is low-income, including the census tract with the lowest median household income in the city, and is the home of the highest percentage of African American residents in the city. This neighbourhood and its residents who are clearly not the creative class that is sought, are not addressed in the redevelopment plan. When I asked how the surrounding neighbourhoods are incorporated into the downtown redevelopment, a planner responded, ‘the upscaling that’s happening will benefit everyone. There are jobs here now and local places to shop and eat.’ However, the growth of the service sector in neoliberal cities catering to the creative class has tended to replace industrial-era jobs that have been lost with jobs that do not pay a living wage. As expected, the new downtown businesses the planner was talking about are mostly small retail shops and cafes, that neither offer employment opportunities that pay enough to help employees move out of

poverty, nor provide goods and services oriented to needs of low-income African American populations. In my visits to downtown, the consumers I saw in shops and cafes and at the farmers' market overwhelmingly appeared to be white. Clearly, the benefactors of this new development are not the residents of the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Up to this point, redevelopment in this area has been slowly replacing mostly empty buildings from the city's industrial era and vacant lots. However, if this current wave of redevelopment is successful, gentrification may displace poor people from surrounding neighbourhoods. The neighbourhoods adjacent to downtown are made up of many large Victorian homes in varying states of repair, many of which had been subdivided into apartments. These historic homes are the kind that could become highly sought after for renovation and made into expensive single-family homes, as has been occurring in post-industrial cities for decades, if redevelopment based on providing urban amenities for the middle- and upper-middle-class continues along this proposed path. The active and ongoing disinvestment negatively impacting these neighbourhoods and their current residents has created potentially lucrative profit opportunities for developers, an outcome of which may be evictions and displacement of the existing low-income population (Smith 1979).

While city officials agreed that farmers' markets are good for cities and good for citizens, the specific benefits for cities seemed somewhat difficult for some interviewees to elucidate beyond the fact that they bring people downtown and are lively places for human enjoyment and healthy food acquisition. Planners frequently expressed that having lively happenings is important. But the answer to the question 'why' diverged. Some conversations were about how farmers' markets are the kind of thing that (certain types of desirable) residents desire. Others emphasised that experts have suggested farmers' markets are good for redevelopment. These experts, identified as fellow planners who had successfully helped transform downtowns in other cities, provided the model for downtown transformation and 'sometimes residents can't see that.' In insinuation, residents were portrayed as lacking the knowledge and expertise to meaningfully contribute to planning their city's redevelopment. Nearly all conversations included mention of the potential for the farmers' market to bring vibrancy and consumers to a part of the city with a lot of potential to become 'a unique destination'.

Quality of Life Discourse and Social Inequality

The creative class approach encourages municipalities to focus their resources on developing places and a quality of life that will attract 'people who add economic value through their creativity' (Florida 2002: 249). It suggests cities must foster the values held by the mobile, young, educated, and 'creative' people they must now attract (Florida 2002). Creative class-centred rhetoric is clearly guiding the redevelopment plans for the case study site. The explicit focus is on providing upscale cultural amenities and upscale housing, suggesting these types of projects will attract residents and visitors with money to spend. The poor are left out of the plans, even though the area where the farmers' market is located that is targeted for redevelopment adjoins low-income neighbourhoods. While a stated goal in the downtown redevelopment plan is to improve quality of life, because of the upscale nature of the projects

encouraged, the implication is that the improved ‘quality of life’ will only apply to middle- and upper-middle-class residents’ and visitors’ lives.

Nevertheless, I received some contradictory messages from planners and other city officials about who the market is for. For example, the individual who serves as liaison between the city and the market and was instrumental in implementing the farmers’ market stated more than once that, ‘the market is for everyone’. He referenced in egalitarian terms a ‘public place’ and ‘a great community space’. However, he also stated unambiguously that it is not actually for *everyone*, explaining that ‘it attracts a certain clientele’. While the use of the words ‘everyone’ and ‘the public’ and ‘the community’ seem to imply inclusivity, in practice they don’t seem to include the poor in this case. Similar contradictions emerged in my discussion with a planner who explained that the farmers’ market is important because,

‘It’s an enriching activity for the whole community where people connect with others and connect with their food. We need more of these types of activities to keep a society healthy.’

During this interview, I was also told that,

‘Farmers’ markets should be considered to be a potential redevelopment approach and a marketing tool because they can be really attractive to yuppies.’

Although public officials are notoriously ambiguous (Eagleton 1991), the particular contradictions described above can be understood as symptomatic of neoliberal redevelopment. Discussions that alternate between extolling farmers markets as benefiting all and casting them as attracting middle/upper-class people highlight a central contradiction of neoliberal governance. Projects and programs developed in the name of improving quality of life for ‘the public’ or ‘the community’ create a visage of inclusivity and benevolence, and thus legitimacy, while tending to cater to only a portion of the population. The quality of life and the needs of the rest of the citizenry are neglected, ignored, or even held up as examples of personal irresponsibility or failure. This contradiction is very powerful, yet is easily overlooked when it comes to such highly idealised projects and spaces as farmers’ markets. The discourse surrounding farmers’ markets has neutralised them as purely benevolent offerings that everyone in the community can enjoy and benefit from. The assumptions embedded in this kind of discourse renders alternative ways of understanding farmers’ markets that consider their connections to neoliberal urbanism and the inequalities it produces more difficult to recognise.

Promotional material the market as well as many shoppers I spoke to identify it as akin to a cross between a public square and a community festival — a place for everyone to come together to enjoy. However, these descriptions mask the reality it is less than truly public. Its ability to draw a particular clientele is precisely why the farmers’ market is considered to be useful as a redevelopment tool. City officials explained that a purpose of the farmers’ market is to further the surrounding area’s transition to a more upscale district. Beyond simply their capacity to spend money, the beneficiary group of the redevelopment plan helps to further the downtown’s image as a place for middle- and upper-class consumers. Much of this has involved bringing this demographic downtown, where, planners suggested, they had not dared to go for

several decades for fear of crime or simply due to a lack of activity. Downtown is portrayed by city officials as a space that had been ‘dead’ for decades and now experiences a rebirth as an outcome of redevelopment planning. According to a city official,

‘People are starting to think of downtown for good restaurants and nightlife. You might go to a museum or see a show and then go out for a cocktail. That wasn’t the case before. Downtown was empty. It is coming alive.’

A related narrative surrounding reasons for promoting the farmers’ market revolves around the desire to create a sense of place and a sense of community, things that had ostensibly been lacking previously and that would encourage downtown redevelopment. A city official told me, ‘the farmers’ market fit into that plan to create a vibrant downtown with a sense of place’. Certainly, the downtown had a sense of place before it had a farmers’ market. Sense of place is not universal but is experienced differently by different people. Although downtown was described as lacking a sense of place by one official and as dead prior to redevelopment interventions by another, not everyone shares these perceptions. I asked some market shoppers if they were familiar with what the area was like previously. Some, primarily younger shoppers, noted that it had been a scary place. Others explained some of the changes and various pre-existing businesses they were aware of. One woman reminisced in detail about downtown when she worked there:

‘At lunch time we would go to a big buffet restaurant. You were charged separate for every item, including napkins. There was a big bank on the corner and my girlfriends and I would cash our paychecks there. From there we’d go shopping at the big department store. The old ballpark was downtown too. It’s been renovated since then, but it was always a fun place.’

This interviewee talked about the downtown of the past fondly, in contrast to the discourse among planners representing the space prior to its redevelopment as always empty and unused — a blank slate on which to create a new image.

Although the downtown did not previously have planters with colourful flowers that it has now and the restaurants were more utilitarian than today, it did not lack a sense of place and was not considered universally dead as city officials suggest. When planners talk about bringing life to a dead area and creating a sense of place, what they reference is a sense of place that appeals to the creative class. Moreover, those who have cultivated tastes for local and organic food and take part in alternative food practices such as farmers’ markets tend to be economically and/or socially middle class, and they tend to be white (Alkon and McCullen 2010, Slocum 2005).

Farmers’ Market Shoppers as Neoliberal Subjects

Neoliberalism shapes ‘citizens as individual entrepreneurial actors across all dimensions of their lives’ (Brown 2005: 57; also see Foucault 2008 and Rose 1999), and farmers’ markets are spaces where entrepreneurial subjectivities are nurtured and where ‘neoliberalism spreads its utopian vision that the market can and should permeate every aspect of human activity and

behavior' (Dean 1999: 57). In this way, power is exercised through the formation of mentalities, desires, and behaviours of individuals in ways that align with neoliberal objectives (Foucault 2008; Rose 1999). McRobbie's (2016) work on the post-industrialised cultural economy details the stealthy ways in which neoliberal subjectivities are being shaped through the normalisation of individualism, entrepreneurialism, and self-exploitation, and the delegitimisation of social critique. My observations and interviews provide evidence for the infiltration of neoliberalism and neoliberal subject formation into unexpected realms, revealing the farmers' market to be not only a place to buy and sell food, but also a place that allows and encourages a set of behaviours and practices that enable buying and selling a specific type of experience, lifestyle, and image or identity.

Individualised consumption choices are often seen as a way of making a statement, supporting certain values, or voting with dollars in this neoliberal era (Adams and Raisborough 2010). Performing and displaying one's beliefs and ethics through shopping at farmers' markets, talking about it, and posting about it online are ways people construct their identities. People use the farmers' market to present themselves as having a certain kind of caring, ethical, community-oriented politics. Interviews suggest people believe that they are enhancing the community by shopping at the farmers' market. Most often, this contribution was framed in terms of supporting local farmers and keeping money in the community, but many respondents mentioned they contributed simply by being at the market and adding to the local vibrancy. As one respondent put it, 'The busier the market is the better it looks from the outside looking in. And if I can be one extra person to help with that, great!'

Farmers' markets are highly idealised, but in certain ways live up to the hype. As interviewees told me, there does seem to be something special about these spaces that draws people to them and makes them feel good. New parents with their babies in slings or strollers smile as they chat with neighbours and friends. People of all ages enjoy the colours and scents and lively outdoor atmosphere. Groups gather around musicians — watching, listening, and sometimes dancing to the music, seeing and being seen doing all of this. People wander and browse through the aisles in search of a certain type of herb or variety of eggplant about which they may have heard or read, or for that perfect peach, picking up a few ears of corn here and a dozen eggs there, admiring piles of heirloom tomatoes. Some chat comfortably with vendors, asking questions about their farms, families, and products. Others purchase a snack or a drink and take some time to relax. The farmers' market is a place to be surrounded by nature's bounty, but just as importantly to see and be seen basking in a lively outdoor atmosphere. As one market patron put it, people go to the farmers' market to 'enjoy the camaraderie of like-minded community members. It's a gathering of kindred spirits. I think that in the farmers' market, people in a sense see a reflection of the kind of community they want to be.'

For some farmers' market shoppers, the experience of being at the market is often more important than the products that they purchase there. When asked what they like about the market, people talk about the act of going there, what they do there, and who they see in addition to what they purchase. The market has clearly become a beloved downtown institution and a trip to the market has become a Saturday morning ritual for many people. In comparing her

experiences at the farmers' market with shopping at a supermarket, one woman stated, 'Physically I can taste the difference; spiritually I can taste the difference. It's really a special experience to get food that way and I think it's more respectful of the work that they [farmers] do'.

There is a belief among many that the farmers' market is where they can have an 'authentic' (if not spiritual) experience. A planner shared the view that this is a big part of the draw to farmers' markets:

'The interest in farmers' markets has to do with authenticity. Farmers' markets allow people to connect their food to the people who produce it. How often does that happen with any other product? Do you know who made your couch or your TV or your jeans or your blender? At a farmers' market you at least know who grew your squash. And I think that as a society, we are seeking that authenticity whether we realise it or not.'

Shoppers ensure that the market's authenticity meets their expectations by probing vendors to be certain their food is chemical-free. They ask questions about the nutritional value of different varieties of produce and swap recipes for their farmers' market finds. Farmers' market vendors are expected not only to sell produce but to play a role in producing what shoppers are seeking as an authentic farmers' market experience. Vendors have become skilled in playing to the nostalgic ideas about who and what farmers and farming are. Some actively construct their own identities in ways that support the desire of shoppers for consumptive knowledge and opportunities for ethical consumption through which market shoppers construct their own identities. The imagery of cows and goats happily grazing in peaceful pastoral settings and of chickens being loved as pets by the children of farming families is deployed frequently in stall signage. Pleasant representations of happy animals and cheerful, knowledgeable, hardworking farmers appeal to consumers concerned about conventional farming practices that provide a miserable life for livestock. They also appeal to those who are not actively concerned about animal, environmental, or social welfare and do not see themselves as necessarily 'voting with their dollars', but simply as enjoying the pleasant atmosphere of the market. These shoppers explained that as consumers they pay a premium for an enjoyable experience. For example, I was told, 'It's got a fun atmosphere. It costs more, but it's an experience. You don't get the music and the smiles at Hy-Vee'.

The association of farmers' markets with authenticity and with an enjoyable friendly atmosphere as well as with an ethical politics helps to obscure their articulation with unequal social relations. This is a 'both/and' situation in which multiple truths exist simultaneously rather than a straightforward example of neoliberal cooptation of ethical impulses. The joy that is felt, and the community connection, are real and are important. Based on my interviews and observations, I believe the farmers' market to be a place where people truly do derive a sense of contentment through their weekly ritual in which they share time and space and practices with others such as perusing stalls of fresh fruits and vegetables, listening to live music, purchasing a bouquet of fresh flowers, and wiping fresh berry juice off of their little ones' faces.

However, this space that creates these opportunities for joy and connection is not created for all segments of the population and this can be a difficult reality to recognise.

Through mentalities that identify shopping at the farmers' market as the result of a rational free choice to do the right thing, social exclusion and inequality are subtly reproduced. The notion that we all have the same choices available to us was prevalent in my discussions with farmers' market shoppers, and many interviewees explained that shopping at the farmers' market is simply 'the right thing to do', implying that it's the right thing to do not only for them but for everyone. When asked who benefits from the market, again and again I was given various iterations of, 'It benefits all of us!' The understanding that these markets are filled primarily with people of a particular social class and race, or of the significance of the demographic makeup of farmers' market shoppers, seemed to be nearly non-existent.

Some people did notice and acknowledge that despite the rhetoric of the farmers' market being a place for everyone not everyone was shopping there. The main way in which this was revealed was through an identification of 'others', set up in opposition to the self-responsible subject described above. At the core of this were constructions of irresponsibility and imprudence. For example, I was told, 'Some people subsist on processed junk because they just don't know any better, but a lot of people are choosing to ignore the information that's everywhere nowadays'. This interviewee did not note affordability or the class-related reasons for differences in diets. Choosing not to purchase fresh local and organic produce was seen very simply as a bad choice while the farmers' market, on the other hand, represents and offers opportunities for individuals to make good choices.

As described previously, the farmers' market is being used to construct a commodified eco-ethical cultural image. This kind of image is deployed to improve competitiveness to attract and retain a certain segment of the population that is seen as most desirable for redevelopment — the creative class. When we take a look at the micro-scale and examine everyday conduct and perspectives of shoppers at the market, a similarly competitive mentality can be identified. The focus on choice and self-maximisation helps produce cultural capital for market shoppers. It also naturalises the identities of others (in this case, those who do not shop at farmers' markets) as irresponsible. Both types of subjects are construed as active, free choice-makers. Making the right individualised choices becomes a moral task.

Once the correct self-maximizing choices are made, in the neoliberal perspective, the free market will presumably take care of the rest. What this view overlooks are the persistent structural inequalities and the inability of individualised solutions to have the desired impact on problems as they occur at scales beyond the individual. A focus on self-responsibility and civic duty serve to divert attention from deeper causes of the myriad distresses individuals who do not meet these expectations face. Broader social conditions and political economies can more easily be disregarded when all responsibility is placed on choices made by individuals. This is a contradiction inherent to the new neoliberal subjectivities farmers' markets help create and reproduce.

Discussion

Farmers' markets offer a green urban spectacle as an urban entrepreneurial imaging tool. They are also highly idealised by the people who use them. To a greater degree than most urban spaces, farmers' markets are revered as beneficial venues, both socially and environmentally. The market I studied is considered to be an authentic community space and to have been benevolently created and supported by the municipal government to make the world, or at least downtown, a better place. Whether or not planners and other redevelopment decision makers personally ascribe to the idealised assessment of farmers' markets, they make use of these representations by incorporating the markets into urban imaging strategies and redevelopment plans. This can contribute to the perceived legitimacy of broader redevelopment plans and practices among residents and mask their complicity with the reproduction of poverty and inequality.

Farmers' markets are being constructed in ways that fit well with neoliberal redevelopment strategies. Moreover, these weekly markets are relatively inexpensive to create compared to conventional government-driven redevelopment initiatives (for example, urban renewal, CDBG, tax abatement initiatives). For this reason, farmers' markets can be particularly attractive to smaller cities with fewer financial resources where they can be packaged as lively, eco-ethical, community spaces. Mobilizing vendors and the community in a kind of public-private partnership that pivots around the aestheticisation of a local food space and green consumption opportunities has become an important urban development tactic.

The market is promoted as an egalitarian space for all while simultaneously being used to promote a type of redevelopment that targets one part of the population, likely at the expense of other groups. The positive, enjoyable experience of shopping at the farmers' market presents a façade of benevolence that helps to conceal neoliberal motivations behind its production. The rhetoric of enhanced quality of life and opportunities to make ethical green lifestyle and consumption choices at the farmers' market legitimises the privileging of urban redevelopment in particular micro-spaces and helps normalise the focus on economic interests over public services and the needs and desires of residents who are not part of the creative class, particularly low-income and racialised residents. Furthermore, the understanding that farmers' markets provide opportunities for citizens to solve environmental and social problems through their own individualised choices erases obligations of government and allows for socially and environmentally harmful development practices to continue. Yet, it should not be completely discounted that city governments are being encouraged to think and act more sustainably and with an eye toward creating community spaces, even if the motivations are neoliberal. Farmers' markets may be influential in opening up new and important ways of thinking about food and about how we can live and interact with each other.

The research presented here suggests farmers' markets and sustainability, localism, and greening do not necessarily challenge neoliberal logic at a fundamental level, but rather can be and are being used to reinforce it. This study describes how a farmers' market has been turned into profitable grounds for production of capital and its reinvestment in the surrounding deindustrialised and formerly disinvested area.

Social and environmental values have become incorporated into the present phase of capitalism in which quality of life is a commodity and consumerism, culture, and creative industries have become key characteristics of the political economy (Harvey 2005). As strategic green amenities are increasingly used to market and produce cities for the creative class in order to encourage urban growth and development, the role farmers' markets play in helping support neoliberal urbanism should be recognised. This study reveals farmers' markets to be complex sites that are highly idealised as benevolent public spaces offering opportunities for individuals to do that right thing and at the same time are implicated in neoliberal processes that create highly uneven urban landscapes and reinforce socio-spatial inequality.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Farmers' Market Shopper Interview Questions

- How often do you go to the farmers' market and what motivates you to go?
- What does the farmers' market mean to you?
- What do you think are the most important benefits that the market provides?
- Do you see yourself as making a contribution to the welfare of the community by shopping at the farmers' market? Please explain.
- Is there anything about the market that could be improved? If so, what and why?

City Official Interview Questions

- Please describe the city's development strategy. What are the main goals for the city?
- How does the farmers' market fit in?
- What role does City government play in supporting the market? What roles did it play previously? Do you see its role changing in the future?
- What benefits has the City anticipated from participation with the market? What has the outcome been? Any surprises?