**MARKET PLACE: FOOD QUARTERS, DESIGN AND URBAN
RENEWAL IN LONDON, SUSAN PARHAM (2012)**
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There has been considerable discussion both in academic circles and in community activists groups about the roles played out by neighbourhood-based processes of commercial revitalization in the broader dynamics of socio-spatial inequalities (Deener 2007; Zukin and Kosta 2004; Zukin et al. 2009). It is suggested that shifts in the composition of retail and services are part of a contemporary urban strategy of commercial investment that enhances the lifestyle of new waves of upper-class residents and users (raising housing values and rents) while, at the same time, forcing out lower-class long-term ones (Marcuse 1985; Slater 2009), who helped to produce the socio-cultural fabric of those spaces.

'A significant area for investigation is the double-sided nature of food quarters and the questions this raises for research in delving into their real character,' writes Susan Parham in *Market Place: Food Quarters, Design and Urban Renewal in London* (221). In fact, while the emergence of new kinds of food spaces and practices may underpin positive sustainability, food-centred regeneration may also lead to either increasing commodification of space based on food and design improvements, and even to gentrification, where food is part of the place marketing strategy. These inconsistencies between convivial intentions and their 'paradoxical effects' (205) have become subjects of heated debate among planners and policymakers. 'For example, how is it that food quarters have operated simultaneously as zones of gentrification that may have excluded some, yet equally appeared to defy dominant spatial trends that are producing food related sprawl and 'obesegenic' environments (Lake and Townshend 2006)? How is it that they have developed in a more convivial, gastronomically rich and sustainable way than some other areas? Can the benefits they offer involve people of all classes or are they for gentrification's winners?' (221-2). These are some of the questions that the author addresses in this book as to point out how the very mundane everyday practices, interactions, and encounters are particularly salient in terms of daily-lived experiences of neighbourhood change (11). As Patch points out in his study of Brooklyn's Williamsburg, for instance, on the role of women in urban renewal, 'the changes associated with gentrification are most viscerally felt at the micro-level, on the sidewalks of neighbourhoods' (2008: 104). Commercial gentrification, in fact, constitutes a primary manifestation of this transition: it encompasses the kinds of stores and shops which are opening (and closing), the commodities which are being sold, or the services provided, who is going to buy such goods, or just who is walking on those sidewalks, as well as the fliers or the advertisements posted, the music playing out of such places and so on. Crucially in the gentrification process these new stores succeed at

establishing new space, where new local relationships occur, and provide public spaces and regular time frames to facilitate such congregation.

Against the backdrop of these questions and debates, *Market Place: Food Quarters, Design and Urban Renewal in London* critically examines the renewal of three 'food-centred spaces in formerly rundown areas of London' (221) – Borough, Broadway and Exmouth Markets – and questions why food quarters have emerged in each place, becoming paradoxically the loci for food-led gentrification. Susan Parham explores in eight chapters the nexus between urban development, design and planning on the one side and sustainable food systems and cultures on the other. Addressing the implications of designing and planning for food-led renewal, Chapter 1 provides the research framework and methodology, while Chapter 2 explores the book's theoretical underpinnings. Chapters 3 to 6 present the research material and analysis from the case study research, followed by Chapters 7 and 8 which draw together and review the findings with conclusions. Using case study research – informed by design, morphological and social science techniques (75) over a three-year period up to 2008 – in the empirical core of the book (Chapters 3–6) Parham highlights the relationship between food, design and urban renewal. She argues that the rise of these food quarters had compromised their conviviality and sustainability.

Interestingly, the book's morphological investigations acted as a basis for considering each quarter's urban structure in a design sense. At Broadway, for instance, the street's structure provided an attractive, 'traditionally shaped' (97) urban space, which possessed the necessary design qualities to make a comfortable outdoor room. In other words, the existing spatial structure made the space human scaled, fine grained, mixed use and highly walkable (232).

If we assume that the socio-spatial configuration of an urban community is the result of cumulative interactions between human activities and the physical environment, the cultural atmosphere is, then, one of the core goals of urban design because of its substantial social impact in community building practices (Allen 2006; Baker 2012; Julier 2005; Molnar 2010; Rankin 2008; Scott 1997; Zukin 2008, 2012). A convivial atmosphere can enrich a fragmented community greatly, and contribute to the creation of a healthy and harmonious living environment. In particular, since food is a pillar of hospitality (Bell 2009; Brotherton 1999), all three food quarters 'have thus become important components of regenerating neighbourhoods, both in terms of attracting new residents and in terms of making them gastro-tourism destinations' as Bell argues about what we might call the *boosterization of hospitality* (2007: 9).

Even though Parham's book mainly suggests that 'consciously designing for food is broadly a good thing for sustainable cities, producing authentic places important for experiencing food-led conviviality in everyday life' (4), she demonstrates how design for food-led renewal is not a straightforward process and it might have paradoxical effects. The production of new distinctively cultured urban consumption opportunities, centred on food-related

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practices, here recall Bourdieu's (1984) symbolic capital which legitimize forms of distinction and classification as well as Jager's (1986) influential piece that put emphasis on class definition and the aesthetics of gentrification. Interestingly, Parham argues, 'food was one of the ways in which this gentrification was expressed' (245). An inescapable conclusion drawn by the author is that at the time of the research all three food quarters were gentrifying areas. However, while gentrification was a significant issue in all three places, the way its causes and effects were playing out varied considerably across the quarters. Such variegated effects were often complex and even paradoxical involving competing narratives. These 'nuanced characteristics' (241), revolved around whether the food spaces created or promoted local social exclusion and displacement effects. The detailed accounts of London's food quarters of Borough, Broadway and Exmouth Markets narrated in *Market Place,* signal, among other things, the risks associated with 'one-size-fits-all' policy approaches to complex urban regeneration processes.

As a book that makes a methodological and conceptual contribution, it will be useful to a range of students and scholars from planning, architecture, geography and sociology interested in bringing into productive contact the debates on the philosophy of hospitality with those on urban sustainability and food-drink related practices (Bell 2007). However, it also stands out by being controversial in tracing some conclusions about the process of gentrification. Sociologists, planners and geographers might question the explanations about displacement and therefore the discussion on paradoxical and variegated effects in the context of the food quarters. They might argue that a project that relies on three years of observations and interviews without any reference to other dimensions of analysis – like on the housing market of those neighbourhoods for instance – is too simplistic. How can one interpret the wider processes of exclusion and displacement through the analysis of food quarters as sustainable urban places? How might gentrification's 'negative effects' (245) be understood in a 'nuanced way' (245) if there is no trace of further findings or at least reflections in that light? Are we moving towards an 'ideology of liveability and sustainability' (Lees 2000: 393–405) to justify gentrification? Are we, indeed, privileging such pro-urban lifestyles (Bridge 2002: 206)?

This book nevertheless raises important questions for scholars interested in the *cultural turn* in urban studies regarding the way gentrification is interconnected with the development of conviviality and hybrid hospitality in food quarters. Parham makes an attempt at showing us how food was one of the ways in which this gentrification was expressed. In doing so, she joins other urban scholars who are working with critical ethnographic and participatory methodologies to highlight the new middle-class habitus in which food is a crucial sphere. Once we acknowledge that, food-related practices and urban design can become much more attendant to the process of accelerated gentrification through which new patterns of spatial inequalities and also urban meanings and identities are produced and re-produced.

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