

# **Fat Cities and Food Deserts: Exploring a Socio-Spatial Continuum**

## **Lesson for Australian Cities from European Experience**

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**Abstract:** Just as in Australian cities, European urban areas are suffering an increasing spatial, social, economic and political divide between the food enabled and those whose health is suffering from poor food choices. But are these really choices that are freely made? The paper explores the structural issues – expressed through governance, urban design, social practices and economic arrangements – that are creating a continuum of spaces from gastronomic quarters for the few to good food deserts for the many. Using case study research conducted as part of my doctoral study at the LSE Cities Programme I suggest some lessons for Australian cities to combat the unsustainable structures and processes that are correlated with poor urban food outcomes. The work particularly focuses on both inner city and suburban areas being regenerated – with specific examples from Australia and Europe - but also provides as a contextual framework a review of food implications of the dominant trends in urban development. The paper asks how, through better design and governance, we can support the conditions for fat cities – rich in sustainable food possibilities – while avoiding the epidemic of obesity that spaces towards the food deserts end of the continuum paradoxically create?

### **Introduction**

I argue that, just as in Australian cities, European urban areas are suffering an increasing spatial, social, economic and political divide between the food enabled and those whose health is suffering from poor food choices. But are these really choices that are freely made? This paper explores the structural issues – expressed through governance, urban design, social practices and economic arrangements – that are creating a continuum of spaces from gastronomic quarters for the few to food deserts for the many. This is by no means a 'centre good - periphery bad' argument but reflects a complex interplay between various forces, with very uneven outcomes across urban spaces and communities.

### **Defining the terms used**

I have developed and am ascribing particular meanings to a number of terms.

I suggest that gastronomic quarters are areas comprising roughly the physical size and population level of a European urban quarter or neighbourhood as described by Moughtin (1996). These provide a range of food related opportunities within their boundaries including local centres with street-based or covered markets, small food shops, cafes and restaurants - at least in part within a walkable catchment area. Such places may also contain a top of the range supermarket and a high level of uptake and availability of online food box schemes and other shopping delivery services. While such quarters may be in long established inner urban areas, equally they can be found in more recently developed places. The quarter's designation does not necessarily imply location at, or within a short distance of, a traditional urban centre.

Food deserts conversely are similarly sized or larger areas within urban/suburban space, which may have no local centres within a walkable range, or centres without most or any of the goods and services listed above. Food deserts may instead contain substantial numbers of fast food outlets, service station 'road pantries', and food shopping based on high cost/low quality convenience stores. If the food desert contains supermarkets, the food on offer may be of poorer quality and higher price than that in supermarkets found in gastronomic quarters and will not be within a walkable radius for most. Online shopping opportunities may be restricted or non-existent. Again, location within overall urban space is not prescribed. Such quarters may be located within well-established areas, however they are more likely to be found where traditional urban design principles have not been followed in making physical form.

The term fat city meanwhile takes its cue from the Italian city of Bologna, which is colloquially described as the *città grassa*. This term is based not only on Bologna's formidable, entwined gastronomic and political reputation but the social and economic practices that underpin this designation. I suggest fat cities can be understood as cities that are rich in sustainable food possibilities supported by governance and cultural values that explicitly recognise and strengthen these food attributes.

### Locating the research in food terms

My research has found that urban food theory (within a range of relevant disciplines including urban sociology, anthropology, geography, and urban policy) tends to be rather aspatial despite identifying loci for the human food system (Goody, 1982: p. 37). However, the conceptualisation of these loci as shown in Table 1 below is worth reproducing because it begins to at least imply some spatial shape to the study of food within urban space.

**Table 1: The features of the human food system**

<i>Processes</i>	<i>Phases</i>	<i>Locus</i>
Growing	Production	Farm
Allocating/Storing	Distribution	Market
Cooking	Preparation	Kitchen
Eating	Consumption	Table
Clearing Up	Disposal	Scullery

Source: Goody (1982), as adapted by Beardsworth and Keil (1997)

This paper broadly focuses on the processes of distribution and exchange, especially in relation to markets and market areas, and consumption, especially insofar as it occurs in public spaces. I extend Goody's model (as adapted by Beardsworth and Keil, 1997) by giving attention to the role the physical qualities of the loci themselves might play rather than solely focusing on the social and cultural processes being played out as food moves from production through consumption to clean up.

### Are European practices and examples of any relevance to Australia?

I argue that it is useful to draw on European urban experience to inform Australian urban practice, although I acknowledge that such an approach could be read as both nostalgic and patronising: mirroring colonial power relations that have been transcended; and reflecting remnants of the cultural cringe. A rejection of European development models has certainly informed Australian urban practice in the past. Shelton (2006) for example has reflected on a dominant suburban aesthetic and experience, as well as ambivalence about the historical imprint of European city form and culture, while others have celebrated this distancing from old Europe. As Davidson (2002) points out, for some "the continental city, with its squares, boulevards, arcades, cafes, and festive Sundays, was a negative model: a threat to Anglo-Saxon standards of cleanliness, spaciousness, and decency, a style of urban life to be avoided rather than emulated."

It is necessary to avoid situating European urban models and practices as an unvariegated mass, as that would disguise which specific aspects might be relevant to Australian cities. Davidson (2002) thus makes a cogent point in distinguishing between continental and Anglo Saxon traditions in city form making. Similarly, in a recent policy paper for the Institute of Public Policy Research, *Them and Us, Britain and the European City*, Nathan and Marshall (2006. p.1) note that, "British attitudes to European cities – like so much else European – are conflicted. We fly to Rome, Barcelona, Paris or Berlin for romantic mini-breaks. We like loft living, café culture and iconic architecture. We admire shiny urban tram systems, and trains that run on time. We hanker after European standards of city living, public space and urban style (without, of course, the willingness to pay continental levels of tax for them). So how about bringing some of this back home? When it comes to serious policy transfer, the British policy establishment has looked across the Atlantic, not across the Channel. Labour's urban regeneration policies are heavily Americanised – clearly seen in the New Deals, innovation policy, clusters or the Chancellor's preoccupation with 'enterprise' in deprived areas". It should also be taken into account that New Urbanist ideas from the United States are now informing UK urban design practice, most famously through the ex-Deputy Prime Minister Prescott's enthusiasm for them when at the head of ODPM, but also for some years now through key urbanist organisations such as the Prince's Foundation based in London.

But can such a clear demarcation be legitimately applied? My research, of which more below, suggests the picture is more complicated than a somewhat simplistic duality between Anglo and Continental urban forms and attitudes would allow. For instance, there are new tram systems developed or mooted for UK cities, there are certainly 'loft and latte' areas in British cities; and iconic architecture is as much a part of British urban place branding as it is on the Continent (Parham, 2006). Likewise, any analysis of the core principles on which New Urbanist development is based, leads the researcher directly back to the European City Model (ECM) with its traditional, compact forms (Parham, 2006). The ECM can be summarized as:

- "Compact: grouped around a core rather than sprawling like American cities, thereby preserving the integrity and coherence of their open spaces;
- Suitably dense: favouring mobility on foot or by public transport, bringing services closer, and avoiding an excessive level of greenfield development;
- Used for many purposes in the same area: combining residence, work and leisure to create an urban lifestyle that is diverse and complex;
- Home to people from diverse backgrounds: reducing the tendency towards ghettos caused by income, origin or race, thus encouraging better levels of social integration;
- Based on public spaces: these act as integrating platforms for various activities and for peaceful co-existence of different social groups;
- Places where public transport dominates: the pressure of private cars is limited" (Clos, 2005)

It seems apparent that both Continental and Anglo traditions in place making have informed Australian cities. Parts of inner Sydney reflect many of the principles of the European City Model in their physical shaping. Other city centres – Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth spring to mind - feature grids laid out on substantial colonial scale – a testament to their classical origins reflected in Anglo planning regimes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet inner Melbourne undoubtedly displays key features of the ECM, and other city areas are increasingly demonstrating aspects of that dense and diverse complexion. While in suburban and conurbation Australia the picture is predominantly Anglo in design terms, yet these very "un-European" spaces are not so different in spatial terms from what is happening in Europe.

### **Australian sprawl and euro-sprawl: the genesis of the food desert and gastronomic quarter continuum**

**Image 1: The scale of euro-sprawl**



Today, euro-sprawl (Hardy, 2002) in conurbations around European urban cores looks and works in remarkably similar ways to the dominant trends in Australian urban expansion. The light map of Europe above indicates the scale of such conurbation development. As I have noted elsewhere (Parham, 2006), spatial reconfiguration has resulted in the construction of spaces unlike the traditional city form of the ECM (Gottdeiner, 1994) in both Europe and Australia, with the emergence of spaces in the non-place urban realm as a developing supermodernity (Webber, 1964; Self, 1982; Augé, 1995). Augé pinpoints the emergence of certain new kinds of spaces (airports, supermarkets etc) that vie with more traditional spaces as centres of social life.

**Image 2: Out-of-town superstores**



After Hall and Castells (1993) and Soja (2000) I argue that this spatiality predominantly relies on a centripetal resorting of land uses, in which the centre of gravity of social and economic activities moves to the peripheries, which are constructed at lower densities than formerly, and often without traditional centres. Such resorting though is by no means uniformly outward and many of its features can also be seen occurring within established areas. As Soja (2000) stresses, this transformation has a fractured and disjointed nature. He argues that having undergone a transforming process of urban restructuring, post-metropolitan regions are now socially fragmented in new ways and extremely uneven in their economic development; with sharpening inequality played out in their spatial arrangements. My contention is that food is one of the expressions of increasing, spatially represented inequality, apparent across Western Europe and the western world including Australia. One outcome is that a great deal of food retailing, like other retail sectors, functions as big box or exit ramp architecture within a postmetropolitan spatial context. Image 2 above shows this happening on the fringe; it is also identifiable in reconfigured spaces in established suburbs.

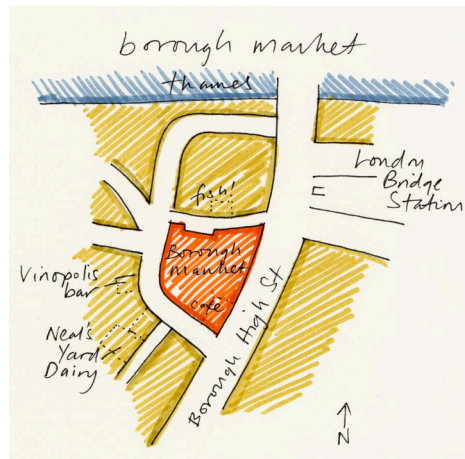
Another outcome is the creation of spaces on a continuum toward food deserts. Recent work in the UK focusing on food poverty (Webster, 1998; Watson, 2002; Wrigley, 2002) demonstrate increasing inequality of access to inexpensive, high quality food within these expanding, spatially transforming urban spaces. Again, this is not simply a fringe or conurbation phenomena but one unevenly spatially scattered from centres to urban edges. Barton et al (2003, p. 137) describe food deserts as places in which people are effectively disenfranchised by lack of access to affordable, healthy local food services. The outcomes include rising levels of adult and childhood obesity that is often correlated to class position. Food deserts are places “where local grocers are disappearing. This can leave those without cars difficult access routes and little choice for their food supply. As a result, health is further damaged in those already at risk, and local producers lack small-scale local outlets” (Barton et al, p. 137). UK guidance on urban design provides explicit design proposals to counter the perceived ill effects of such developments. Guidance that is informing practice includes *Shaping Neighbourhoods* (Barton et al, 2002), *By Design* (DETR, 2000) and *The Urban Design Compendium* (Llewelyn-Davies, 2000).

### **Focusing in on gastronomic quarters: findings from the case study research**

I suggest that the points above demonstrate the relevance of European case study examples to a conference focused on the state of Australian cities. In the next section I draw on research currently being undertaken as part of doctoral study in the Cities Programme at the London School of Economics. The point of these examples is to explore the urban design, social, economic and governance arrangements that underpin gastronomic quarters, and consider what spatial and other lessons these might offer for place making to shrink food deserts and expand fat cities. Due to space constraints I focus here on findings in relation to the market areas that form the centrepieces of the quarters rather than each of the quarters as a whole, but my broader research programme considers this wider spatiality. It also tries to avoid any simplistic dualities in the analytical framework. I am theorising a quarter as a food-centred site that can be considered at the developed end of a food-space continuum. This continuum is not posited as a simplistic physical space-based linear progression but a more multilayered set of spaces that may be very differently experienced depending on the social, economic and environmental position and practices of the user. A very brief summary of findings from the market areas I refer to is sketched out below.

**Borough Market** is London's oldest retail and wholesale market, dating back to before Roman settlement. It is located in inner south London next to the Thames and London Bridge Station and not far from Tate Modern. After suffering apparently terminal decline in both its economic functions and built form, over the last decade this market has been subject to a staged architectural and design focused regeneration programme which has renovated its market halls and surrounding small shops. The process is being led by a charitable market trust, and includes pioneering retail and other stakeholders including Neal's Yard Dairy, Monmouth Coffee and La Brindisa. Today Borough Market has become an extremely significant food and food tourism destination for both Londoners and a huge number of visitors from further afield. With broader European connections, including a twinning arrangement with La Boqueria market in Barcelona, it was recently described as one of the 100 'must visit' retail spaces in the world (Nicholson, 2006).

**Sketch 1: Indicative Plan of Borough Market**



Its website claims that "Borough Market is the country's most important retail market for fine foods. It is a founding member of Emporion, the European Association of Markets. It is run as a charity by a board of trustees, all of whom live in the Borough. Borough Market is Great Britain's principal centre of food excellence. The Trustees and Traders of Borough Market believe that everyone has a right to eat well". It goes on to say that, "At least if one shops at Borough Market one has the failsafe insurance policy of fabulous food and drink with which to cushion Britain's meteorological blows. Whether you're being sizzled or soaked as you shop in the Market you can count on a luscious cornucopia of Summer produce". (<http://www.boroughmarket.org.uk/index.php?module=food>)

Fieldwork subjects have noted that that the enormous success of Borough as a destination may have upset the balance between food buyers and the many who come to simply to enjoy the market atmosphere. Research interviewees told me that "real buyers" now try to visit on Thursdays to avoid the crowds who throng to Borough each Friday and Saturday. Meanwhile, to capture and extend the regeneration benefits brought to the area by the runaway success of the market, the Market Trustees have developed an explicit community programme of outreach to the deprived area of Southwark within which it sits. Thus: "The Borough Market maintains close links with the local community and businesses. The annual barbecue for tenants of the Peabody Estate is an exceedingly popular Market event. Cooperation and communication is maintained with the Cathedral, with local cultural locations and particularly with Southwark's schools. The Trustees plan to strengthen community ties even further with the opening of The Borough Market Food School". (<http://boroughmarket.org.uk/index.php?module=community>)

**Broadway Market** meanwhile is based in a traditional market street in the middle suburb of Hackney, East London. It is lined with small shops and over-the-shop housing; abutting London Fields to one end and Regent's Canal at the other. From a virtually dormant market space it has been recently regenerated by an amalgam of local stakeholders, leading within a few years to a local housing boom and designation in the media as one of London's hippest streets. The local residents who started the market's revival argue that this is simply bringing to local people the kind of authentic market shopping that had been missing, rather than being an intentional gentrification process, which is something they would oppose. However, the approach has been so successful in social and economic terms that the volunteer market manager has now been commissioned to start a similar market on another moribund market street Exmouth Market in Clerkenwell, London (described below).



Broadway Market's website describes the rebirth of the market in these terms, "As one of the original chartered open markets in London, Broadway Market is having a revival. Once a thriving market some thirty years ago, Business then decayed almost (sic) into oblivion. Now it is about to become a buzzing centre of the community again. This is due to the efforts of the local Tenants & Residents Association (the BMTRA) who have joined forces with Hackney Council to set up and promote a Farmer's STYLE Market which will once again cater for our special needs. Dozens of covered stalls will stock an eclectic variety of mouth-watering produce - from local farm shops to continental delicacies". (<http://www.broadwaymarket.co.uk/market.html>)

**Image 3: Broadway Market, Hackney**



One field work interviewee points to some of the social complexities of the gentrification process occurring at Broadway, such as the implications for disposable income of those just able to afford the high cost of London housing. "I've learnt you get a lot of people down here - supposedly 30 to 40% of people are middle class but because of the cost of living/housing these people are what I call "rich poor". They may have a flat that is worth ¼ million pounds but they have very little disposable income so they are coming to Broadway Market and being very selective about their food and getting the free social aspect".

A number of other interviewees suggest that while there is clearly a strong community basis for the revival of Broadway Market, that does not preclude the process from having unintended gentrifying effects. A market-user says along these lines that, "I see the market as gentrifying space. The history of this market: there have been cycles of attempts to have this as a market. First as a traditional market, then there was an attempt to do a flower market, then this high end market".

Meanwhile, **Exmouth Market**, located in the inner northeast London quarter of Clerkenwell, was a traditional market street, similar in scale and grain to Broadway Market, that had fallen into abeyance, despite the street hosting a number of fashionable restaurants and bars. Moro, Medcalf, The Quality Chop House, and the Eagle and Easton 'gastro pubs' are located on the street or nearby. The street is also situated just round the corner from the headquarters of the Guardian and Observer broadsheet newspapers, feeding in a steady supply of media workers to the street. A weekly retail market, featuring fruit and vegetables, meat and hot food stalls, has recently been initiated by a consortium of gastronomic stakeholders. These include well-known local restaurateurs (from Moro) and others responsible for the revival of Broadway Market.

Its website explains that, "Exmouth Market is a vibrant pedestrianised street in the heart of Clerkenwell flanked on either side by a colourful mixture of small independent design boutiques and long-standing traditional shops, as well as the many bars, cafés and restaurants for which it is well known comprising an eclectic mix to satisfy even the most discerning shopper and gastronome". (<http://www.exmouthmarket.co.uk/>)

The myvillage Islington website explains that a key person in the establishment of the Market is Mark Sainsbury, although it does not note that he is son of Lord John Sainsbury of the Sainsbury's supermarket family. Mark Sainsbury is also Chairman of the Exmouth Traders' Association, a local restaurateur and owner of the Zetter Hotel, a fashionable hotel and restaurant in the vicinity. Myvillage

Islington says that he has “put together a team of three entrepreneurial women to create the market. They are: Samantha Clark of Moro, Monika Linton of Brindisa Spanish foods (committee members on the Exmouth Market Traders Association), and Louise Brewood. The team have been working closely with the Street Trading Department at Islington Council who have been have been extremely supportive and encouraging taking a far sighted view of their plans”.

**Image 4: Exmouth Market, Clerkenwell**



My contention that a linked social movement is underway seems supported by points the site makes about the market founders' connections. “All three have impeccable credentials. Louise is founder and manager of Hackney’s runaway success story, Broadway Market; Monika was one of the first retailers to go to Borough Market and now sits on its selection committee; Sam Clark’s Moro triggered a steady regeneration of Exmouth Market upon opening ten years ago, transforming the then run-down, boarded-up street into a focal point for fine food and quirky shops. Now Sam, Monika and Louise have decided that following the success of its annual summer festivals, Exmouth Market is finally ready to have its market reinstated”. ([http://www.myislington.co.uk/islington/fe-community\\_new-exmouth-food-market.htm](http://www.myislington.co.uk/islington/fe-community_new-exmouth-food-market.htm))

Most recently undergoing a similar transformation, **Whitecross Street Market** is a traditional street market in inner east London, just north of the Barbican and relatively close to Exmouth Market. The street market long languished in the doldrums but has been recently revived in the form of the “Whitecross Food Festival” by some of those responsible for the regeneration of Borough Market. Influential Borough Market based retailers such as Neal’s Yard Dairy, Sillfield Farm, The Ginger Pig and Flour Power have set up at Whitecross Street’s monthly two-day market, branded as providing high quality local and regional food, with related events including food talks and demonstrations by celebrity chefs and food writers (<http://www.whitecrossstreetmarket.co.uk/whatson.html>).

The overt intention referenced on the Whitecross Market website is to establish the street as a regular food destination. In this case, the initiative is most explicitly backed by a commercial company, Market Squared, which comprises a team with market development architectural and urban design expertise who have also been key actors in the architectural design aspects of the revival of Borough Market. Other partners include a food promotion outfit Food from Britain, the local authority (the London Borough of Islington) and a government funded regeneration partnership active in the area (EC1 New Deal Partnership).

Of the research sites, I would argue that Whitecross is the most consciously planned of these gastronomic quarter developments. It reflects lessons learned at the earlier sites about combining food quality, food celebrity and architectural expertise within a traditional street market space. The clear intention is to create a high quality retail experience centred on sustainable food through which it is expected to produce wider regeneration benefits for the local community.

### **Some implications from these gastronomic quarters**

My fieldwork data suggests that these sites demonstrate various stages of the development of a new market centred urban form, displaying intriguing shared social, economic, and environmental aspects, located within a very particular urban design context, and giving rise to an equally distinctive urban design expression. The emerging (Exmouth and Whitecross), more developed (Broadway) and mature

(Borough) gastronomic quarters can thus be seen as a kind of continuum; understood both in spatial terms, as sites for a particular set of social practices and in relation to their development as fully realised food quarters over time. They inhabit the other end of the continuum from food deserts, in terms of their urban design and their economic and social functions. Although I haven't canvassed the sustainability aspects here they also contribute to more sustainable distribution, exchange and consumption practices within the food chain by stressing localism, seasonality, quality over industrialised production, and food mile reduction.

A number of points stand out. Inner and middle ring urban revitalisation based on the development of food markets is not posited as the only relevant process for creating and maintaining functioning gastronomic quarters within conurbations. Many European urban neighbourhoods constitute gastronomic quarters within a polycentric spatiality. They have done so unselfconsciously in the long term and constitute a distinct urban habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) that transcends class position. Likewise, there are thriving quarters in Australia based on markets like the Adelaide Central Market and Victoria Market (previously researched but not discussed here) that perform similar roles. New farmer's markets in Australian cities are also emerging in locations remote from their cities' main urban centres and sometimes on the fringe. It should also be acknowledged that these spaces can be food enabling for some and excluding of others. My research findings strongly suggest that gastronomic quarters are experienced differently depending on a range of factors besides the spatial; including identity, cultural values, income, age, class and ethnicity.

### **The importance of design**

For the external observer it is interesting to consider why these particular streets and spaces rather than any other are the ones the various markets' proponents chose - or felt driven - to revive, and why each has been such an outstanding success within the terms defined by their proponents. Interviews with market users, traders and urban design experts appear to confirm the hypothesis that the physical shape of the spaces - in each case traditionally scaled streets or sets of market halls with good levels of enclosure and height-to-width ratios that make the spaces work as outdoor rooms - is perceived to have a strong influence. Morphological and urban design analysis undertaken as part of the research effort suggests that urban design qualities such as a high level of legibility, permeability, robustness, visual richness, variety and fine grain are also notable elements present in each that appear to have an impact on their use.

It is worth considering the physical shaping of these spaces in the light of some of the thinking around the development of food spaces in urban peripheries. This seems curiously apposite in this context despite the fieldwork sites' inner and middle ring urban locations. Just as by the early 1990s edge city food spaces became the new centres of metropolitan life for an increasing proportion of urban dwellers (Rowe, 1991: p. 109), the stagecraft that has developed in the use of the spaces of Broadway, Borough, Exmouth and Whitecross Markets in the late 1990s and early 2000s could on first viewing seem to some degree analogous to "the packaged nostalgia, refinement, heritage and sophistication found in the gallerias, shopping malls, office villages, mixed-use developments and festival settings of the post-modern city" (Rowe, 1991, p. 109). Yet in each case the gastronomic quarter displays an authenticity and civility in Norbert Elias's (1982) terms that those manufactured and cynical simulacra fail to generate. Instead these gastronomic quarters appear to provide rich territory for the practice of everyday life (De Certeau, 1984).

Their physical design presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, none of these markets or their environs is artificial in the sense that the built form has been entirely created from scratch as post-modern consumption space (Wilson, 1991). At the same time, however, on Broadway Market for example, the street is a hollowed out space of attractive height-to-width to provide a good degree of enclosure behind which much of the 19<sup>th</sup> urban fabric has been demolished post war to make way for now decrepit public housing tower blocks. The street space can thus be seen as a kind of tenuously attached frame to attract visitors, some of whom define themselves in terms of consumption that is conspicuous and that they perceive as refined (Visser, 1987). The urban fabric around Borough, Exmouth Market and Whitecross Street has fortunately suffered a little less from these well meaning depredations but the same framing analysis could still be applied.

In each case the market spaces sit within predominantly dense, mixed use urban areas that mostly comprise (despite unfortunate demolition histories) urban blocks built up to the street alignment to compose a traditional fabric based on a grid of streets and an armature of public spaces as a basis for their urbanity (Madanipour, 2003). Borough Market - the most mature of these spaces in revived gastronomic terms - has received considerable architectural and urban design attention to renovate



and reshape its built structures and increase the permeability and legibility of its access and circulation spaces. At Borough this has been an elaborate and ongoing exercise intended to draw a large catchment - constituting a global community of interest - to the place long known as London's larder. At the other markets the renewal programme has been able to rely on the extant excellent proportions and scale of the street and built frontages to create an appropriate backdrop for gastronomic activities even where the surrounding area has suffered urban blight or decay. In Broadway, Exmouth Market and Whitecross Street the ambitions are more modest in scale and extent, focused in the main on the local community and Londoners as the catchment, and providing gastronomic services for an increasingly discerning local and sub-regional population. It should perhaps be noted that Broadway is starting to attract savvy Londoners who now find Borough too mainstream and too crowded by tourists. Such refugees from gastronomic globalisation do not see themselves as tourists in their own city although they may well be playing this role in relation to their consumption of space (Miles, S. and Miles, M., 2004).

### **Proscenium arches for stylish consumption?**

This begs the question whether Broadway, Borough, Exmouth and Whitecross are any more than the "proscenia for the enactment of consumption-oriented lifestyles" (Knox, in: Whitehand and Larkham (Eds), 1992: p. 208). As Knox (1992), Bourdieu (1984) and Smith (2004) have suggested, such designed settings can be important backdrops for stylish materialism as practiced by an affluent class fraction drawn from the new bourgeoisie. It could be argued that a newly affluent group, (made so by a particular phase of capitalism based on service, management and communications industries) has withdrawn from a more fully engaged civic life, retreating instead into an "exploration of freedom and self-realization...characterised by materialism, narcissism and hedonism" (Knox in Whitehand and Larkham, 1992: p. 223). Gastronomic quarters might thus be seen as the perfect spaces for these practices to be acted out. As Knox points out, in the struggle for status it is important to choose the right things to eat, places to dine and destinations for food consumption. "A central issue...is how, in the scramble for social distinction, to avoid being caught in a compromising position with *déclassé* people, objects and places" (Knox in Whitehand and Larkham, 1992: p. 223). As Zukin (1995: p. 9) notes, "the sensual display of fruit at an urban farmer's market or gourmet food store puts a neighbourhood "on the map" of visual delights and reclaims it for gentrification".

My field work certainly demonstrates that the markets give space to a rich array of social practices centred on food which I suggest are supported by and in turn may influence the physical design of the market and surrounding spaces. Practices I observed during field visits include various kinds of walking – from flanerier to the passeggiata; stall based browsing and shopping; buying at small shops; eating, drinking, posing and socialising in the street; doing some of these things at cafes, restaurants and pubs; engaging in political work; making art and music; and acting as a tourist, sometimes with cameras and guidebooks on display.

The stylish materialism analysis seems to me to some extent be supported by the research data, but does not capture the full picture. I suggest that spaces such as Broadway, Borough, Exmouth and Whitecross Street also very clearly provide sites for social engagement of a less self-conscious kind, that in Lefebvre's (1991) terms goes beyond mere exchange value. As Lefebvre identifies, there may be a form of mystification operating in which plenitude, represented by increasing consumption, is mistaken for real human richness. For Lefebvre (1991: p. 101), to bridge this gulf, specific urban needs "require places of simultaneity and encounters, places where exchange would not go through exchange value". Thus, there may be stylish consumers at these markets but they may also be enjoying Lefebvrian-style exchange as well. My data from interviews and observations suggests that there are others too who are enjoying the social possibilities in a less mediated way. Thus, based on the research evidence, it is possible to see the sites as variously and multiply used both as consumption backdrops for stylish materialism as well as in other more socially engaged and less self conscious ways.

Lefebvre (1991: p. 48) argues that despite the loss of authenticity he perceives in cities, there is no going back to a time when the city was "whole and unfragmented (towards the traditional city)". This seems in my view to beg various questions; first whether the market sites constitute an attempt to create social authenticity in a fractured, fragmented urban environment by mimicking traditional food allocation and consumption forms? Are these sites merely nostalgic, romanticised places? And, if they are, does that mean they cannot be socially and economically sustainable or positive ones? Is the social and economic life found here being modelled on some kind of pastiche of the traditional food consumption patterns of the past? Does that make the governance that sits behind these spaces a rather dubious form of partnership between self-interested or self-deluded stakeholders? Broadway

Market's website makes the connection, saying, "All this great food and great shopping is ensuring that Broadway Market is fast becoming the jewel in Hackney's crown. So if you want traditional East End coupled with trendy and sophisticated investigate Broadway Market you won't be disappointed." (<http://www.broadwaymarket.co.uk/>).

However, my contention is that while this emerging urban form may have pretentious aspects it cannot be dismissed merely as an exercise in nostalgia, a regeneration marketing strategy or solely an example of the changing face of stylish consumption. Rather, the emergence of gastronomic quarters, in cities where the Anglo model of urban development has dominated over a Continental one, suggests the possibilities for melding traditional and newer elements of urban form and social practice in socially satisfying and economically revitalising ways to produce more sustainable, convivial places people like to be - as has happened in Continental Europe for centuries. These developments have increased access to healthy food, and the capacity to access that food in more healthy ways by creating walkable catchments. In each case the development of the gastronomic quarter occurred in what had previously been something of a food desert. And in each case it has provided food alternatives to those who do not have the resources or inclination to drive some distance to the supermarket on a clone town high street (Simms, A. Kjell, P. and Potts, R: 2005) or to an out-of-town superstore.

In all the examples discussed here, the revitalisation of a moribund local food market into the centrepiece of a gastronomic quarter has undoubtedly contributed to significant and rapid revitalisation, but has it also contributed to a gentrification process that in turn may have displaced poorer households? At one level such regeneration can be read as a story of socially inclusive, community based renewal. It can also be understood to be about creating or emphasising a particular kind of social space that appeals to the middle class incomers over working class inhabitants. Broadway's (self identified) working class promoters, though, vociferously deny this, saying, "We got bad press to say we were gentrified. I bawled them out. I don't care how long people have lived here. If regeneration is solely about gentrification, that can't build communities. If it benefits long-suffering residents then you will win. We planned, have created, the first urban village; complimenting the shops that were already here. Here we just expanded on what we wanted - a bunch of locals who wanted to shop local. Have camaraderie. Because we're an association - market traders, shops, residents, everyone gets to comment. Look at the whole street, not just the market and shops".

### **In conclusion - some implications for fat cities**

Given the similarities - and I suggest increasing convergence in important respects - between UK and Australian urban spatiality, trends in one place are likely to be mirrored in the other. In that context, the urban sustainability basis for promoting gastronomic quarters seems to make strong claims despite the acknowledged issues around gentrification that may come into play. The economic alternative appears to be to continue to produce an urban landscape marked by a highly inequitable and uneven spatial pattern of food desertification. The dominant end of the food continuum would in this reading be car dependent, supermarket based retailing that (largely although not universally) accentuates inequality in health and social outcomes, reflects exclusion from good food and civilised sociability, and more broadly undermines urban sustainability. That, to me, presents a highly unappealing prospect.

Capturing regeneration benefits locally is clearly an important technique to master, in order to strike a balance between the gentrifying effects of stylish consumption and the need to support local social inclusion through more unmediated encounters. The research data shows that is happening at each of the sites.

Another important lesson to extract from these gastronomic quarter examples concerns economic development and governance. Through watching (and in some cases taking part in) the development of the earlier of these market spaces, the more recent quarters have learned useful ways of working in alliances and partnerships between local leaders, community-based organisations, local and regional governments, food retailers, wholesalers, celebrities, and promoters, and those with urban design and architectural expertise. Although there was no space to discuss this aspect in detail, it is worth noting that government - especially local government - began by opposing and creating barriers to such revitalisation processes and has to some extent become their supporters and advocates. Now, in London, such development is understood as a key governance, economic development, sustainability and strategic planning topic (GLA, 2006).

A third area is the relationship to urban design. As a form of architecturally based place marketing the focus on sustainable food seems to me an interesting urban design development. In spatial terms it represents a far more inclusive, human scaled form of intervention than city branding predicated on iconic architecture. It is no coincidence I think that such quarters have been easiest to develop within traditional urban fabric which lends itself to the creation of comfortable outdoor rooms at the heart of walkable neighbourhoods. How more fragmented, economically uneven and centre-less urban spaces can be reconfigured in a similarly fine-grained, convivial, food focused ways remains to be seen. I suggest that the continued rediscovery, and new development, of such quarters in both Europe and Australia should be part of the increasingly urgent work to remake cities in more sustainable ways.

Although in this brief overview it has been impossible to do justice to the breadth of the research, I claimed at the outset of the paper that through better design and governance it would be possible to support the conditions for fat cities - rich in sustainable food possibilities - while avoiding the epidemic of obesity that food deserts paradoxically create. I believe that the case study examples tentatively suggest some directions to follow up to make good that claim.

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