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## **Public markets: Spaces for sociability under threat? The case of Leeds' Kirkgate Market**

Penny Rivlin and Sara González

### **Introduction**

Traditional retail markets can function as spaces of sociability and inclusion for diverse groups in the city, yet these benefits are threatened by the advancement of urban neoliberal policies. In this chapter, we focus on Leeds' Kirkgate Market in the north of England, which after decades of local authority neglect is currently undergoing a process of transformation and redevelopment. An important historical and heritage asset to the city of Leeds, Kirkgate Market is one of the largest traditional markets in the UK and Europe, comprising both indoor and outdoor areas. Originating as a collection of open livestock, corn and street markets in the early 1800s, it was first constructed as a covered market in 1857, being subsequently adapted and extended (Fraser, 1980). In December 1975 a disastrous fire destroyed two thirds of the market, but left an extension built in 1904 unaffected. Subsequently, the market was classed as protected heritage, and two contiguous 'hangar structure' halls were constructed in 1976 and 1981 to replace the damaged sections.

Owned and managed by Leeds City Council (hereafter LCC), Kirkgate Market hosts around 400 businesses with various tenancy agreements, from casual day to long-term leases, that support over 2,000 jobs (LCC, 2010). Attracting an annual footfall of 10 million visitors (ibid.), the market offers an exceptionally diverse range of stalls; Traditional greengrocers, butchers, fishmongers, bakers, florists and confectioners trade alongside drapery, haberdashery, clothing, DIY, homeware, and technology stalls. A substantial proportion of the goods and services reflect the ethnic and cultural

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diversity of market users, such that the scale and diversity of Kirkgate Market's offer contributes to its reputation as the most varied, affordably priced retail outlet in Leeds.

The market is situated in the heart of the city of Leeds, a city with an increasingly diverse population of 751,485 people, of which 18.9% of residents identify themselves as Black and Minority Ethnic (ONS, 2011). Considered to have a diverse and growing economic base, Leeds has been relatively resilient in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis; however the city is spatially and socially segregated, with significant proportion of residents living in areas of high deprivation (González and Oosterlynck, 2014). Exploring the significance of Kirkgate Market in this context, we will go on to empirically examine its role as an important space for affordable food provisioning and social inclusion, especially for residents from deprived neighbourhoods. Our interviews with market traders emphasise their role in servicing Leeds' diverse working class, low-income and marginalized communities, revealing a narrative of historical continuity affirmed in histories of British markets.

As explained in the introduction of this book, enclosed market structures were originally designed as a response to the unsanitary, disorderly and unmanaged open and street markets, in which livestock, agricultural produce, food and people circulated (Schmiechen and Carls, 1999). Late Georgian and Victorian enclosed markets were utilised by both the middle and working classes. However the accessibility and affordability of perishable food ensured the continued patronage of the working classes throughout the nineteenth century (ibid, p. 21), such that for the urban poor, markets performed 'a function as important to the operation of urban life as the gas and waterworks' (Hodson, 1998, p. 98). In our research we have seen the continuity of this relationship between traditional markets and poorer communities supported in recent LCC data on Kirkgate Market: the majority of market users occupy the lower

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socio-economic class groups with students, female, middle-aged and elderly users predominating (LCC, 2014b). Attesting to the importance of the market for Leeds' BME and migrant communities, the dominant demographic profile of traders is female, aged 45 and over from BME backgrounds; it is worth noting that these communities are also disproportionately represented in the poorest residential wards of Leeds (LCC, 2011).

This chapter therefore situates Kirkgate Market as a key historical and societal landmark in the city of Leeds; It is part of the working class collective imaginary of the city, and more recently, a space of interaction for migrants and residents from ethnic minorities. Tracing developments over recent years, we argue that for Leeds' most vulnerable residents, this space of sociability is being transformed and potentially undermined through various local, national and global trends. We develop our argument as follows: First, we map out relevant theoretical concepts that were foregrounded in the introduction of this book. Second, we chart the recent history of Kirkgate Market within the context of austerity and the neoliberalisation of urban policy in Leeds and beyond. Third, we summarize Kirkgate Market as a space for sociability. Finally the concluding section suggests that the benefits of sociability are threatened by the market's recent redevelopment and associated processes of gentrification.

The chapter utilises data from several sources. One of the authors has a long-term engagement as an action researcher in the market (see González and Waley, 2013), and more recently, we conducted ethnographic research as part of an interdisciplinary project<sup>1</sup>. We used multiple methods of investigation, including multimodal data collection, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with market users; this chapter focuses on data generated from observation fieldnotes, narrative

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interviews and policy analysis (in a comparable way to González and Waley, 2013; Cattell et al., 2008; Watson and Studdert, 2006). We conducted semi-structured interviews with 9 female and 12 male traders aged between 28-64. In terms of ethnic origin, four traders identified as White British, three as White Eastern European, eight as British Asian, two as Asian, one as Chinese, one as Kurdish Syrian and two as Afghani. We identified 14 different 'main' languages (from those listed in ONS, 2011) spoken by traders, and proficiency in 35 other languages, all of which were deployed in the market. While we acknowledge that the study cannot claim empirical generalization, we made concerted efforts, as far as possible, to ensure representativeness.

### **Markets as spaces for sociability and community diversity**

There is growing evidence within the international literature that traditional retail markets represent a crucial node for the study of sociality in cities, and more broadly, for examinations of the economy-society nexus (Hiebert et al., 2015; Morales, 2011; Pottie-Sherman, 2011). Theorised from a range of perspectives, the relationships between sociality and markets appear contingent on the specificities of place, spatial variation, historical (dis)continuity, cultural and economic practices and adaptations to these interconnecting processes. Historically, urban markets are key public spaces for the reception and integration of strangers, new residents and immigrants to the city, facilitating communication across national, ethnic, linguistic, religious and socio-economic differences (Vicdan and Firat, 2015; Wessendorf, 2014; Morales, 2011). Contrasting with public spaces such as neighbourhood parks, city squares and quasi-public spaces such as shopping malls, the comparatively unmediated, informal space of the city market can foster relations of recognition, adaptation and civility across multiple differences (Anderson, 2011).

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Markets have been debated as spaces in which diversely-situated people actively 'create a public space' (de la Pradelle, 2006), where differences are mediated by 'rubbing along' (Watson, 2009) for the constitution of 'commonplace diversity' in the city (Wessendorf, 2014). Everyday practices of mingling and observing in markets (Cattell et al., 2008) have fostered conditions whereby people conduct 'folk ethnographies' that may promote a 'cosmopolitan canopy' of social inclusion, cross- and inter-cultural understanding, tolerance and civility (Anderson, 2011). A more ambivalent thread in sociologies of markets theorises social interaction across difference in terms of 'mutual avoidance' (Smith, 1965); a tacit 'indifference to difference' that can co-exist with 'openness to otherness' (Pardy, 2005); or the active assertion of difference and 'othering' to shore up power and position in an intensely competitive environment (Busch, 2010, and Liu, 2010 cited in Pottie-Sherman, 2011). This view interprets the market as a site of economic exchange relations wherein sociality is secondary or incidental to its primary function.

Crosscutting these contradictory tensions, another strand of research emphasises the role that markets play in mitigating social exclusion and economic disenfranchisement for marginalised groups. In their ethnography of eight UK markets, Watson and Studdert (2006) document the importance of markets as key spaces of social interaction, particularly for low-income groups. Drawing attention to class and gender dynamics in areas of socio-economic deprivation, the authors stress the significance of markets for the elderly, women and single parents with children, recommending their inclusion in national social exclusion policy agendas. Several studies on retail and street markets in London highlight a high correlation between areas of deprivation, high density BME populations and concentrations of street markets (Cross River Partnership, 2014; Hall, 2015; NEF, 2005), and their importance for migrant and local entrepreneurship, employment and social interaction (Dines, 2007; Hall, 2015; Morales, 2009); factors also highlighted in the chapter by González and Dawson in this book. In the context of the US, Morales' historical-empirical research of

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Chicago's Maxwell Street market (2009; 2011) argues that historically, markets have functioned as social levellers, promoting economic and socio-cultural accommodation and assimilation in public space. The market's low barriers to entry and relatively informal, flexible and transparent regulatory system works to ameliorate discriminatory practices in employment and business sectors, affording viable pathways to social mobility to unskilled or undercapitalised people.

This body of evidence on the sociability and community benefits of markets for vulnerable and marginalised groups highlights their salience to cities within the context of urban diversity and socio-spatial inequalities associated with modernisation and urban redevelopment. Although our approach concurs with this perspective, our contention in this chapter is that the scaffold upon which these benefits are constructed and reproduced in UK markets is unstable and fragile. In part, this is due to the unique elements that constitute the market itself. The modes of inclusive sociability in public space that interest us here typically thrive in neglected, informal and under-the-radar places that have historically received limited attention from public authorities and private investors. But periods of neglect and abandonment in cities are often followed by phases of reinvestment, wherein formerly unattended spaces come under the spotlight of state and private interests (Smith, 1996). Ensuing urban redevelopment projects often trigger contested processes of transformation (e.g. Porter and Shaw, 2013; Rankin and McLean, 2015;), bringing city markets under the remit of economic development agendas that generally prioritise commercial and economic interests (González and Waley, 2013). As the introduction and several other chapters of this book have discussed, these redevelopment agendas may exert pressure on markets to change through processes of increased regulation, formal governance and the sanitization of space, creating conditions that can compromise provision of social and community benefits and contribute to the displacement of vulnerable market users and traders. In our contribution, we want to pursue the point that gentrification processes can compromise urban diversity and the associated sociability and community benefits that are realized in the unique space of the market.

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## **Urban diversity and sociability in Leeds' Kirkgate Market: Accommodating difference in public space**

This section empirically examines relations of sociability and urban diversity in Kirkgate Market. Our interviews with Kirkgate traders suggest that the market provides a unique space in Leeds for social interaction across a number of relational registers. In what follows, we discuss several interrelated dimensions of sociality that contribute to a conception of sociality as a valued resource that is a fundamental, rather than incidental, dimension of the market.

Kirkgate Market is a spectacle of cultural difference, encapsulating public multiculturalism not reproduced elsewhere in the city centre. Contrasting with the bland homogeneity of the nearby Trinity shopping mall and the stylised luxury of neighbouring Victoria Gate arcade (see Map 1), the market's dominant aesthetic is of bustling eclecticism; on busy days the market assumes a vibrant, carnivalesque ambience of orderly disorderliness (Bakhtin, 1984). The socio-cultural and ethnically diverse backgrounds of market users and traders shape the range of inexpensive food, goods and services on offer – many of which are found exclusively in the market. Over several years of research engagement in the market, one of the authors has witnessed the proliferation of retail outlets such as mobile phone products and services, European, Asian and African-Caribbean styled hair and nails salons, clothing alteration stalls and ethnically-specific food and clothing outlets. Echoing other UK based studies of superdiverse city spaces (Hall, 2015; Wessendorf, 2014), these retail trends attest to Leeds' increasingly ethnically diverse and fluid migrant population (LCC, 2011).

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Resonating with Wessendorf's (2014) conception of 'commonplace diversity' as normative in superdiverse neighbourhoods, all the traders we interviewed described the market as a 'mixed' environment that includes 'people from every background' and 'every community', encompassing 'all nationalities and languages'. Several longstanding British traders (of White and Asian origin) expressed evident pride in the diversity of market users, perceiving diversity as fundamental to its identity in the context of an increasingly homogenised and 'faceless' retail landscape:

The market's for everybody in Leeds; that's why it's different [...] We get people from all over the world coming in here, speaking different languages, from different cultures. If you just took a snapshot of the shop now, we've got a Chinese woman, we've got a Japanese woman at the back, an English woman; you know, just in that one second you've got maybe four different cultures there. You just don't get that in the high street.

(Male butcher, White British)

Another trader framed the market as a place of cultural familiarisation and integration for new migrants, explaining that 'all our customers from other countries are used to shopping in a market because most only have markets where they come from, so they prefer a market to a supermarket'. Notwithstanding these positive responses to diversity, we were mindful that the traders' recognition of diversity as a unique dimension of the market does not necessarily evidence active social engagement and connection across difference (Pardy, 2005). Like other studies of sociality in markets (e.g. Anderson, 2011; Mele et al., 2015; Watson, 2009; Watson and Studdert, 2006) we observed spontaneous enactments of sociability between traders and passers-by such as smiles, nods and waves between traders and customers of diverse backgrounds – the kind of minimal engagement described by Watson (2009) as 'rubbing along' that constitutes a distinctive 'social glue' in markets. However, our research data revealed that as a means of accommodating the social mix of the market, traders engaged in a



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fluid process of adaptation and negotiation, which in turn, fostered transcultural social connections.

Strategies of accommodation originated in economic concerns; the traders were reflexive about 'keeping pace' with the needs of an increasingly diversified customer demographic. As noted earlier, ethno-cultural accommodation is explicitly evidenced by the growth of stalls, providing for a fluid market multicultural. We interviewed several recent and longer-established migrant traders hosting cafés or fast-food outlets serving Asian, Halal and Middle-Eastern food, and other stalls offering goods and services familiar to specific ethnic, faith and national backgrounds. These traders explained that their stalls provided unique opportunities – particularly to those at early stages of migration – to maintain attachments to the cultural and communicative repertoires, traditions and preferences of their countries of origin, thus contributing to a sense of 'home' in a new and unfamiliar environment.

Yet we also observed practices of adaptation and accommodation in the market's long-standing and traditionally 'British' stalls. Responding to the shifting ethno-cultural market landscape, traders were engaged in a sustained process of intercultural learning, diversifying their product lines accordingly. A White British trader in beauty products pointed out her expanding range of 'different skin tone' cosmetics and 'alcohol-free' fragrance options sourced for her 'Muslim and Asian customers', many of whom would visit her stall 'just to chat', despite the episodic nature of beauty consumption. Similarly one butcher commented that the wide range of offal and other 'stereotypically English' cuts on display now constituted between forty and fifty per cent of sales, effecting a shift from a predominantly White British customer base:

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Take pig tongues; a perfect example. You would never see them in a supermarket, you would probably never see them in a normal butcher's shop on the high street. We purposely bought those in for our Chinese, our Asian and African customers.

(Male trader, White British)

In addition to the more instrumental practices of product diversification, traders employed a range of communicative repertoires that contributed to the sociability of the market. We observed several traders exhibiting cultural competency via the appropriation of material cultural signifiers. The butcher quoted above explained the display of a Chinese lucky cat in the shop window as 'a wave 'hello' to our Chinese customers', noting that 'the kids love that, too' (See Figure 1). Similarly, a fishmonger exhibited cultural competency in relation to his Chinese customers via the display of celebratory Chinese New Year banners and red paper lanterns. He also told us that he had learned to practice culturally-specific modes of fish preparation to accommodate the beliefs and food habits of customers from different ethno-cultural and national backgrounds.

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Figure 9.1. Chinese lucky cat displayed in butcher's shop at Kirkgate Market. Source: Penny Rivlin, 2015.

A striking feature of market users' social interactions was the range of strategies employed to bridge language differences and proficiencies. Although traders' and customers' English language skills ranged from fairly basic to fluent, language proficiency did not appear to constrain social interaction more generally, or specifically, forms of inter-cultural and inter-ethnic exchange. In particular, an emphasis on the practice of patience was well-rehearsed in traders' narratives, suggesting that socio-cultural diversity is re-shaping the rhythms and temporalities of consumption and sociality in the market along 'slow' lines (Paiva et al., 2017). Traders typically kept notepads and pens for writing the prices of goods, or to communicate through simple drawings. In particular, mobile technologies played an important role in mediating language differences in the market. Many traders reported that customers routinely deployed their mobile phones as translation devices via the use of language translation applications and dictionaries, online images of the desired product, or for

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engaging an English-speaking friend or family member as translator. These communicative strategies were complemented with informal linguistic interactions that involved traders' and customers' acquisition of basic words and greetings in others' main languages besides English: as one trader commented, 'we learn from them, and they learn from us'.

Kirkgate Market therefore combines spaces for specific ethnic minorities who are attracted by speciality produce, as well as more general stalls where traders and users from different backgrounds and cultures accommodate each other through various communication strategies. These reciprocal practices of accommodation turn the market into a 'comfortable' space of social and cultural inclusion, which, for many traders, is key to its uniqueness within the Leeds' retail landscape. Here, it is worthwhile recounting the narratives of two recent migrants to Leeds. One young Polish man related his initial concerns that his English language skills 'would not be enough' to forge and sustain meaningful relationships within the market, going on to explain that he quickly felt part of a 'community' of market users:

I am very comfortable here; my English – it's been no problem at all in this community [...] and I try to make people feel comfortable. For example, some Muslim women wearing the veil are unable to speak English. It needs a certain amount of social skill [...] because they might be embarrassed that they don't know English. And for them to still feel comfortable, I do a bit of pretending I don't need their English.

(Male trader, Polish food shop)

Another young trader's narrative of comfort suggests that the market opens up possibilities for local, elective affinities to space and place (cf. Savage et al., 2005) for diasporic subjects:

Nobody discriminates here. I am comfortable here [...] people are friendly in the market; the customers, the traders. I think the market is my community now.

(Confectionery trader, Afghani origin)

Crucially, some traders' narratives of the market as a site of comfort and elective affinities were explicitly framed in relation to social class differences, particularly in relation to low-income users. One British Asian trader of thirty years standing observed that ethnic and linguistic diversity in the market is as 'commonplace' (Wessendorf, 2014) as the class position of its primary users:

It doesn't matter whether the customers are White, Black, Asian, Polish or whatever – they're nearly all working class in the market.

(Male, British Asian, homewares trader)

Allied to this recognition of the market's function as an inclusive space for low-income users was a concern for the welfare of the elderly population in the context of the spatial changes to the market, and the council's corresponding decision to remove casual seating to deter homeless people and anti-social behavior:

People come to the market because they're lonely, to pass the time; especially the elderly come and walk around. And there's nowhere really for them to sit unless you go to the café's, which costs them money, and they probably can't afford it, you know, to spend money. There should be more places for the elderly to sit.

(Male trader, South Asian origin)

Contesting management policy via an ethic of care, this trader positioned two chairs adjacent to his stall for the benefit of elderly market users – a well-used facility that contributed to the overall inclusive sociability of the market. We observed traders institute other everyday acts of care, ranging from the storage of customers' shopping bags, to providing hot drinks for regular elderly and low-income users. On a day of

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heavy rain, we observed a trader leave his stall to drive an elderly woman home after noticing her soaked appearance, another trader stepping in to watch his stall in his absence. That the prosaic encounters described throughout this section require patient, repeated investments in time, effort and care suggests that market users actively seek and value inclusive sociality in ways that disrupt conceptualisations that foreground markets as sites of indifference to, or avoidance of 'otherness', wherein economic exchange relations predominate.

### **Gentrification pressures and threats to inclusive sociability**

As we stated in the introduction, this chapter discusses the importance of Kirkgate Market as a space of sociability across diverse relational registers, but questions the extent to which this sociability will be maintained in the face of recent transformations in the market led by the local authority, Leeds City Council (LCC). To understand these transformations, this section analyses the recent history of LCC's approach to the market, considering its selective process of policy development, as well as wider urban transformations. Informed by Hackworth's (2002, p. 815) distillation of gentrification processes as 'the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users', we argue that Leeds City Council's redevelopment of the market is a representative example.

Up until the 1970s, Leeds Kirkgate Market was an important reference point for the population of Leeds as both a provisioning space and part of the local identity – in particular for working class communities and other marginalised groups. Since then, however, an array of interrelated processes led to a slow phase of decline. Significantly, as mentioned earlier, a fire destroyed about two thirds of the market in 1975, which led to the construction of two utilitarian buildings of lower quality (Burt

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and Grady 1992), and since then LCC has struggled to institute plans to support and maintain the infrastructure of the market. In the mid 1980s, a planning proposal for a megaproject advanced by a private Dutch company would have resulted in much of the market being demolished and its marginalization within a modern shopping centre. This proposal encountered substantial opposition from traders, members of the public, civic organizations and public campaign support, totalling 250,000 signatories, eventually resulting in its abandonment following a public inquiry (Lytton, 1988). Following this defeat, LCC undertook a series of improvements in the early 1990s, especially to the heritage-listed front profile of the market. However, two further decades of minimal investment in infrastructural maintenance, unaddressed until the end of the 2000s, has resulted in a general condition of neglect.<sup>2</sup>

This policy and (dis)investment history has deteriorated the relationship between traders and LCC, and more generally, has tainted the public's opinion of LCC's intentions towards the market. Indeed, one butcher who is currently defying LCC's recent relocation policy to a newly designated area has displayed a newspaper clipping from the 1986 redevelopment episode, telling us that 'history was repeating itself'. This process of neglect of the public market can be explained by a more general shift in the role and function of local authorities throughout the UK, and more widely throughout the western world. Since the rise of neoliberal ideology and policy from the 1970s, the local state is reconceptualised as an entrepreneurial economic actor that actively seeks investment and income generation opportunities, signalling a shift from its primary function in the delivery and distribution of public service (Harvey, 1989). Local authorities across the UK have thus marginalised public markets and no longer tend to see them as part of their welfare provision; instead they have treated them as 'cash cows' (House of Commons, 2009), or increasingly, have opted to sell them to private developers under the remit of a wider austerity agenda (González and Dawson, 2015).

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In parallel with the abandonment of the market as a public service, LCC pursued a policy of regeneration of the city centre from the late 1990s into the 2000s that aligned with a broader national policy of 'urban renaissance' (Imrie and Raco, 2003). In Leeds, this renaissance took the form of a huge expansion of residential use in the city centre through the building of 9,500 apartments, primarily constructed between 2003 and 2009 (Unsworth, 2010). This corresponded with an upgrade of the core shopping district, most recently advanced by the construction of the new Trinity shopping centre (See Map 1). Additionally, urban renaissance policy also fueled the development of smaller versions of the large supermarket chains, enabling their insertion into the existing fabric of town centers and direct competition with the publicly-owned market (See Map 1 for new supermarkets in Leeds city centre). González and Hodkinson (2014) analyse this renaissance as a process of unfinished new-build gentrification, which, whilst not directly displacing residents, has created new exclusionary residential and commercial urban landscapes unaffordable for many in the city and city-region.



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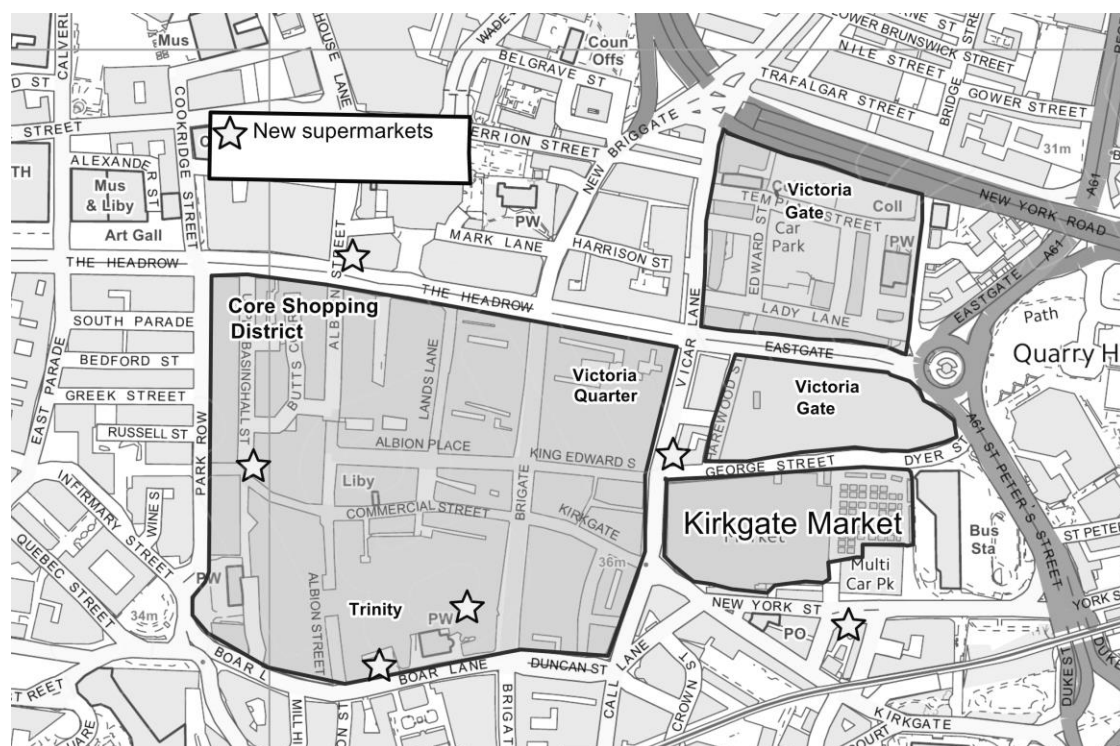


Figure 9.2: Map of Leeds city centre. Source: Annotated Ordnance Survey map by the authors

Part of this renaissance incorporated the area immediately adjacent to Kirkgate Market (See Map 1), a similarly neglected site formerly occupied by municipally-owned car parks, which had been earmarked by LCC for years as a retail development opportunity (LCC, 2005). Protracted negotiations with private developers eventually led to the construction of an additional £150m luxury shopping centre, 'Victoria Gate', which opened in October 2016. Anticipating potential opportunities for Kirkgate Market in relation to the Victoria Gate development, LCC eventually launched an independent redevelopment plan for the market in 2012, supported by borrowing £13m based on future profits. Completed in 2016, this public-led redevelopment project has important elements of physical redevelopment in conjunction with aims to change the public image of the market through a new branding strategy. The redeveloped market now hosts a revamped 'fresh food' area that showcases the heritage aspects of the building – for the first time bringing butchers and fishmongers together. It also cleared one of the Halls (evicting many traders) built after the 1975 fire to facilitate a large 'meet and eat' space featuring nine street food cafés. Other

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works included partial repair to the roof and the improvement of waste management and electrical facilities.

Whilst this capital investment is long overdue, our contention is that the redevelopment of Kirkgate Market reflects aspirations aimed at capturing customers and traders from or oriented to higher socio-economic demographic, establishing a trend of gentrification. In the final planning stages in 2014, such intentions were implied in the market manager's address to local press: 'If we are going to be taken seriously as a retail presence in the centre of Leeds, we have to be accessible to our audience, whether that means targeting a younger, student audience or the middle class shopper' (Hudson, 2014). The appeal to 'be taken seriously' as a city centre retailer is predicated on the imagined participation of the middle-class consumer-citizen upon which neoliberal policy is based. At the same time displacement is inferred by what is *excluded* from the vision of a productive retail market: an existing, 'deficient' customer base constituting the elderly, new migrants, the unemployed and working class market users who collectively lack the material and cultural resources to be taken seriously (see also Rankin and McLean, 2015; Sullivan and Shaw, 2011). From the first phases of planning of this redevelopment project, LCC has expressed minimal concern over its potential social impact. Evidenced as early as 2010, a LCC strategy document questioned 'whether the market really is the best place for those on low incomes to shop [...] there are a wealth of alternative discount and supermarket offers located within the city centre and communities, many of which offer cheaper alternatives' (LCC, 2009, p. 20).

In their discussion of markets as the 'new frontiers' of gentrification, Gonzalez and Waley (2013) demonstrate that one of the first steps taken towards the replacement of traders and customers involves the selective displacement of long-established traders

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that do not 'fit' with the profile of upscaled branding. Whether strategically-deployed by market management or not, this trend corresponds with the long-term neglect of Kirkgate Market, and moreover, has accelerated with the recent redevelopment. Although it has proved difficult to qualify this trend, we do know that the redeveloped market has less trading space, and that many established traders were unable to secure suitable spaces in the new areas due to significant rent rises and associated costs – factors which implicate a process of trader displacement (Friends of Kirkgate Market, 2014b).

We observed simultaneous gentrifying initiatives in the realm of food. Earlier, we explained that Kirkgate Market has long functioned as a key space for everyday provisioning in the city centre, providing good quality, affordable food. This provisioning for instrumental needs particularly benefits Leeds' poorer residents, especially those living in disinvested locales and wards that suffer underprovision of accessible and affordable food retail (e.g. Wrigley et al, 2003). Although the price point in the market is comparatively low in relation to the city centre foodscape, some elements are exceptionally so. For instance, a number of fresh food stalls sell bowls of mixed fruit and vegetables at £1; others offer heavy discounts on packs of perishable food in the last hour of trading. However, recent initiatives in LCC's redevelopment agenda suggest that this important dimension of the market is at risk of marginalisation and even displacement. One prominent indicator includes LCC's recent trader recruitment drive, which clearly aims at refashioning the market's food sector along gourmet lines. The council's tender pack invites traders with expertise across a wide range of 'niche' foods including: World Food, Artisan Breads, Patisserie, Delicatessen, Smoothies, Handmade Chocolates, Organic and Local Farm products, Niche Supermarkets and Micro Brewery and Wine Retail (LCC, 2016). Other indicators of food gourmetization include the installation of six international 'street food' inspired kiosks and specialist coffee bars in the new events space, and a project trialling 'pop-up' independent food and drink businesses. Signalling aims to

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attract a new socio-economic demographic, the council claims that these latter food ventures will provide 'something unique and exclusive to the market [...] encouraging new customers and traders to use the market', thus positioning 'Kirkgate Market as a supporter of high quality independent food and drink businesses' (LCC, 2015).

We can see in this rebranding of the food offer of Kirkgate Market the appropriation, sanitisation and commodification of ethnically and culturally diverse food cultures; they are re-packaged as 'unique and exclusive' gourmet experiences and 'othered' for the consumption of the potential customer base that the market management wishes to target. The problem here lies in the tendency for price elevation in line with professional incomes and therefore patronage (Anguelovski, 2015). This gourmetization process can also lead to the displacement of long term market users, a point underscored by Sullivan and Shaw in their study of retail gentrification and class in the US: 'New retail offers goods and services that cater to newcomers, charge prices that correspond to professional incomes, and create cultural symbols and spaces that tend to attract newcomers but alienate long-time residents' (Sullivan and Shaw, 2011, p. 414).

The Leeds-based campaign group Friends of Leeds Kirkgate Market challenged this potentially exclusionary aspect of the market redevelopment project, objecting on the basis that it 'presents genuine threats to the Market's future survival as a community hub' (Friends of Leeds Kirkgate Market, 2014b). Delineating the ways in which the council had failed to study the customer base of the market, the group disputed its capacity to assess the social impact of the project. In response, LCC acknowledged that the 'community impact assessment' was insufficiently researched, resubmitting an alternative that nevertheless failed to address any of the objections raised by the campaign group (Friends of Leeds Kirkgate Market, 2014a<sup>3</sup>).

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Similar concerns in relation to the gentrification of the market have been raised by traders, market users, and other members of the public at various stages of the planning process. Of particular note, a key LCC consultation document *Statement of Community Involvement*, commissioned in 2014, summarises the responses to the proposed redevelopment in an on-site and online public survey. Worth quoting at length, the following extract captures Leeds residents' anxieties in the early stages of gentrification, and their efforts to contest its further progression:

It is clear is that the majority of customers, traders and visitors to the market enjoy the heritage feel of the market and this should be maintained. Some consultees felt that *the proposed designs are sterile and there is a concern that Kirkgate Market will be gentrified*, or the unique character and atmosphere of the building will be lost through the refurbishment. *Comments made indicated that Kirkgate Market is a place where people feel welcome regardless of their social status and that this should be maintained. Some felt that the only way this can happen is to keep rents low therefore keeping product prices low.* Comments on the online questionnaire raised concerns that as a result of the development the market may become gentrified and prices would increase.

(LCC, 2014a, p. 21, italics in the original)

It is also the case, however, that some traders expect to benefit from, and would welcome the arrival of, different customer traffic generated from the newly-opened Victoria Gate shopping centre. Given the long period of neglect of the market by the council and recent disruptions associated with the redevelopment project, many traders have lost the patronage of long-term customers, and as such, look forward to the arrival of a more affluent clientele. However, at the present juncture it would be premature to evaluate the extent to which the market can balance the anticipated customer mix, nor how many of the current traders will realistically be able, or indeed willing, to adapt their products, service and modes of accommodation in response to a changing market environment.

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## Conclusions

In this chapter we have presented public markets as complex spaces of both value and tension. Markets serve as places for the reproduction of sociability and inclusion in increasingly diverse cities, but this valuable and valued resource is threatened by urban redevelopment processes. In pursuing this contradiction we have identified a range of interconnected risk elements that can advance the displacement of long-term market users and traders, pushing traditional retail markets in the direction of gentrification. We have discussed these complex issues in the case of a large public market in the centre of Leeds that has historically served a very diverse customer base, more recently welcoming new migrants from around the world as both traders and users. Through our ethnographic research we have found that the market functions as a space for dense sociability where market traders and users routinely engage in practices of cultural translation, adaptation and accommodation. In much of the literature on markets as places for social interaction, researchers have highlighted the powerful contribution of such semi-public spaces for the development of low level, non-threatening interaction between diverse publics, which in other spaces might be in conflict or competition due to class, culture and ethnic differences. However our research reveals that traders and users do not merely tolerate each other to facilitate instrumental economic transactions; Rather, they invest considerable time, care and effort in everyday interactions to accommodate difference and communication across cultural, class and language barriers.

We have also shown how Kirkgate Market is at a critical juncture of potential transformation in response to a major process of redevelopment that has involved a partial upgrading of the infrastructure and the relocation and subsequent displacement of many traders. We have argued that this redevelopment project is yoked to the opening of an adjacent luxury shopping centre from which market managers and LCC

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aim to attract a more affluent customer base to Kirkgate Market. We have demonstrated that this state-led redevelopment project has exhibited limited consideration for the locally-valued social and intercultural aspects of the market, therefore potentially posing a risk to the vibrant forms of inclusive sociability identified earlier in this chapter. This sociability is facilitated by a number of intersecting elements: affordability; familiarity and comfort at spatial and cultural levels; a particular mix of uses; and the socio-economic and ethnic mix of market users. We contend that the trend towards gentrification triggered by the redevelopment project is potentially eroding these unique socio-spatial elements, as well as the history of traditional retail markets as a public service. At the present moment, we speculate that this constellation of elements would be exceptionally difficult to reproduce both in the market itself, and elsewhere across Leeds' retail landscape and its city centre as a whole. Thus, as a fitting end, we borrow a biological metaphor from a London-based campaign group that likens the market to a 'human coral'; 'Rather like a coral reef this multi-layered and multi-faceted community is a fragile form, easily destroyed, yet near impossible to replicate' (Friends of Queen's Market, n.d.).

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<sup>1</sup> 'Leeds Voices: Communicating Superdiversity in the Market' was funded by the British Academy and the University of Leeds between October 2015 and July 2016 (<http://voices.leeds.ac.uk>). Through the twin lens of superdiversity and multimodality, the project explored the multilingual and cultural accommodations that people of different ethnicities make in their interactions at Kirkgate Market (Blommaert, 2014; Vertovec, 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> This data on investment was uncovered by public inquiries made by the campaign group Friends of Leeds Kirkgate Market, to which one of the authors belongs. They are available through the website [whatdotheyknow.com](http://whatdotheyknow.com).

<sup>3</sup> The acknowledgement of the deficient Equality Impact Assessment came in private emails between Leeds City Council policy officers and members of the Friends of Leeds Kirkgate Market campaign. These are accessible upon request.