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# An Eco-Egalitarian Solution to the Capitalist Consumer Paradox: Integrating Short Food Chains and Public Market Systems

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**Abstract:** Presently, alternative agri-food networks are in a renaissance, utilizing an economy of proximity to compete against transnational agri-business and food distributors. While this is positive ecologically and socioeconomically, the overreliance on market mechanisms in short food chains has led to class distinctions in food distribution and consumption. The result has been a capitalist consumer paradox exacerbating inequality in the alternative agri-food networks. To resolve this inequality, we focused on how public policy can leverage state investment in public markets to reduce or overcome the capitalist consumer paradox in short food chains. To clarify our argument, we began by examining the benefits of short food chains in the urban food system. Then, we explained how type of consumption and policy regime effect food access. After this, we utilized Mexico City and New York City's public market systems as representative of an alternative policy regime and the effects of moving away from state-oriented development. We concluded by describing possible conflicts and complements to the integration of public markets into short urban food chains.

**Keywords:** short food chains; public market systems; sustainable urban food system; eco-egalitarian policy; capitalist consumer paradox

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## 1. Introduction

A principal policy goal aims to increase access to nutritious and locally-sourced food through community and economic development, leveraging territorial identity and proximity. Currently in the US, short food chains (SFC) have been a key tool for policymakers seeking to achieve this goal. Recently, there has been an upsurge and expansion in the number of small to medium farms using this direct-to-consumer channel. For instance, 7.8% of food consumed in the United States now comes from SFC [1]. This has followed, to differing degrees, a worldwide trend in implementing policies to bolster alternative agri-food networks (AAFN) [2].

While SFC increases the economic and ecological viability of local food networks, this does not amount to a sustainable food system. The United Nations defines a sustainable food system as “a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised” [3]. Following this definition, under current conditions, SFC are not sustainable in all cases, as certain policies bringing about SFC do not generate a viable social base. Depending upon policy, SFC are not able to meet the volume and diversity demanded in urban areas for all. Why is this so?

Globalization has brought about a post-fordist consumer that is able to distinguish themselves through the consumption of a greater diversity of quality, types, and classes of food products [4]. Under post-fordist consumption, instead of SFC serving as the principal source for food provisioning, in certain cases they function as market niches for specialty goods with price premiums distinguishing qualities based on proximity, authenticity, origin, “healthiness” or cultural identity [5]. Because of this, SFC reliant on market mechanisms tend to focus on professional and capitalist clients that have the economic means to enter these markets, “voting with their forks” to access the AAFN [6].

Food justice scholars note the paradox in SFC, and AAFN more broadly, because while they are different from conventional firms and commodity chains, in the United States they primarily function for consumers in higher social strata [7]. Following food justice scholars, such as Alkon [8] and Allen [9], as well as Veblen [10] and Bourdieu [11], we label this the capitalist consumer paradox, wherein policy that relies on individual consumer taste that is conceived of as equal in an abstract market are, in reality, generating inequality. Under the current neoliberal policy regime, the state reduced its role in egalitarian development projects focusing on the professional and (informal) proletarian classes. Neoliberal policy relies on capitalist markets to distribute public funds, where the power to affect is based on income and wealth and excludes the majority of the population (see Zweig [12] for US, Portes and Hoffman [13] for Latin America). Whatever good intentions exist on the part of SFC actors in the United States, without economic means and a lack of universal social policy to level the field, SFC will not lead to a sustainable food system for all. Rather, SFC, embedded in a neoliberal policy regime and based on post-fordist consumption, deepen inequality and are not conducive to providing a complete, weekly food basket for family.

To overcome the capitalist consumer paradox, and to meet the sustainable food system’s “for all” qualifying condition, we argue for an eco-egalitarian policy integrating SFC with a public market system (PMS; Pensado and Smolski [14]). Based on Mexico’s effective public market model developed in the 1950s and 60s, we envision that integration as an opportunity to build and better public infrastructure for the purpose of regulating the urban food system. PMS can be a platform for urban sustainability given the importance they have, and can acquire for social and cultural life in neighborhoods [15]. We argue that through public investment and subsidies, this integration would function as a counterweight to the current tendencies of oligopolization and concentration on the part of larger conglomerates [16], the market’s tendency to deepen inequality through mechanisms, such as consumptive distinction [11] and the treadmill of production occurring in agriculture more generally, even in organic sectors, whereby the system is unsustainable and even what was relatively sustainable becomes absolutely unsustainable [17–19].

In contrast with past iterations of state intervention in the food system, we are not arguing for centralization of urban food chains under state control, but increasing autonomy and capacity of participants through public investment. In part, this is because like Douglas and Isherwood [20], we do not find consumption to be wholly a predatory act, and that we can, and often do, find joy in consumption. The state’s role is then to not decide what is produced and consumed, but instead that everyone is equally able to benefit from a sustainable food system. From the intervention that we envision, the goals are varied; increase equality in consumption, strengthen social cohesion through recuperation of public spaces and community identity, and expand knowledge about responsible and sustainable production and consumption. While not a panacea, the integration would be an effective, eco-egalitarian tool for bringing about a sustainable food system and overcoming the capitalist consumer paradox.

We began by reviewing prior scholarship on what constitutes a SFC and their proposed benefits. After this, we situated SFC historically relative to changes in consumption and policy regime in the United States and Mexico. We connected the changes to how SFC practices reinforce inequality and social unsustainability in those contexts. From there, we reviewed the literature on PMS, outlining our argument that they present a more eco-egalitarian model for SFC in the United States and Mexico. As part of outlining this argument, we utilized two cases, New York City and Mexico

City, and the historical development and contemporary functioning of their PMS and SFC. While New York City transitioned to a neoliberal SFC policy, incentivizing a quasi-private PMS, Mexico City let the PMS stagnate with no major intervention for decades. Comparing these cases offers crucial insights into why SFC and PMS provided for different consumer strata. Understanding how important policy implementation is to outcomes, we concluded with a discussion of the conflicts and complements that could arise from an urban public policy seeking to integrate SFC and PMS markets in alternative agri-food networks. While this historical case method makes generalizability unachievable, it does make a strong argument for further research on this integration, an agenda we also outline in the conclusion.

## 2. The Benefits of Short Food Chains

According to Lucy Jarosz [21], contemporary AAFN are comprised of SFC, representing forces that are re-spatializing and re-socializing urban food production, distribution, and consumption. For this study, our focus was not on all types of SFC, but rather just on those SFC dedicated to specialized products and direct-to-consumer markets which handle the majority of SFC sales. This excludes community supported agriculture, solidarity economy, fair trade, and home production and consumption. In general, all SFC are embedded in socioeconomic relationships that go beyond the instrumental goal of profit, instead involving the substantive (re)production of ties connecting producers, distributors, and consumers [22–24]. As such, SFC rely on an economy of proximity, such as geographic proximity, the closeness of the food production area to urban consumption [25,26]. Due to proximity, goods from SFC are given more relevance through local cultural patrimony and community development.

With food, cultural identity generates an intrinsic patrimony. Patrimony comes from place and other attachments connecting identities to specific foods and agricultural practices, such as foie gras' connection to a nationalist identity in France [27]. This leads to product distinction based on origin, geographic indicators, and special ecological quality as regulated by the AAFN [28–30]. Consumer interest in the sustainable consumption of fresh, non-industrial food works to directly link rural producers to urban centers in socioeconomic relationships, while also increasing socioecological resilience by reducing carbon emissions produced by intensive agricultural practices incentivized by neoliberal globalization in the conventional food system [31–35]. As such, SFC play a role in reconfiguring cultural patrimony and urban life to be more green through leveraging local relationships of trust, empathy, and altruism to increase the dynamic ties between producers and consumers.

Further, practices rooted in traditional knowledge, when available, can be more synergistic with the ecological system in which a group of people is embedded [36]. For instance, Sicilian blue fin tuna fisherman practiced an intricate netting system under the cultural signifier of la mattanza that left intact a reproduction cycle that was broken within a century of industrial methods being introduced [37]. In another example, a green urbanite identity may be in development, such as the increased participation in food production that occurred in La Habana, Cuba during and after the Special Period [38]. In all cases, we must become more considerate of the connection that knowledge has to play, and the effects of uprooting knowledge from place on attempts to ameliorate and mitigate the environmental degradation caused by the current agri-food system.

For community development, AAFN are beneficial due to their generation of collective action and cooperation by embedding participants directly in the social [39]. Proximity enables actors in SFC to constitute themselves as an alternative confronting the dominant, commercial model, and oligopolistic self-service stores [40–42]. Therefore, SFC are important for empowering small and medium-sized farmers and consumers to diminish the control that transnational agri-business has over global value chains, and this increases their capacity to determine production and distribution to the consumer [43,44]. With more community control there is further investment in the outcome of the venture, embedding the SFC directly in social relations through the development of solidarity between AAFN participants [42,45]. Communities are then able to dictate the terms of what is meant by local,

to unite their development of place-based relationships to a common political objective, and assure that the food system is addressing directly food access inequality [46].

From this perspective, SFC utilizes place and community identity to bring about collective action reproducing AAFN. That is, they embed themselves in a substantive economy that is able to support it, even if SFC are inefficient in formal terms. As such, SFC are a possible local and ecological alternative to industrial agriculture, and the consumption of mass produced commodities by the oligopolistic food distribution system. However, because contemporarily, many SFC in the United States are implemented by leveraging price premiums and class-based cultural distinctions, certain limitations exist, specifically the capitalist consumer paradox. Thus, according to the UN's definition of a sustainable food system, North American SFC as currently constituted, are not sustainable, because over time they undercut the social and economic bases supporting the ecological basis and ability to provide food security and nutrition for all.

### 3. The Capitalist Consumer Paradox in Short Food Chains

Since the 1970s, SFC has been largely carried out by private actors, with public support and regulation [9,19]. SFC are part of the larger trend remaking the North American food system with organizational expressions like farmer's markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and other direct-to-consumer models [47]. As well, for the last third of the 20th Century to the present, changes centered on flexible commodity production led to product diversification and a post-fordist consumer [48]. At the same time, a neoliberal policy regime was implemented globally based on privatization, deregulation, and export-oriented policies, also known as supply-side economics with aspects of Austrian economic philosophy [49,50]. The State role in redistribution of the surplus shifted away from direct investment in the working and lower classes, toward investment in firms [51]. Globalization in all areas (economic, political, social, and cultural) contributed to this change, with economic liberalization leading to increased flows of labor, goods, and capital [52].

During this period, a worldwide cultural industry flourished based on the exacerbation of individual consumption, generating social distinction from consumption and bringing about the transition to a heterogeneous consumption pattern [53]. Distinction manifests clearly in a capitalist social system, where what people have in common is being consumers and demonstrating that consumption through symbols they accrue [10,11]. While sharing the market role as consumers, consumption is stratified with increasing social inequality between consumers of different class strata. Lyson [54] and Guthman [55] argue that in the United States, the current alternative agri-food movement reproduces the neoliberal policy regime through this focus on the individual consumer and producer, and their "rational" economic decisions. AAFN have principally focused on leveraging market mechanisms to develop short food chains, as well as privileging individual action over collective action [56]. This leads to a reliance on mechanisms that actively exclude many from participating, the capitalist consumer paradox, whereby increasing capitalist and professional class consumption at SFC decreases their capacity to serve other strata.

What occurs is that a post-fordist consumer subject based on the expansion of choice and access becomes a substitute for actual subjects within structures of inequality being (un)able to purchase. Under these assumptions, the market as an institution embedding SFC is treated as a neutral arbiter. The food justice literature has demonstrated that, to the contrary, race and social class fundamentally affect who can and cannot participate. This occurs because every subject is historically constituted and embedded within specific social structures and institutions. The market individualizes action so that collective, social problems remain unaddressed and reproduced [57].

For instance, in Manhattan, access to organic food correlated with education levels, race, and class, with stratification of market location based on the price premium that these specialized products offered producers and distributors, as derived from the symbolic capital of these products [58]. As education level and income level increased, there was a concomitant increase in the likelihood that stores had organic products. Even worse, for the overwhelming majority of census tracts with low income

and only a high school education or less, there was no access whatsoever to organic food [58]. This stratification of food access has occurred concurrently in other major metropolises, like Mexico City, and is part of the larger trend that we see concerning SFC [59]. The inequality is not just class, but also race. The CSAs, when consumers assume risk with farmers by purchasing pre-harvest shares, and Farmers' Markets in California reproduce the racial caste hierarchy of the United States, as their color-blind ideology places blame onto People of Color for "not knowing", rather than being aware of how the alternative food system reconstructs a space for whiteness [55].

Even when there is a commitment to food justice, markets remain a problematic aspect when divorced from public policy able to subsidize and incentivize AAFN to address inequalities. For instance, Alkon and Mares [60] and Alkon [8] demonstrate that at the West Oakland Farmers' Market specific focus was made on addressing race-based food injustice, such as the dispossession of Black Farmers, relying on the market maintained their structural disadvantage. Thus, the market was disadvantaged and found it difficult to sustain itself over the long term. Thus, when people are educated about the struggle against institutional racism, this does not overcome the very real material constraints on such people who are positioned in structures of inequality. In this way, SFC are reproducing a differentiated set of social inequalities.

Rather than reliance on the market and consumers, which will not "create more democratic, participatory, and inclusive" commodity chains, there is a role for the state to bring about these ideals [61] (p. 177). Following food justice scholars, we argue that when AAFN is solely reliant on the market embedding social relations for the production and distribution of food, this widens and deepens class-based food access inequalities [57]. Diversity of goods and freedom of choice do not equate to a sustainable food system, although they can play positive roles, especially in reducing standardized mass production. These scholars argue that market models grant power to consumers with economic means, which excludes lower social classes from participating in the location of local food distribution points. Thus, market models for AAFN restrict access, rather than universalizing access, creating a capitalist consumer paradox with freedom of choice for the few.

This was not always the case. The neoliberal policy regime was preceded by an era of the development state, with government policy focused on the creation of domestic state-regulated markets through the injection of a highly centralized state into the economy with nationalized industries and technology transfer under import-substitution policies [50]. While this failed to plan for the ecological base, these policies demonstrate how the social base can be positively generated to provide an economic base for professional and (informal) proletarian classes. In what follows, we provide a historical account of this trend in Mexico City and New York City, and provide evidence for our argument that public policy investing in PMS was more capable than the neoliberal policies at expanding food access for lower social class strata. We draw directly from Smolski [62], a master's thesis on Mexico City's public markets, as well as other secondary sources, especially Audant [63] on New York City, to make our argument.

#### 4. Comparing Public Market Systems in Mexico City and New York City

The re-orientation of policy away from direct public investment in infrastructure was detrimental to PMS, which had prior utilized state investment to develop and sustain (informal) proletariat class food distribution during the prior state-led development model [64–66]. The result is that present forms of SFC act as an exclusionary mechanism to the (informal) proletariat, utilizing price premiums and class distinction as a competitive advantage against larger distributors [67,68]. The middle and upper social class strata can pay to access the AAFN, while others are excluded, dependent on the global value chains and/or existing in food insecure zones.

To remedy this inequality, public policy is necessary. There has long been a focus on maintaining a functioning urban food supply for a larger set of urban social strata. Throughout history from the agoras of Greece to present, public authorities have always intervened to avoid problems and conflicts associated with food availability, scarcity, famine, and safety [69,70]. Over time, they built public

institutions and organizations through which they looked to regulate and reproduce the concurrence of public and street markets, and the relationship between producers, vendors, and consumers (see Table 1 for historical development of Public Market Systems in Mexico City and New York City). For instance, Horowitz, Pilcher, and Watts [71] describe two centuries of tension between market forces and state regulation in meat markets in three metropolises from the 18th to 20th Century; Mexico City, New York City, and Paris. The first movement was against the corporatist structure of the ancien régime with its guilds and paternalism, the second movement was against market liberalization's concentration of power in the hands of private merchants [71]. It was during the second movement, whereby the polity restrained the market and the PMS arose during the 20th Century, part of a trend starting in the late 1800s [71].

**Table 1.** Development of Public Market Systems.

Years	Mexico City	New York City
1840–1860	Open air Markets	Enclosed Markets
1900–1920	Covered Markets	Enclosed and Pushcart Markets
1930–1960	Modern Public Markets	Modern Public Markets
1970–1980	Deterioration and closure	Deterioration and closure
1970–Present	Street vendors and Mobile Markets	Greenmarkets and Greencarts
1980–Present	Stagnation and Gentrification	Stagnation and Gentrification

In metropolises like New York City and Mexico City, during the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, authorities strengthened the infrastructure for a PMS to regulate prices, avoid famine and scarcity events, and to satisfy a mass of consumers with industrialized food [63,66,72]. In both New York City and Mexico City, public officials argued for the PMS as a matter of modernization and a form of class-based corporatist politics (see Olsen [73] for Mexico City, see Audant [63] for New York City). After reports like Upton Sinclair's [74], *The Jungle*, the need for regulation of production and distribution made state intervention necessary to a functional urban food system. Not only that, authorities sought to control flows of traffic and even to control the perceived immorality of the market. Because of this multitude of reasons, governments constructed PMS, although they were drastically different in size and scope depending on location. Note though, for these PMS, SFC goals were non-existent, with no explicit purpose to connect rural producers to urban consumers.

#### 4.1. Mexico City's Public Markets

In the case of Mexico City, the PMS became a counterweight to private commercial interests and direct producers [75]. Even though geographic proximity does not exist in many cases, there is organizational proximity. Food is produced and distributed by groups and producer associations in federated entities that are related to participating members. The distributors are vendors in the markets selling more diverse products than what they solely produce. These vendors purchase additional products to diversify their market offering and entice consumers to visit periodically. In most established public markets, it is difficult to buy all the necessary weekly products for a family, which leads consumers to complement their basket in other places. Consumers understand that vendors are not in all cases the direct producer, and that the products do not necessarily always come from the local area. Instead, products might be locally produced or come from other states.

In post-revolution Mexico, the public markets began to be recognized as an "essential public service" in order to deal with congestion of public spaces, which was linked to sanitation, but also to the necessity "that new subdivisions had to have the essential urban services of water, sewers, paving, and markets" [73] (p. 119). The government was attempting to resolve the problems associated with policies enacted to increase rural to urban migration [76]. Those policies were leading to the establishment of land grab settlements (*colonias populares*) when there was not enough sufficient housing to provide for the expanding population [76,77]. Lack of sufficient housing also meant a lack

of infrastructure to support and sustain the growing population that was heading to the cities for opportunities in the industrial sector. Within this situation the government had to develop a policy increasing food distribution through the resources it had available, while also reducing congestion on the streets and enabling more sanitary conditions for vending.

In the 1950s, government policy was directed toward the development and regulation of the PMS [69,78]. The majority of public markets were constructed as part of a policy that was initiated on both the federal and local scales starting in 1951 under the “Normative Declarations” of the Government’s Plan (“Declaraciones Normativas” del Plan de Gobierno) executed by President Miguel Alemán [72]. The wider government plan was meant to combat poverty and increase the capacity to consume by decreasing prices, while also increasing production of “corn, wheat, beans, sugar, etcetera, in quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the country’s necessity” [72]. Government interventions enacting policies, such as the Normative Declarations, permitted the government to gain legitimacy, enabling it to more strongly dictate the meaning of development and how it would be achieved [50,79].

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the public markets provided a large percentage of the food supply in Mexico City, making them a homogenous food distribution source [64]. The government’s large interventionist role in the economy, while not beneficial in terms of inequality, was efficient at formalizing the economy [80]. This role allowed it to play the role of mediator in class conflict through its corporatist system by benefitting some groups, while harming others [81]. By doing this, it legitimated policies and its role as market regulator, controlling the terms of the market through its dominance of institutional political economy, thereby affecting the social class structure and the informal-formal economy continuum [82]. The PMS is then a political decision. What policies are enacted in the end affect their economic outcomes, because the State has this role as rule-setter of the market [49,83].

By the 1980s there was a discontinuity between the era of government intervention in the economy on a large scale and the neoliberal policy regime that was adopted by the Mexican government. The overbearing and debt-ridden government adopted the neoliberal policy critique in the 1980s, a reaction against any state involvement and a push for the de-politicization of the economy [49,50,84]. NAFTA plays a considerable role in permitting the explosion of supermarkets; from 1993 to 1998, a 172.6% increase in supermarkets in Mexico, and the reduction in popular means of economic activity and distribution of food [65,78]. This form of minimal government intervention for aiding popular forms of economic activity, active government support of transnational corporations, and a lack of a policy to reinvigorate the public markets continues to the present, therefore impacting economic development and the informal economy (i.e., expansion of the informal economy). It increases the informal economy by ending, over time, prior subsidies to the public distribution systems it had constructed to provide citizens with necessary products [85].

After the 1951 regulations of the public markets, the government had not updated regulations or altered them, leaving the public markets in a state of stagnation, a position in which they continue up to 2012 [66,86]. This has led to an increase in food access inequity across Mexico, both at the PMS, and even at the supermarkets [87]. Harner [87] found this dynamic in Guadalajara, where supermarkets privileged wealthy consumers, and the cessation of public market construction has meant that they no longer continue to increase access equity even while they were previously quite equitable. The reduction in access equity and public investment is linked to the present situation of the PMS, attending to approximately only 22% of the food supply in Mexico City [64,66]. Recent public investment of 45 million pesos to reconstruct 31 markets and recognition of PMS for cultural patrimony do inspire hope for a return to development state policies, and point to a possible reversal of this trend [88].

Thus, what we have is a distinct historical trajectory in Mexico for the PMS. That trajectory begins with a concerted effort on the part of the government to both modernize the food system, getting folks off the streets and under a system of regulation, along with creating distribution channels to reduce food insecurity. As the government policy regime was changed, this direct investment in public infrastructure was abandoned, and unlike in the New York City example to follow, or as was done in

Spain, there was no public-private partnership reinvigoration and SFC construction occurred largely through private action.

#### 4.2. New York City's Public Markets

The United States' history with the public market demonstrates their importance to urban zones. Since the 17th Century, the public has been preoccupied with their construction [89–91]. From 1840 to 1860 a wave of construction occurred, a wave recreated during the modernization drive from the 1930s to the 1960s [89,92]. Initial waves of public market construction involved municipal control, and as Gentry [92] and Sandberg [90] relate, this was based on taxation, bonds, and the general funds of a municipality investing in the public market. Markets themselves were places of class stratification, both signifying through consumptive distinction and the hours they went to purchase, but also in a hierarchy of vendors [89,91].

In the 1930s, New York City elected the progressive-corporatist, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, who set forth a policy to enclose the pushcart markets that had been the principal food distribution point for immigrant and working class neighborhoods [15,63]. The goal was to move vendors off the congested streets, into formal, sanitary buildings where inspectors and administrators maintained regulations [63]. A further goal was to end the "pushcart wars" that had erupted between store owners and street vendors [15,90]. A corollary goal was to bring food prices down by prohibiting haggling about prices and standardizing them instead [63]. This policy was carried out during the New Deal-era, when public pressure was put on the policy regime to bring about direct investment in lower economic strata, specifically the working and professional classes [63]. LaGuardia utilized 1.2 billion USD from the Public Works Administration to begin building the public markets, which took from 1936 to 1955, and was a continuous budget line item [63]. During this policy, nine enclosed public markets were built, leading to the shutdown of 56 pushcart markets [63]. While this policy was a direct attack on the pushcart vendors, and largely supportive of the middle class, it did seek to establish and maintain accessible channels for the working class [63].

By the 1950s to 1960s, that policy was reversed, privileging instead large supermarkets over the public market system [90]. This was the beginning of the larger liberalization drive that the city would experience from the mid-1970s onward [93]. From then onward, the public market system experienced a rapid decline; a couple of the public markets were demolished, three were closed, and the others have become places for the sale of artisanal goods, or tourist attractions representing cultural patrimony [63].

This change in policy regime did not abandon alternative food distribution models, but rather focused on the quasi-private model of the Greenmarkets, and other direct-to-consumer farmers' markets [94]. That model itself is not the invention of capitalist owners or entrepreneurs, but rather comes from the counter-culture and anti-war movement of the 1960s [95]. Globally, people reacted against fordist production of food and called for more sustainable production methods, both from a scientific and a romantic vantage point [19,96]. At the same time, with a transition from one policy regime to another undergoing, there was no access to public investment in the PMS-sense, a universally mandated program. Nor were counter-cultural participants necessarily looking to force the state to build public markets. Rather, it was focused on promoting a lifestyle, one that was environmentally conscious while also seeking individual fulfillment through "radical" consumption [95].

Instead, public-private partnerships let the market dictate access rather than policy, despite this not being the original intention of urban planners [94]. Developers even leveraged Greenmarkets in gentrification processes as selling points for neighborhoods [94]. As such, the Greenmarkets focused on geographic proximity and on leveraging price premiums afforded to direct-to-consumer commodities [94]. While successful, with now 51 markets throughout the city, the change in goal altered their location and ability to serve the lower social class strata. In New York City's food distribution system, lower social class strata and racial groups generally have less access to organic food, sustainably-produced food, and generally less stable food retail environments [58,97,98]. The

transition to a market model increased SFC infrastructure, while inequality in food consumption remained. Current developments at the Greenmarkets have resuscitated a food justice orientation, what Kornfeld [94] considers their original mission. It remains to be seen if this challenges the capitalist consumer paradox.

We have once again a distinct, but similar, historical trajectory. The principal commonality is the relation of class strata to the AAFN, and the effect of capitalist, post-fordist consumption on food access in AAFN for lower social class strata. Just as in Mexico City, New York City's PMS was the result of a modernization project linked to a specific policy regime. And just as in Mexico City, New York City's PMS also deteriorated as the city government transitioned into a neoliberal policy regime. That being said, New York City's involved a transition to a SFC model, rather than the abandonment of economy of proximity as in Mexico City. This point is key, that the SFC came to keep a quasi-PMS alive but did not produce a sustainable social or economic base for all.

#### 4.3. Summary

What is clear from the historical record is policy regime and the state in both Mexico City and New York City play an important role in whether food distribution is egalitarian. When the state changed policy regime, either SFC filled a specific void, or the PMS was left to stagnate. Without a shift in policy regime that would lead to direct investment in public infrastructure and subsidizing distribution reducing dependence on market imperatives, SFC in the United States and Mexico will continue, in the majority of cases, as an AAFN reliant on a substantive market reproducing the capitalist consumer paradox. Alterations in policy regimes have occurred countless times since the 19th Century, with ebbs and flows as the public rises up, demanding the state curtail the power of the "free" market. If such a shift does occur, and one appears underway, it should not aim to do away with SFC, but rather to utilize the logic of cultural identity and community action in conjunction with PMS for a sustainable food system; what we consider to be an eco-egalitarian solution to the capitalist consumer paradox.

### 5. Conclusions: Conflicts and Complements for Integrating Short Food Chains and Public Market Systems

In seeking to overcome the capitalist consumer paradox, public policy clearly plays a substantial role in addressing class inequality and food consumption. While SFC are able to produce cultural patrimony, community action, links farmers to cities, and reduces agriculture's ecological impact, many do so by utilizing market mechanisms that undercut social and economic bases. Accounting for the historical institutional change in policy regime, we note that PMS can be a viable organization for AAFN to resolve this paradox, or at least to reduce its negative effects. Integrating public markets into contemporary short food chains should be under consideration, with understanding of the following conflicts and complementarities.

Conflicts over operating public markets as part of short food chains arise because of scale differences, class distinction in quality diversity, and know-how about food marketing. In particular, public market vendors in Mexico City have professionalized over generations. Results show that they do not want to operate as a short food chain based on proximity, due to their food quality and lower prices. These two imperatives are set by intermediate wholesalers following seasonal and volume changes. The local vendor from the PMS is not interested in the producer's profits, while on the contrary, SFC vendors are, because in many cases they are also the producer.

Further, because of the price premium that comes with direct-to-consumer products and location of private markets in New York City, customers are stratified. In Mexico City's PMS then, the consumer is more likely to come from the (informal) proletariat, while the consumer of SFC in New York City, in part due to the price premium or specialty product, is more likely to come from the professional or capitalist classes. While both SFC and PMS tend towards the sale of "quality" goods, comprehension of quality is distinct [86]. Food is differentiated by flavor, maturation, and price-quality relationship when used in local/traditional gastronomy. For SFC consumers, these products need to be produced locally,

with best environmental practices, specific techniques, local-cultural identity, without agri-chemicals, and without industrial methods.

Understanding these conflicts exist does not negate several complements for bringing SFC into a PMS. For instance, in both cases, relationship generation is based on respect and trust between consumer and vendor/direct producer. This sustains social cohesion and socioeconomic bonds, both of which are important for endogenous community development [70,86]. Both PMS and SFC require public infrastructure permitting cost reductions, regularity, and permanence for population food access. With PMS, infrastructure vendors and direct producers can coexist in just one space, because they do not compete based on products that have been given product distinction and consumer differentiation. This entails a fusion of geographic and organizational proximity.

The fusion of SFC into PMS could be the base for creating new infrastructure and avoiding the generation of disputes between direct producers and local vendors already established in public markets. Infrastructure modernization at the public markets could amplify both systems, generating a larger capacity for sustainable consumption, and bettering urban social resiliency. In Mexico City for instance, the CEDA wholesale system could be retrofitted to act as food hubs for local and regional farmers to create economies of scale [99]. Strengthening public market infrastructure could be a counterweight to the commercial, private system that leads to irrational and unsustainable consumption, thus permitting systemic re-equilibrium.

In conclusion, with the development of social heterogeneity in food consumption in the post-fordist era, new market niches have emerged for products that distinguish themselves for being specialized, differentiated, local, and/or associated with better sustainable and organic practices, natural, fresh, or artisanal (i.e., not industrial). Starting in the 21st Century, social forces have reemerged calling for local authorities to establish small, independent producer and vendor concentrations, in professional and capitalist neighborhoods, to acquire or exchange for organic, natural, fresh, collectively labeled, and, as much as possible, local products. This corresponds to a social demand, mentioned before, around locally differentiated products for which the consumers accept the products will have a price premium.

However, because of this price premium and the status accorded these products, this has meant that lower-level urban social strata are, in many cases, unable to access these SFC, such as in New York City. Or, worse, in the case of Mexico City, the PMS is left to deteriorate. Although, since 2012 there have been policies to repair and better the PMS, accompanied by a proposal to protect them for their intangible benefit to cultural patrimony. In both cases, lower-level urban social strata are effectively excluded from SFC. From our review of the literature, we consider PMS to be an important organization for remedying this problem. This would require increased public investment and collective action that is focused on integrating public markets into short food chains. By doing so with recognition of their conflicts and complements, this can be done in an efficient manner that reduces the class-based stratification of access to sustainable, local, organic food.

## 6. Future Research Agenda

Future research needs to focus on developing a geospatial analysis looking at the correlation between social class and market location. Further, future research needs to expand beyond Mexico City and New York City, which are only two of many large metropolises globally. For instance, in Europe where social policy has been able to resist the full imposition of the neoliberal policy regime and where inequality is lower, we may find that the market does not automatically lead to negative consequences if left to its own devices. It also may be true that other state-led development policies can have similar or better results than the PMS in bringing about more equitable SFC. There are also SFC, which like the solidarity economy, are outside of state and market and need to be incorporated into future analysis. Thus, this study should be considered as a theoretical proposal for an eco-egalitarian policy of SFC-PMS integration based on historical evidence that calls for more research to clarify and make generalizable the claims of these systems.

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