THE JUST URBAN FOOD SYSTEM:
Exploring the geographies of social justice
and
Retail food access in Kingston, Ontario

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores poor retail food access in low-income, class-segregated communities through a social justice lens. Disadvantaged communities with poor food access—often called ‘food deserts’—have received ample scholarly attention, however the problem has yet to be analyzed from a normative, critical perspective. For this research, I use the case study of two communities in Kingston, Ontario’s North End, whose retail food geography changed significantly between 2006 and 2009. Critical political economy is my primary theoretical framework. I conducted forty-two qualitative interviews with key informants, four focus groups (three with low-income North Kingston residents and one with elderly Kingston residents), two door-to-door surveys in Rideau Heights, archival research, and I attended public meetings around a grocery store closure in the North End.

I advance several research findings based on my results. Most broadly, I argue that the food desert problem represents capital’s ability to shape the ‘everyday geographies’ of simple, mundane activities like food shopping through the manipulation of the urban built environment. As such, capital is able to distribute the costs and burdens of food procurement in ways that reproduce class relations and class contempt to suite the dynamics of capitalist accumulation. I propose three interpretations of poor retail food access as a social injustice: (1) poor access represents the unequal and disproportionate allocation of burdens and costs of food acquisition on those with the fewest resources to mitigate these costs; (2) class disparity is inherently supported by urban governance systems that protect the interests of capital, therefore scaled-up retail capital is not accountable to residents of communities or their non-economic needs or wishes; and (3)
the consolidated retail food geography of North American cities deprives low-income people of freedom, choice and dignity that is often embodied in the act of enjoying a ‘normal’ middle-class shopping experience. In the transition to a post-capitalist retail food geography, therefore, activists should abandon a romantic notion that low-income people should drive the change by somehow adopting a more agrarian lifestyle or lead the food system re-localization agenda – change driven by desperation rather than personal values.
Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Although it may already have faded from many Kingstonians’ minds, there was significant restructuring of the retail food landscape in Kingston, Ontario’s North End between 2006 and 2009. Most notably, two full-service food stores located close to low-income populations—the Kingslake IGA and Grant’s No Frills—closed, while a large-scale food store—a new Grant’s No Frills—opened nearby in a retail shopping centre. While North Kingston is far from uniform in terms of who lives there, what they do, how much they earn, and other characteristics, it is safely considered Kingston’s most high-needs area. The Rideau Heights community, as I show in subsequent chapters, is home to the majority of Kingston’s public housing, its largest population of social welfare recipients, and its greatest portion of residents with compounding social problems such as addiction, chronic unemployment, and low income. It is not surprising, then, that social service providers and other interested parties were concerned about North Kingston residents being without a full-service grocery store for the foreseeable future. For this dissertation, I base my empirical research on the North End communities of Rideau Heights and the Inner Harbour. I use declining retail food access in these communities to ask much-needed questions about urban social justice and the role of capital in shaping everyday landscapes of consumption and social reproduction for residents of class-segregated communities.

Capital embeds itself in the urban landscape, modifying the built environment and, by extension, the everyday geographies of work and social reproduction in the city. Food as a commodity for trade and exchange is not unique to the capitalist economic
system, however retail food capital\textsuperscript{1} has undergone a remarkable rescaling over the past century, constantly remaking the urban geography of retail food access. Moreover, capital is well served by the class contempt shown by the employed working class toward the ‘reserve army’ of the unemployed, creating new geographies of spatialized class divisions in cities. Indeed, many Canadian cities are still coping with the legacies of mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century urban public regeneration and housing projects such as Toronto’s Regent Park that geographically concentrated the working and chronically poor (e.g., Gordon, 2010; Purdy, 2003a, 2003b). In many North American cities with these housing projects, along with aging inner cities, there has been a withdrawal of capital and essential retail services from their communities, leaving class-defined commercial deserts of poor physical access to everyday essential commodities such as food.

In recent years, the general public has become increasingly familiar with the ‘food desert’ problem that is occurring in North American cities of all sizes. Food deserts are defined by Wrigley, Warm and Margetts (2003) as areas of simultaneous socioeconomic disadvantage and poor access to retail food outlets. Food deserts first gained public policy attention in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s, when the British government undertook a series of policy papers to address the changing retail food landscape of cities. This was in response to a growing concern about the increasing size and scale of large-scale food retailers such as Tesco and their locational patterns that revealed an exodus from older, inner-city neighbourhoods in favour of surburban locations. This trend, it was believed, was leading to a hollowing out of retail food outlets from these inner-city areas.

\textsuperscript{1} Retail capital is also referred to as merchant capital by Ducatel and Blomley (1990), which is discussed more extensively in Chapter Four.
and the creation of health and access challenges for low-income, low-mobility households who remained ‘trapped’ in such areas.

Since the late 1990s, awareness of similar processes in North American cities has increased. The most drastic cases included the inner-city areas of cities such as Detroit, Oakland, Chicago, and Philadelphia, where combined factors of ‘white flight’, new suburban housing growth, and inner-city commercial disinvestment created a vacuum of accessible essential retail food services. As of 2003, Detroit, for example, had only five grocery stores (sized 20,000 square feet or larger) to service an urban population of nearly one million people, and by 2007 its final two stores faced closure (Smith & Hurst, 2007). Residents faced the difficult dilemma of either spending large portions of time traveling long distances to suburban grocery stores (often by public transportation, which makes scheduling and carrying bags more difficult), or shopping at local corner stores where prices are higher and food selection, quality, freshness, and healthfulness tend to be poorer (ibid.). Pothukuchi’s (2005) study of municipal and grassroot efforts in three American cities to attract food retailers further suggests—like the UK government’s engagement in food planning and policymaking—that a scarcity of commercial food outlets is a legitimate urban issue that deserves serious deliberation and intervention.

This issue is not confined to the United States, and recent academic studies have examined urban areas with poor retail food access in a number of other countries. Such studies have been conducted in a diverse range of Canadian cities, including Kingston, London, Toronto, Saskatoon, and Edmonton (Bedore, 2007; Larsen & Gilliland, 2008; Wrigley, Guy and Lowe (2002) provide greater detail about the UK policy environment during this time. They explain key policy texts that first proposed to combat social exclusion through neighbourhood regeneration.
Moreover, grassroots efforts, popular media, and policy documents show that the issue has also received attention in cities such as Ottawa, Toronto, Antigonish, and Saint John (Carey, 2005; Hossie, 2008; Johnston, Wadsworth, Cameron, Costa & MacGregor, 2008; M. Lagier, personal communication, May 6, 2010) where lower-income or inner-city areas have faced the closure (or outright absence) of a full-service community food store.

There are multiple concurrent issues that intuitively tell us that something is wrong with this situation. On the one hand, the food desert problem brings to light the effects that chronic, spatialized poverty has on commercial disinvestment of an area, and the vagaries of free market dynamics and uneven development at work in urban areas. It also provides a highly visible example of the scaling-up of retail food capital over half a century, and the constant need to realize new economies of scale that has driven retail capital into suburban areas. On the other hand, the situation is troubling because it represents a distinct ‘everyday class politics’ of the urban experience for residents of low-income communities; this is a spatial politics of urban accessibility where something as essential (yet market-driven) as a food purchase presents a disproportionate burden to low-income, high-needs urban residents. Moreover, the changing retail food landscape and declining retail food access in low-income communities is problematic as it represents a loss of choice, control, and self-determination on the part of an already-

3 Not all studies demonstrate the existence of food deserts, however. Apparicio, Cloutier and Shearmur’s (2007) study of Montreal is one important example of a Canadian city with relatively good food access overall, and Beaulac, Kristjansson and Cummins’ (2009) comprehensive review of food desert studies between 1966 and 2008 finds mixed evidence in the Canadian literature.
disenfranchised group of people. The food desert problem, then, is a heretofore unexplored opportunity to understand the sociospatial consequences of capital’s strategic use of—and movement throughout—the city and the need for normative frameworks to explore the class-based urban experience.

Research problem

In this project, I attempt to provide a counter-balance to the quantitative approach driving recent research on urban food access within several disciplines. Geographers have used quantitative statistical and modeling tools to test for the existence of food deserts, and to map the changing landscapes of poverty and poor food access over time (e.g., Larsen & Gilliland, 2008; Peters & McCreary, 2009; Smoyer-Tomic, Spence & Amrhein, 2006). Public health and geographical research on food deserts has also followed the familiar pattern of testing the effects of a given intervention on health outcomes and food availability: Wrigley, Warm and Margetts’ (2003) well-known study of the Seacroft community in Leeds, England suggested that the opening of a large-scale grocer in this low-income community created “a positive but modest impact of a retail intervention on diet, associated with significant shifts in access” (p. 182). Other examples include Cummins et al. (2007), who show modest findings on the impact of a new food retail outlet in a low-income area on health, and Bodor, Rose, Farley, Swalm and Scott (2008), who suggest that the presence of neighbourhood food stores offering fresh produce is positively related to consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. There is far too much similar literature to review here, however it should be noted that controlled testing using the scientific method, until now, has been the primary methodological approach to the
food desert problem within these disciplines. Similarly, disciplines such as commerce and urban planning have confined their studies of food deserts primarily to empirical questions of best practice in land use planning and large store development policy. These usually neglect the political-economic questions of class and retail capital rescaling that provide a long-term view of the changing urban retail food landscape and their implications for everyday politics of the city.

The objective of this research project is not to deny the value of these previous approaches to the food desert problem. Indeed, they have contributed to our understanding of the changing dynamics of the retail food landscape, the importance of food access to diet and health, and debates on the effectiveness of interventions in the retail landscape to peoples’ shopping habits and other policy outcomes. In this project, I build on this previous literature and introduce normative frameworks of social justice and a distinct class perspective to the study of urban retail foodscape. This is my contribution to the literature.

Geographers and other social scientists have, for decades, studied the changing nature of labour and production under capitalism. There have been, however, fewer attempts to study changing urban consumption patterns under capitalism. For example, scholars have conducted political-economic critiques of capitalist agriculture and production techniques (Bobrow-Strain, 2008; Fine, 1994; Guthman, 2004; Mitchell, 2007; Walker, 2004), however there is much less literature about urban food consumption

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from a critical political-economic perspective. In this dissertation, I attempt to address this less-explored area by using the food desert issue to answer questions about class disadvantage and consumption patterns in the capitalist city. I draw from the urban political economy tradition to build a critical assessment of my case study, North Kingston, arguing that a more just urban food system involves a complex relationship between (1) respecting liberal values of choice, capabilities, and the social embeddedness of capital in peoples’ lives and (2) the conclusion that in the long term, the imperatives of contemporary retail food capital are not conducive to embeddedness or responsiveness to low-income communities’ needs or wishes.

In addition to my efforts to provide a serious political economic, class-based analysis of the relationship between food deserts and social justice, this project is distinct in its focus on the consumption and social reproductive elements of a more just food system. Over the past several years, scholarly and grassroot research and advocacy for alternative agro-food systems (also called alternative food networks, or AFNs) have focused heavily on the question of creating more sustainable food production systems. AFNs are understood dichotomously and in contrast to the conventional food system: they are thought of as place-based and with shorter distances between producers and consumers instead of placeless and void of human relations; farming and production methods are more holistic and operating at a smaller scale than corporatized, large-scale agriculture; they embrace alternative food purchasing venues rather than conventional retail grocery models; and they offer commitments to social, economic, and environmental dimensions of the food system (e.g., Jarosz, 2000; Morgan, Marsden &

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5 The latter is defined and explored more carefully in Chapter Two.
Murdoch, 2006; Whatmore & Thorne, 1997). In my own experience with ‘foodie’ social circles, however, the question of the viability of local agricultural production nearly always trumps questions about equitable food distribution—especially food that is locally produced, organically grown or imbued with some other notion of quality and provenance. Most notably, food system advocates have often failed to adequately address the obvious dilemma that ‘quality’ food is often more expensive, and may be culturally inappropriate, and less physically accessible for people living in low-income, class-segregated communities. Slowly, however, scholars are responding to this inattention to issues of class, race, and other categories of social difference: works by Allen (2004, 2008, 2010), Guthman (2003, 2008a, 2008b) and Hinrichs (2000, 2003) have attempted to address, for example, the fact that explicit formulations of social justice are often missing from food activism discourse, and that this activism often fails to adequately confront issues of historically-embedded racial, ethnic, and class inequality.

In this project, I follow the examples set by these researchers to add a normative, class-focused analysis to the problem of low-income communities with poor retail food access. My focus on food inherently speaks to social reproduction, as economically disadvantaged households and communities must constantly adapt their consumption patterns to accommodate the changing capitalist urban food landscape. Food is also an interesting starting point of research because its distribution is market-driven, however it is imperative that we ingest food and drink regularly to maintain our health and well-being, as well as for sociocultural reasons. In his study of the food and hunger politics of the Black Panther Party, Heynen (2009) cites urban scholars such as Lefebvre and Swyngedouw who address the ways that capitalism mediates the relationship between
food and the body. Food access, they suggest, is one small element of the everyday politics of urban life—the urban metabolic process\(^6\)—that is subject to domination by capital and the perpetuation of inequality amongst prosperity. Moreover, food occupies an uneasy space between the public and private sphere. As Winson (1993, p. 4) notes, food is an “essential commodity”: it is vaguely ‘public’ in the sense that we cannot live without it, and must ingest it into our bodies regularly to survive and thrive; its importance is so undeniable that a host of public and third sector institutions exist to provide people with food in the event that they cannot access it through traditional market channels. Yet food is obviously ‘private’ in the sense that food acquisition has, historically in Western capitalist society, been subsumed by the private sector.

To capture my interest in conducting normative, class-conscious and consumption-focused research on communities with poor retail food access, I address three research questions that are particularly helpful to unpack the food desert problem using a normative, critical political economic framework:

(1) How are the processes of globalized retail food capital creating uneven retail food access for class-segregated communities?

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\(^6\) Foster (1999) discusses ‘metabolism’, one of Marx’s ecological concepts, as “constituting the complex, interdependent process linking human society to nature” (p. 381). The ‘rift’ Marx writes about is fundamentally a problem of capitalist treatment and depletion of soil fertility, “the growth simultaneously of large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture under capitalism, with the former providing agriculture with the means of intensive exploitation of the soil” (p. 380). In contemporary writing, the ‘urban metabolism’ terminology is primarily a feature of the urban political ecology literature. While this research area will be briefly mentioned in the following chapter, it is important to recognize that food, hunger and food access are being theorized within many sub-areas of the political economic tradition, for food’s distinct role in cities, economies and the intimate space of the body.
(2) What principle(s) of justice are most helpful to understand this case study as a social injustice?

(3) What types of new institutional arrangements are helping to achieve a just urban food system?

These questions address three crucial key questions about the food desert problem and the inequitable geography of retail food access in places such as North Kingston: Why is it happening, what is wrong with this situation, and how do we fix it?

**Setting**

The case study for this research project is the changing retail food landscape of North Kingston, the most economically disadvantaged and spatially segregated community in the small city of Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Kingston is the largest city in south-eastern Ontario, with a population of approximately 117,000 people.

Kingston is a primarily English-speaking city located midway between the major cities of Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. The Kingston Census Metropolitan Area is home to nearly 43,000 families, including 6,545 lone-parent families (Statistics Canada, 2010a). The median family income of the city’s residents in 2007 was $71,980, higher than the Canadian average of $66,550 (Statistics Canada, 2010b). Recent Statistics Canada data reveals that, like other third-tier cities, Kingston’s population is slow-growing: between 2001 and 2006, the Kingston Census Metropolitan Area population increased only 3.8%, from 146,836 to 152,358. Within the boundaries of the city proper, the population grew only 2.6% in that time, from 114,195 to 117,207 (City of Kingston, 2009a). These are significantly lower than the provincial and national population increases of 6.6% and
5.4% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2010a). Kingston, for various historical, cultural, and economic reasons, also fails to attract significant numbers of new Canadian immigrants compared with other urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2009a). It is neither a world-class entrepreneurial city nor a declining, failing city. It has a modest economy heavily weighted to the public sector, and natural amenities owing to the local topography, including a lively sailing and boating culture on Lake Ontario.

As we will see throughout this dissertation, the historical and contemporary presence of federal, provincial and local institutions shape the unique spatialized class relations in Kingston. The city and its surrounding region are home, for example, to two universities, one college, a public and Catholic school board, seven penitentiaries (giving the city its unofficial heading of the ‘prison capital of Canada’), two hospitals, Ontario Ministry of Health infrastructure and a Canadian Forces military base. These many public sector institutions overwhelmingly shape the employment patterns of the city (see Table 1).

Table 1: City of Kingston major employers, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public sector</th>
<th># employees</th>
<th>Private sector</th>
<th># employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Forces Base Kingston</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>StarTek Canada</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen’s University</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>Invista Canada</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingston General Hospital</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>Empire Life Insurance Company</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone District School Board</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>J.E. Agnew Food Services</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional Services of Canada</td>
<td>2,670</td>
<td>Novelis</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Kingston</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>Assurant Solutions</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence Care</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>Bell Canada</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Ministry of Health</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>Commissionaires Canada</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Dieu Hospital</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>Dupont Research and Development Centre</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongwanada</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>SLH Transport Inc.</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kingston Economic Development Corporation, 2010
Meanwhile, Kingston’s poverty rate is 15.2%, higher than the average for Canadian small- and medium-sized cities (12.4%) (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2007). Some of this poverty can be explained by the unique relationship between the city and the many penitentiaries, whereby an unknown number of families of inmates migrate to the city to be closer, and former inmates may remain in the city after they are released (Meagher, 2007). North Kingston is the community that houses the majority of the City’s low-income households and publicly-subsidized housing. One community in North Kingston, the Inner Harbour, is adjacent to Kingston’s downtown. While the area contains pockets of older housing and industrial areas where residents are generally of lower income, it is also slowly gentrifying: it is home to growing numbers of Queen’s University students and faculty, as well as seniors, professionals such as teachers and lawyers, artists, activists and other people committed to accessible downtown-style living.

The other community of interest for this study, Rideau Heights, does not offer the historic housing or downtown accessibility that explains the mixed quality of the Inner Harbour. Rideau Heights was annexed by the City of Kingston in 1952, at which time the area was a community of makeshift shacks and poorer-quality houses. In the 1960s, the area was redeveloped as the location of most of Kingston’s public housing, including large clusters of low-rise apartments and rowhousing. The child poverty endemic to the area is reflected in the poor educational attainments of the area’s two public schools (C.D. Howe Institute, 2007). The area is less racially diverse than other communities in Kingston, however there is a large (uncounted) Aboriginal population (Katarokwi Native Friendship Centre, personal communication, May 27 2010; Meagher, 2007). Based on
2006 census information, median family income for this community is $35,247, significantly lower than that of the Kingston Census Metropolitan Area, and home ownership is only thirty-three percent. Thirty-two percent of Rideau Heights residents indicate that their highest level of schooling is secondary school, while a further thirty-two percent have no certificate or diploma (City of Kingston, 2010). Like the Inner Harbour, Rideau Heights has a distinct and significant population of disadvantaged, low-income individuals owing to the concentration of public housing in the area, however this is not uniform: the area does include single-family, detached homes that contribute to the class mix of the area. Table 2 provides a comparison of selected neighbourhood characteristics of Rideau Heights, the Inner Harbour, and the City Kingston as a whole, while Figure 1 offers a map of the older portion of Kingston, including its North End communities.

Table 2: Selected characteristics of Rideau Heights, the Inner Harbour and the City of Kingston, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rideau Heights</th>
<th>Inner Harbour</th>
<th>City of Kingston</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>7,390</td>
<td>117,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average family income</td>
<td>$39,022</td>
<td>$56,520</td>
<td>$83,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% home ownership</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with no high school certificate or diploma</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

City of Kingston, 2009b

The temporal setting for this research project is from 2006 to 2009, during which time two grocery stores closed in the Inner Harbour and Rideau Heights, and one new large-format grocery store opened. The Kingslake IGA was a medium-sized grocery store within the Kingslake Plaza, a 1970s-style strip plaza adjacent to the largest cluster of public housing in Rideau Heights. The IGA was a mid-level priced store that, generally
speaking, was the most physically accessible grocery store for many Rideau Heights residents, even though its affordability was questionable. The IGA announced its impending closure in October 2006, and its doors closed in December 2009. Figure 2 shows the store immediately prior to its closure and eventual redevelopment into a Shopper’s Drugmart pharmacy. Grant’s No Frills was located in the Inner Harbour, and was founded in the early 20th century as Bennett’s, an independent food store. Facing increasing pressures, the Bennett family sold the food store to the Loblaw Corporation in the 1970s, who converted it to the budget-minded No Frills banner (Interview no. 11). Figure 3 shows the store in the mid-20th century, while Figure 4 shows the store prior to its closure (in early 2009) and its eventual demolition (in early 2010).

In January 2009, the Loblaw Corporation officially opened the new, large-format Grant’s No Frills in the King’s Crossing retail development. King’s Crossing is a large mixed retail development that offers a discount fashion park, a Canadian Tire hardware store, the No Frills grocery store and various mid-priced family restaurants such as Boston Pizza. The King’s Crossing development is located adjacent to Highway 401 and is well-suited to attracting regional commuters and residents. It is also adjacent to Rideau Heights, separated by a major six-lane arterial road, Division Street. Rideau Heights residents, then, were without a full-service community grocery store for roughly three years, while the transition was relatively uninterrupted for Inner Harbour residents. Some of these people could travel easily to the nearby Food Basics, a lower-priced grocery franchise owned by the Metro Corporation, which is also located in Kingston’s downtown. Shuttle buses were used following both grocery store closures to mitigate some of the inconveniences: various municipal actors such as the Kingston Economic
Figure 1: Map of Kingston’s older communities and key landmarks

Author, 2010
Development Corporation organized a shuttle bus to bring Rideau Heights residents to another grocery store, and the Loblaw Corporation provided a shuttle bus to bring Inner Harbour residents to its new Division Street location for a short time.

**Argument and outline**

The main objective of this research is to view the food desert problem as a prism through which to explore the intimate and everyday geographies of class experiences under urbanized capitalism. I explore poor retail food access in class-segregated, low-income communities as a normative social justice issue affecting the consumption
practices of the city’s least well-off citizens. In Chapter Three, I explain the research methodologies used in this project, including survey data, qualitative interviews, focus groups, attendance at public meetings and historical archival research. In response to the three research questions outlined above, I advance three key arguments. To answer the question ‘how are the processes of globalized retail food capital creating uneven retail food access for class-segregated communities?’, I conduct a political-economic critique of retail food capital over the past several decades. I use the case of North Kingston to argue that the current situation of class-segregated communities with poor retail food access has emerged through a set of interrelated institutional factors, including modernist planning approaches to the geography of public housing, the historically-embedded geography of blue collar employment and underemployment in Kingston, and the rescaling of retail food capital during and after the Fordist regime of accumulation. In particular, I argue that there is a dialectical relationship between the ‘new retail geography’ of North American food retailing and the spatialization of poverty. I describe the changes brought about by the advent of the low-cost discount retailing model best personified by Wal-mart, including a low-cost labour model, vertical integration, the increasing use of fictitious capital, and the implementation of new managerial and technological advancements to increase predictability throughout the grocery supply chain. The contemporary retail food geography in North America—a product of the capitalist imperative to reduce costs through economies of scale—is an inherent threat to small-scale, independent, community-embedded food retail and requires ever-increasing amounts of land to accommodate the now-dominant large-scale retail format. Moreover, contemporary cities are still coping with the legacies of mid-20th century urban
regeneration schemes, which spatialized the poor and present an ongoing disincentive for retail capital.

The second research question is ‘what principle(s) of justice are most helpful to understand this case study as a social injustice?’ To answer this question, in Chapter Two I first provide a detailed outline of the political economy tradition and its application in the discipline of geography, suggesting that political economy—in its many forms—contributes to the current theoretical heterogeneity within the discipline. In Chapter Five, I suggest that poor retail food access must be understood as only one element of burden or disadvantage that marginalizes low-income people from the social norms and institutions of everyday life. In particular, I look to the effects of regressive social welfare policies and systemic discrimination within areas such as banking, employment, education, home and car ownership, and child protective services in exacerbating the daily burden of people living with low income. In Chapter Six, I conclude that it is difficult to develop standards or benchmarks that would constitute a more ‘just’ urban retail food geography; a language of rights or social justice cannot easily be applied to food access, because of the heterogeneity and subjectivity of individuals’ burdens and preferences in the food procurement experience. Thinking beyond only physical distance to food stores, I argue that the food desert problem constitutes an injustice for three reasons: (1) the contemporary scaled-up capitalist retail food system adopts a geography that places a disproportionate burden of food acquisition on those with fewer financial resources to mitigate this burden; (2) class disparity is inherently supported and enhanced through urban governance systems that protect the interests of capital, therefore scaled-up retail capital is not accountable to residents of communities through systems of
information-sharing, decision-making or taking account of non-economic needs or wishes; and (3) the changing retail food geography of cities (characterized by consolidation, peripheral locations, and the large-scale, low-cost retailing model) deprives low-income people of freedom, choice, convenience, and dignity that are often embodied in the act of enjoying a ‘normal’ middle-class shopping experience in the current capitalist system. This final interpretation suggests that in imagining the transition to a post-capitalist retail food geography, activists should abandon a romantic notion that low-income people should drive the change by somehow adopting a more agrarian lifestyle or lead the food system re-localization agenda – change driven by desperation rather than personal values.

To address the final research question ‘what types of new institutional arrangements are helping to achieve a just urban food system?’, I use Chapter Seven to consider two streams of contemporary ideas and policy recommendations: one that works within the present-day institutional context, and a second that imagines the transition to a post-capitalist retail food geography. The former consists of a critical review of urban food systems planning ideas about increasing the availability of food in low-income communities, with the emphasis on new regulatory systems to better plan for retail food in cities. The latter incorporates the writings of critical economic geographers such as Gibson-Graham to imagine new, re-scaled food economies that operate according to non-capitalist imperatives and moralities. In particular, I assess the viability of three social economy, community-owned and civil society-driven models, arguing that these models have perhaps the best potential to be more community-embedded while respecting peoples’ desires for a socially acceptable retail experience.
One of the key theoretical contributions that this dissertation makes to the critical urban political economy literature is that capital manipulates the urban landscape of consumption in order to maintain class relations and class conflict that are essential to furthering the capitalist production and accumulation logic. The food desert problem and the volatility of urban retail food landscapes are difficult to qualify as a social injustice in a way that is salient to a public audience. This only further normalizes the actions of scaled-up retail food capital in cities while shifting blame to individuals’ food-related patterns, choices and behaviours. Hence, the cycle of inter-class conflict and animosity continues while the structural causes of poor retail food access go under-addressed.
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I began Chapter One with the premise that the urbanization of capital produces spatialized class relations and geographies of class disadvantage throughout the urban landscape. I described my case study of the changing retail food landscape of the economically disadvantaged community of North Kingston between 2006 and 2009, during which time two medium-sized franchise grocery stores closed and one new large-scale grocery store opened. I noted that until now, the ‘food desert’ problem has been the subject of mostly-quantitative approaches to social science research from disciplines such as urban planning, public health, and business. It has rarely been addressed using normative frameworks that seek to understand this problem as a social injustice.

In response to this lack of critical consumption-oriented research, the objective of this chapter is to introduce my theoretical framework—the critical political economy approach—that drives this research project about a more just urban food system. In the following pages, I provide a detailed exploration of the political economy tradition and its use by geographers over the past several decades. I describe classical and critical political economy, including Marxist political economy that formed the dominant radical social science research agenda of the 1970s and 1980s. I also define key concepts and debates such as capital, class, and the role of the state. In response to the shortcomings of the Marxist political economy approach, several important conceptual developments have emerged within political theory including postmodernism and poststructuralism in conjunction with a ‘cultural turn’ throughout the social sciences. Other contemporary ‘projects’ within political economy include political ecology, cultural political economy,
and institutional economic geography. In the final section of this chapter, I situate my own research within current critical political economy writing and the ‘normative turn’, suggesting the food desert problem as seen in North Kingston is an opportunity to explore the geographies of consumption and social reproduction as a reflection of spatialized class relations in the capitalist city.

**The political economy tradition**

According to Barnes (1995) and others, what we now call a ‘political economy’ approach to understanding human economic activity evolved over several hundred years. Beginning with 17th and 18th century French physiocrats and classical political economists such as Smith and Ricardo, the term originally referred to the study of the nature, reproduction, and distribution of wealth (ibid.). Sen (1985) writes that the very disciplines of economics and political economy—back to the writings of Adam Smith—are founded on questions of “how people arrange to make commodities, how they establish command over commodities, what they do with commodities and what they get out of commodities” (p. 1). Furthermore, Barnes (1995) defines the fundamental research question of the political economy approach as “the study of the economic surplus, however defined, as it is produced, distributed and accumulated within a class-divided society” (p. 425). For Peet and Thrift (1989), the central research focus for political-economic geographers is to “practise their discipline as part of a general, critical theory emphasizing the social production of existence” (p. 2). Overall, then, the scholarly imperative is to understand processes and consequences of economic activity, uneven
development and the political, economic, and social dynamics of everyday life under
capitalism or other economic systems.

In classical economics and the liberal variety of political economy, capital and
social classes\(^7\) are understood rather uncritically as elements of production and
distribution; that is, in a competitive market, prices are said to ‘naturally’ arrive at an
equilibrium—the intersection of supply and demand—by virtue of what Smith called ‘the
invisible hand’ of the market. Capital is only one input—along with land and labour—
whose value is embedded in a final good or service, which commands a price. Indeed,
Smith’s work emphasized a *laissez faire* approach with respect to these market
mechanisms. The price mechanism is best elaborated by Ricardo, who developed a labour
theory of value to understand price relative to the cost of production.

Within neo-classical economics and the Weberian perspective, ‘class’ is often a
means of categorization, determined using basic analytical and descriptive categories
such as income, education, and socioeconomic status (Sadler, 2000). With respect to the
role of the state, theorists from diverse disciplines suggest that it has several functions
within the classical political economy framework. More contemporary liberal approaches
view the functions of the state as being the supplier of public goods for society, the
regulator and facilitator of the economy, an agent in society with an agenda of its own, or
an arbiter between many competing groups that comprise society (pluralist theory)\(^8\).

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\(^7\) It is impossible to give these concepts—and many others in this chapter—any adequate
treatment; I merely define them here to provide historical context as well as basic
coverage of key terms that carry throughout the dissertation.

\(^8\) Painter (2000) includes a useful table in his discussion of the state and governance,
which suggests that the state has many roles in the modern economy that can be
interpreted through either a liberal or Marxist framework, including maintenance of a
regime of property rights, management of territorial boundaries, maximizing economic
Neoclassical economic theory was somewhat decentred in social science research with the growth of radical social sciences in the second half of the 20th century. The 1960s were the high point of the ‘quantitative revolution’ in geography and the social sciences, dominated by abstract modeling and inferential statistical and mapping techniques (which themselves displaced previous emphases on aerial differentiation and regional geography) (e.g., Plummer, 2000). Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, however, human geography underwent a gradual theoretical diversification and move toward radical geography (Barnes, 2001). This was, in part, due to increasing interest in social movements, environmental problems and civil rights protests occurring in the United States, and also to the ‘rediscovery’ of Karl Marx’s 19th-century texts on capitalism (Cloke, Philo & Sadler, 1991; Swyngedouw, 2000). Like Ricardo, Marx theorizes the relationship between production and distribution. While Ricardo uses a circular model to explore the need for continued accumulation for capitalism to reproduce itself, Marx takes a historical and relational approach to the processes of capitalist accumulation, arguing that the relationship is “sodden with conflict, oppression, class antagonism and moral skullduggery” and the accumulation process as “a violent one, potmarked with various depressions, devaluations and downturns that are consequences of internal contradictions of capitalism itself” (Barnes, 1995, p. 424).

Themes such as capital, class, social reproduction and the role of the state took on new importance with the emergence of critical political economy approaches in human and social cooperation, provision of basic infrastructure, and creating and governing financial markets and product markets.

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geography and other social sciences from the 1970s onward. In Marxian economics, the
capital accumulation process also constitutes a general theory of social relations. Capital
takes on a far greater importance in Marx’s analysis of the capitalist accumulation
process: capital is the means of economic transaction and exchange (in other words,
money) for finished goods as well as machinery and other capital investments, and it is
also the object or ‘social value’ with which human labour power is purchased. Labour is
also central to Marx’s theory, and it must be understood not simply as an input for
production but as a commodity that is bought (by the capitalist) and sold (by the
labourer). This exchange of labour is dependent upon a distinct set of class relations
between the capitalist and working classes (in other words, capital and labour). The
capitalist class constitutes a ruling class whose profits expand with the growth and
reinvestment of capital; this class owns the means of production, pays labourers a wage
and appropriates surplus value for re-investment. The working class, on the other hand,
does not own the means of production and must sell its labour to capitalists for a wage to
afford the costs of social reproduction given the increasing commodification of everyday
life under capitalism. The proportion of money set aside by capitalists for wages is
determined by class struggle between capital and labour, and this arrangement is
stabilized through the various institutions of the state. Poverty offers a distinct and useful
benefit to the capitalist class: in its relatively short history, capitalism has not produced
full employment, but rather large segments of the working class who are temporarily or
chronically unemployed. This contingent—known as the ‘reserve army of the

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10 This two-sided categorization of class relations is admittedly oversimplified. Marx
developed more complex systems of class relations, as did other social theorists like
Weber (Harvey, 1982).
unemployed’—functions as a visible threat, and ready replacement, to the employed working class. In this way, the presence of poverty can suppress collective organization and uprise by the employed working class, in light of persistent exploitation by the capitalist class who must perpetually endeavor to reduce the costs of production (including labour costs) to avoid crises of accumulation (Harvey, 1973, 1982; Sadler, 2000).11

Moreover, themes such as the state and social reproduction take on new meanings in Marxian economics. Human geography’s most accomplished Marxist scholar, David Harvey, challenges the liberal-pluralist view of the state as an arbiter of competing actors’ claims or a neutral power broker. He argues, rather, that the capitalist state has three basic functions: (1) stabilizing an otherwise erratic economic and social system by acting as a ‘crisis manager’; (2) striving to create the conditions for ‘balanced growth’ and a smooth process of accumulation; and (3) containing civil strife and factional struggles by repression (police power), cooptation (buying off politically or economically), or integration (trying to harmonize the demands of warring classes or factions) (Harvey, 1982). Even a social democratic state is a capitalist state, which must reproduce existing class relations in order to sustain capitalist accumulation and growth. For all the functions that the state performs—at an international, national, or even urban level—it internalizes the logic of capital and the imperative of continued growth. In doing so, it must employ ‘instrumentalities of power’ to maintain the built environment,

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11 Sadler (2000) observes that the Marxist theory of class relations and class conflict can be highly deterministic, according little possibility for human agency or human consciousness. He reviews this ongoing structure-agency debate as part of the scholarly conversation between conventional Marxist geography and poststructuralism, which I briefly review below.
manage, and internalize class conflict and intervene as necessary to facilitate and encourage the accumulation process (Harvey, 1982, 1985).

Social reproduction is an essential element of class struggle and class relations. According to Katz’s (2001) critical approach to ‘vagabond capitalism’, social reproduction is

The fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life. It is also a set of structured practices that unfold in dialectical relation with production, with which it is mutually constitutive and in tension. Social reproduction encompasses daily and long term reproduction, both of the means of production and the labor power to make them work. At its most basic, it hinges upon the biological reproduction of the labor force, both generationally and on a daily basis, through the acquisition and distribution of the means of existence, including food, shelter, clothing, and health care. (p. 711)

Social reproduction is more than this, however. According to Marxist theory, social reproduction is essential to reproduce a labour force according to the geography required by capital. It also reinforces class and other categories of difference, reproducing a labour force with the necessary education and skills to accommodate the needs of capital in a given context place and time. Bordieu (e.g., Bordieu & Passeron, 1977) calls this ‘habitus’, the learning that takes place around sets of cultural forms and practices that reinforce and naturalize dominant social relations of production and reproduction (Katz, 2001). The costs of social reproduction are borne by a combination of the household, the state and civil society, in accordance with the relative strength of capital or labour during ongoing class struggle (i.e., the strength of labour unions and other manifestations of class solidarity). While production and reproduction are relatively mobile across space, Katz (2001) also observes that social reproduction is far less mobile and more place-based where “all sorts of disjunctures occur across space, across boundaries, and across scale, which are as likely to draw upon sedimented inequalities in social relations as to
provoke new ones” (p. 716), suggesting a relationship between spatialized class inequalities and challenges to social reproduction, even in highly localized geographies. Marxist scholarship, then, is responsible for a new level of awareness and critical scholarly attention to the everyday geographies of class and social reproduction, which form the theoretical basis of this research project.

In addition to Marxian theory, human geographers adopted other critical political-economic frameworks for understanding global economic change during this period. To understand the global economic crisis of the 1970s, for example, geographers explored theories of economic transition and crisis aversion, including regulation theory, neo-Schumpeterianism and flexible specialization (Amin, 1994). The goal of the French regulationists (e.g., Aglietta, 1979; Boyer, 1990; Lipietz, 1986, 1987, 1992) was to develop a theoretical framework which could encapsulate and explain the paradox within capitalism between its inherent tendency towards instability, crisis and change, and its ability to coalesce and stabilize around a set of institutions, rules and norms which serve to secure a relatively long period of economic stability […] The project was thus to identify structures, principles and mechanisms which underpinned the passing regime, to explain its internal contradictions and to speculate on future possibilities for growth. (Amin, 1994, p. 7)

A prolonged and sustained period of growth (called a mode of development) is made possible by a given regime of accumulation (regulationists argue that the Fordist and post-Fordist periods are examples of historical periods of capitalism with distinct economic characteristics) and an accompanying mode of social regulation, which is an institutional ensemble of cultural habits and norms that secures capitalist reproduction (ibid.). Capitalism is able to avoid crisis by adopting the elements of a mode of development, partly by using ‘fixes’ such as the production and switching of new spaces
and scales (e.g., Harvey 1982, 1985; Schoenberger, 2003). Geographers have analyzed and advanced regulation theory in light of debate over the nature of the post-Fordist economy from the late 1970s until today (e.g., Moulaert & Swyngedouw, 1989; Moulaert, Swyngedouw & Wilson, 1988; Peck & Tickell, 1992, 1994) (Swyngedouw, 2000). To illustrate contemporary thinking about Fordist and post-Fordist economic transition, Table 3 offers a highly simplified typology of the dynamics of production social regulation under the two modes of development.

While Marxist and other critical political economy approaches to geographical enquiry dominated the discipline for several decades, in the last twenty years new conceptual frameworks and sub-genres of political economy have emerged in response to the shortcomings of Marxist political economy. Social scientists increasingly observed that the Marxist framework was overly focused on questions of ‘the economy’ and class at the expense of ‘culture’; the ‘cultural turn’ in the social sciences during the 1980s and 1990s reflected new scholarly attention to social theory, power, gender relations, and the situated nature of economic activity within broader interconnected social and cultural relations (Lee & Wills, 1997). Thrift and Olds’ (1996) contribution emphasizes that the ‘economic’ and ‘cultural’ are inherently intertwined (using the example of Christmas to make this point) and that questions of culture now pervade disciplines such as economic geography, commerce, and economics. Newer fields such as institutional economics, evolutionary economics, feminist economics, and new political economy studies take

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12 Some social scientists look to Polanyi’s (1944) arguments about the embeddedness of economic activity and the relationships between the economy and socio-cultural institutions in *The Great Transformation*. 
Table 3: Typology of key elements of Fordist and post-Fordist modes of development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Fordism</strong></th>
<th><strong>Post-Fordism</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prototypical production dynamic</td>
<td>Taylorism, mass standardized production</td>
<td>Flexible specialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key scales of production</td>
<td>National economies and industries; large production firms to achieve economies of scale</td>
<td>‘Entrepreneurial cities’, inter-urban and inter-regional competition; dynamic firms may be smaller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key production inputs</td>
<td>Repetitive, specialized and/or low-skill human labour with few demands for specialized knowledge; production located according to availability of land, transportation, etc. Production is stable, predictable, slow to change</td>
<td>Human labour is skilled, well-trained, highly flexible. Production and firm activity is on a smaller, more flexible scale, catering to highly specialized niche markets; firms are less place-based. Production is just-in-time, or increasingly outsourced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour-management relations</td>
<td>Collective labour organization stabilizes wages; adversarial labour-management relations; firms are vertically integrated</td>
<td>New, smaller firms are characterized by lower levels of worker organization; higher labour-management trust with greater workplace flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities of firm</td>
<td>Vertically integrated production; centralized and hierarchical power structures</td>
<td>Vertically disintegrated production; decision-making is decentralized, consensual and participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family, household structures</td>
<td>Wages support a masculinized workforce, single-income nuclear families</td>
<td>Decline of single-income families; both genders active in paid labourforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption norms</td>
<td>Mass production and high wages lead to higher consumption standards; high regard for scientific innovation and product differentiation</td>
<td>Mass-produced goods remain common, but tastes in consumer goods shift toward quality, provenance, ethical consumption, lifestyle, authenticity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Brenner, 2004; Donald, 2009; Hollingsworth, 1997.

human constructions, behaviours and cultural patterns into account (Thrift, 2000).

Specific examples include economic studies that consider the nature of knowledge transmission, trust and social capital in economic activity, and cultural geographies of labour spaces and practices (e.g., Bathelt, Malmberg & Maskell, 2004, or Chapter Seven of Clark, Feldman & Gertler [2000] for a review).

Within this context of the ‘cultural turn’, geographers and other social scientists became frustrated with the Marxist approach’s overdetermination and singular focus on class as the entry point to political economic analysis. Rejecting Marxism’s overdeterminism, Gibson-Graham’s (1996) now-famous book *The end of capitalism (as*
we knew it) attempts to find middle-ground between poststructuralism and modernist Marxism. She focuses her critique on Marxism’s essentialism (i.e., its overreliance on class as the singular entry point for political economic analysis), its overdetermination (rejecting the idea that theory based on clear, simple causality produces a better understanding rather than a different understanding), and its discursive constructions of the economy as dominated by a singular, unified capitalism while downplaying non-essentialist routes to non-capitalist alternatives. She addresses the (masculine, heterosexual) economic metaphors that, she claims, remake and legitimize power relations and economic systems, replacing them with more feminine, porous and non-hierarchical metaphors. Gibson-Graham continues this poststructural project with *A postcapitalist politics* (2006) by exploring the diversity of economic relations that pervade economies, further calling into question the ‘purity’, totality or inevitability of the spread of capitalism. The poststructural tradition, then, begins with—and critiques—Marxist frameworks and methods of enquiry while moving beyond the tradition’s tendency toward “the dismal science of economics”, offering something “a little more cheery” (Barnes, 1995, p. 427). Geographers have been excited by Gibson-Graham’s project that foregrounded “ethical decisions, as opposed to structural imperatives, that construct economic ‘development’ pathways” (Jones, 2008, p. 382) such as the social economy as a space for the forging of new identities and liberated space for economic difference (ibid.)

Postmodernism gained increasing scholarly attention thanks to contributions by political philosopher Iris Marion Young (1990, 2000)\(^\text{13}\). In *Justice and the politics of difference*, Young argues that scholars should consider other categories of difference than

\(^{13}\) See Bertens & Natoli (2002) and Cloke, Philo & Sadler (1991) for additional information about key figures in postmodernism.
simply economic class (and sets of relationships other than traditional class struggle) to understand the processes of oppression in society: these include gender, ability, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and other non-economic categories. Young’s work reflects the cultural turn occurring in the social sciences at this time but also an urge among scholars to engage in research about collective identity, group affiliation, and conflict constituted through non-class relations. It also reflects postmodernism’s rejection of grand theories and universal laws, instead favouring a more relativistic approach to observation and analysis. This relativism and subjectivity necessitates that the researcher be aware of their own identity and positionality in addition to the subject of observation.

Postmodernism’s\(^{14}\) effect on research within the social sciences cannot be underestimated. In geography, the 1980s and 1990s saw growing numbers of female scholars as well as research on gender, race, sexuality and disability and other then-underrepresented categories of difference. At the same time, there was a noted decline in class-centred research. Smith (2000) notes that

> The displacement of class as an object of geographical inquiry or as a means to understand the social geography of the world came partly from direct challenges as competing social theories exploded in the 1980s. Feminist, anti-racist, and gay and lesbian political movements all predated the 1980s but it was in that decade, alongside poststructuralism and postmodernism, that these movements exploded in theoretical creativity, insisting much as Marxism had done a decade earlier that they merited their own theoretical space. (p. 1016)

As well, the growth of postmodern research has meant the popularization of new research methodologies and more unconventional writing styles, seen in many human geography sub-areas such as feminist geographies (McDowell, 1992) and economic geography (e.g.,

\(^{14}\) Postmodernism is also an aesthetic *style*, as seen in postmodern architecture, as well as a new urban spatial form, as in the ‘postmodern city’ (e.g., Dear 1986; Dear & Flusty, 2002).
Tickell, Sheppard, Peck & Barnes, 2007). Postmodernism also calls attention to epistemology and the social construction and politics behind what is considered ‘knowledge’, meaning, and identity. It validates ‘local knowledges’ while maintaining suspicion for meta-narratives and grand theory. Debate continues around the consequences of this relativism to geographical enquiry, especially the assertions that (a) relativism results in an endless juggling of equally valid perspectives, making it impossible to formulate recommendations (e.g., Fainstein, 2005; Harvey, 1996;), or that (b) relativism is paradoxical, since prejudicing local knowledges over meta-narrative theory entails a judgement that postmodernism professes to reject (Sayer, 1993).

**Theoretical heterogeneity and contemporary research themes**

As the previous section suggested, over the last forty years, scholarship in human geography has been approached from numerous theoretical traditions. The gradual movement of interest from classical political economy to its more radical and critical forms—including Marxist political economy—has been balanced by poststructural and postmodern approaches that have decentred class as the primary category of difference through which to understand uneven development and inequality. Because of this evolution of theory, it is safe to say that the discipline of human geography is now characterized by tremendous heterogeneity in terms of commonly-employed theory and research questions. For the remainder of this section, I reflect briefly on a selected range of political economy ‘sub-genres’ within human geography. Following this, I situate my own research within the ‘normative turn’ in the social sciences and calls for a return to class-centred and social justice research.
Within the broad realm of political economy, human geographers have pursued a range of research interests over the past decade. Recalling their interest in understanding what new regime of accumulation (to use the regulationists’ wording) might characterize the post-Fordist period, geographers have furthered our understanding of neoliberalism as an economic system (mode of production) as well as new political and social mode of regulation. Neoliberalism as an intellectual concept is based on the work of Hayek and Friedman, whose goal was to re-orient economic thinking about free-market economics. In recent practice, a period of neoliberal governance began in many developed countries in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in response to economic recession, government overspending and growing national deficits. National governments such as the Thatcher and Regan administrations helped to implement and normalize ‘lean states’, including the re-engineering and dismantling of the Keynesian/Fordist welfare state using new managerial models, new values, and new fiscal goals (Isin, 2000). Neoliberal policy change has been similarly undertaken in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries in the following decades.

Neoliberalism has hardly been uniform in its application or implementation across nations or even sub-nationally. Nevertheless, there are key elements worth reviewing. In Peck’s (2001) discussion of the neoliberal agenda, he mentions tenets such as removing obstacles that interfere with the efficient functioning of free markets, restraining public expenditure and collective initiative, celebrating the virtues of competitiveness and economic self-sufficiency, weakening or abolishing social welfare and transfer programs and celebrating ‘active’ citizens, meaning those who are active in the labour force, while targeting those who are inactive and are not self-sufficient. To achieve these tenets,
neoliberalism is predicated on naturalized markets as optimal, while the state retreats from economic life, through public policy and a physical reorganization of the state, including the shrinking of government (Larner, 2000a; Mohan & Mohan, 2002; Peck, 2001). The earlier phase of neoliberalism has been called “roll-back” neo-liberalism, and represents a destructive time, characterized by deregulation, dismantling, and an agenda “preoccupied with the active destruction and discreditation of the Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions” (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 384). The excesses of this period have been noted as a period of intense economic and social crisis, with the dismantling of Canada’s and other countries’ welfare states, and economic crisis of the early 1990s (Larner, 2000b; Peck & Tickell, 2002).

The response to this troubling time is known as “roll-out” neo-liberalism. This is a period of ‘creation’ in response to the previous ‘destruction’, characterized by “purposeful construction and consolidation of neo-liberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations” (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 384). Rather than be preoccupied with the role of markets in solving policy problems, roll-out neo-liberalism allows new forms of institution-building and government intervention, through the use and creation of new scales of governance and an expanded policy repertoire (ibid.). Indeed, neoliberal public policy often entails new roles for civil society, households, and families in the assumption of risk and delivery of services: the voluntary sector and communities somewhat displace the previous fixation on the private sector to fill in for the state, while municipal governments are subject to service offloading, and the individual takes on a new importance in neoliberal discourse about self-sufficiency,
personal responsibility and economic independence (from the state) (e.g., Andrew &

Given the pervasiveness of neoliberal policy agendas into virtually all (economic,
political and social) dimensions of everyday life, geographers have set to understanding
neoliberalism, its diverse forms and consequences. A few examples include police and
policing (Herbert, 2005), public policy restructuring of the role of the family (Larner,
2000a) and neoliberal urbanism (Boudreau, Keil & Young, 2009; Hackworth, 2007;
Leitner, Peck & Sheppard, 2007). There is an enormous domestic and international
literature on neoliberalism as well, which is far too vast to explore here but does speak to
growing interest in the topic and the pervasiveness of this language to understand the
post-Fordist era.

Geographers are also showing interest in cultural political economy (CPE) as a
more culturally-inclined classical political economy. CPE was first discussed and
advanced by scholars such as Sayer (Ray & Sayer, 1999; Sayer, 1995, 2001), but the
project has been taken up primarily by Lancaster scholars such as Fairclough (Fairclough,
Sum (2001, 2006) (Jessop & Oosterlynck, 2008). These scholars take up the call for a
cultural political economy that combines the old (traditional political economy, including
Marxian theory) with the new (the cultural turn’s interest in language, discourse and
knowledge construction). Sum’s (Jessop & Sum, 2001; Sum, 2004) solution is to
combine Gramsci-inspired international political economy (including Gramsci’s concepts
of hegemony and counter-hegemony) with Foucauldian interest in ideology, discourse
and postmodernist notions of power and politics. The authors develop, in short, a CPE
that “takes seriously semiotic aspects of political economy, i.e., the linguistic and narrative turn, and the construction of inter-subjective meanings” (Jones, 2008, p. 384).

The CPE approach also suggests that

To understand contemporary society, requires not only the contributions of classical political economy of old with its emphasis on value, exchange, distribution and justice but also a new political economy emphasizing the social/cultural construction and embedding of economic actions and activities. (ibid., p. 383)

While Jones (2008) concludes that this is a productive area of theoretical development, CPE is still in its early stages, he suggests several criticisms and areas for extension. Its strength, however, is a “a move away from economism, capital-centrism, productivism, and essentialism in Marxist analysis” (p. 386).

Another research domain of human geography and economic geography is political ecology. Political ecology seeks to understand the complex relations between nature and society through a careful analysis of what one might call the forms of access and control over resources and their implications for environmental health and sustainable livelihoods. (Watts, 2000, p. 258)

Political ecology is a roughly forty year-old field of enquiry that looks at the politics of environmental problems at diverse scales such as the body, community, state, and global governance. It combines ecology with the political economy tradition to encourage “the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself” (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987, p. 17, cited in Watts, 2000, p. 259). Political ecologists have spanned an incredible variety of topics in their research, including biotechnology, natural hazards and disasters, environmental justice and the uneven distribution of scarce natural resources (ibid.). The presence of a feminist political ecology focusing on women’s environmental knowledge, as well as the
deconstruction of identity and knowledge, suggests that the discipline has incorporated postmodernist thinking into its repertoire (ibid.). Perhaps most interesting for this project about urban food access is the recent work of McClintock (2008; 2010) who, under the supervision of Richard Walker, uses an urban political ecology approach to analyze urban agriculture initiatives in Oakland, California. In particular, he makes use of Marxist ecological concepts such as the ‘metabolic rift’ discussed in Chapter One to understand the relationship between human industrial activity and soil degradation and revitalization.

Lastly, institutions have played an important role in economic geography over the last twenty years. In this time, another key ‘turn’—the institutional turn—has meant “the recognition that the form and evolution of the economic landscape cannot be fully understood without giving due attention to the various social institutions on which economic activity depends and through which it is shaped” (Martin, 2000, p. 77). Interest in institutions has grown because of several factors, including the French regulation school’s emphasis on modes of social regulation (discussed above), as well as cultural turn, which critiques the idea that economic geographies can be abstracted from social, political, and cultural contexts (ibid.). The key shared idea is that “economic activity is socially and institutionally situated: it cannot be explained by reference to atomistic individual motives alone, but has to be understood as enmeshed in wider structures of social, economic, and political rules, procedures and conventions” (ibid., p. 79). The institutionalist approach to economic geography, then, studies the nature and effects of formal and informal systems of rules, procedures and conventions.

Institutions have figured prominently in several strands of economic geography research. For instance, Samuels (1995) distinguishes between rational choice,
sociological and historical (evolution) institutionalism, drawing from several disciplines. While economic geographers have applied all three frameworks, in particular they have used the idea of ‘embeddedness’ from the sociological perspective to understand how localized institutional contexts produce distinctive and successful competitive economic advantages. Advantage can derive, for example, from the social environment (high levels of social capital, trust, and reciprocity developed through strong face-to-face networks facilitating the exchange of tacit knowledge) (e.g., Gertler, 2003; Maskell & Malmberg, 1999; Storper & Salais, 1997; Storper & Venables, 2004) as theorized by Granovetter (1985). They have also considered the idea of ‘institutional thickness’, which Amin and Thrift (1995) contend

Establishes legitimacy and nourishes relations of trust […] [and] which continues to stimulate entrepreneurship and consolidate the local embeddedness of industry. [W]hat is of most significance here is not the presence of a network of institutions per se, but rather the process of institutionalization; that is, the institutionalizing processes that both underpin and stimulate a diffused entrepreneurship—a recognized set of codes of conduct, supports and practices which certain individuals can dip into with relative ease. (pp. 102-103)

Institutional thickness is constituted by four factors: (1) strong institutional presence (in the form of institutional arrangements between diverse actors), (2) a high level of interaction among these institutions to facilitate networking, cooperation, and exchange, (3) the presence of well-defined structures of domination, coalition-building, and collective representation to minimize inter-institutional conflict, and (4) inclusive and collective mobilization; in other words, a common sense of purpose around a widely-held agenda (Martin, 2000). Other scholars such as Christopherson (1999, 2002, 2007) and Gertler (2001, 2004; Gertler & Wolfe, 2002, 2004) have often examined the roles of national, regional, and sub-regional formal and informal institutions, regulations, and
conventions in explaining the geography of firms’ success and innovation (or failure).

The literature in institutional political economy continues to grow, illustrating the resonance of regulationist methodology to understanding the institutional contexts within which a variety of economic activity is situated.

My approach to this research project

To this point, I have provided a brief overview of the political economy tradition, whose critical variety is the theoretical basis for my study of urban retail food access in low-income, class-segregated communities. I outlined the approach’s historical roots, including a comparison between classical and radical political economy on key concepts such as class, capital and the role of the state. I argued that present-day human geographers are drawing from a heterogeneous body of theory, including critical political economy, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. Finally, I discussed some important research topics and sub-genres of political economy that illustrate its continuing relevance to the discipline: these include neoliberalism (as an ongoing debate about the role of the state in a post-Fordist mode of development), cultural political economy, political ecology, and institutional geography. For the rest of this chapter, I situate my doctoral research theoretically within current research agendas in human geography, including the ‘normative turn’, new interest in class, consumption, and urban social justice.

As I explained in Chapter One, a key objective of this doctoral research is to analyze the food desert phenomenon through a critical political economy framework; this is a project that has not yet emerged in the critical geography or social science literature.
(Bedore, forthcoming). For the purposes of this project, I understand food deserts to be
one feature of the changing urban landscapes of consumption. Mansvelt (2008) observes
that consumption is political, and has been understood in relationship with identity and
cultural norms. In this project, however, I focus on food deserts because they indicate that
travel time and burden can influence communities’ consumption patterns: living in a food
desert where healthy food is less available or deemed unaffordable by residents has been
suggested to influence not only the burden of travel for grocery shopping, but also
peoples’ dietary choices stemming from the additional expense of food and food
acquisition (Hendrickson, Smith & Eickenberry, 2006)\(^{15}\).

While the food desert terminology is common in public an academic formats, it is
not without controversy and criticism. The definition provided in the previous chapter
(“areas of poor access to the provision of healthy affordable food where the population is
characterized by deprivation and compound social exclusion” [Wrigley, Warm &
Margetts, 2003, p. 151]) is notably vague and simultaneously speaks to both changing
retail environments and the spatialization of poverty. As such, determining causality and
measuring the existence of food deserts somehow requires that researchers account for
variables that stretch over many scales and socio-economic phenomena. McEntee (2008,
2009) identifies these problems, arguing that the meanings and methodologies attached to
identifying and quantifying food deserts lack consistency and clarity of language; hence
the term is likely to be loosely used in a way that blurs its meaning. Similarly, Shaw
(2006) suggests that there are many reasons why people experience poor retail food
access (for example, issues with ability, information, or lack of assets). This diversity of

\(^{15}\)
explanations for peoples’ poor access complicates policy prescriptions. As well, it raises the important point that many types of communities may qualify as food deserts, and these are not always poor: residents may be financially well-off but lack a personal automobile, complicating physical access, for example (ibid.). Finally, Raja, Ma and Yadav (2008) suggest that while technical measurements may not provide evidence of a food desert, they tend to miss the tendency of racial disparity in retail food environments. For example, African American communities typically have fewer large-scale grocery stores, but more small-scale neighbourhood stores – which is turn does not tell us very much about food affordability, freshness or quality. In an effort to recognize these issues, I argue throughout this dissertation that retail food procurement experiences and preferences are highly subjective and diverse, even within a community that is recognizable by its class and income status. I prefer to use the term ‘changing retail food geographies’ to draw explicit attention to the rescaling of retail food capital as my point of interest. In Chapter Six, I explore the highly subjective notion of dignity to argue for a retail food environment that consists of many diverse and co-existing food procurement spaces and practices to heterogeneous individuals’ needs and wishes.

The division of labour whereby most North American households do not grow all their own food suggests that before we can ingest food into our bodies, we must purchase or acquire it at some other commercial or non-commercial place; this entails physical movement throughout the city. The travel for food—an essential ingredient for social reproduction—inherently speaks to both the uneven geography of retail food options in the city as well as access problems deriving from neighbourhood and infrastructure decline, as Katz (2001, p. 715) suggests,
Social reproduction always takes place somewhere, and the environments for its enactment are integral to its outcomes. Disregard for the concerns of social reproduction is visible in the landscapes of neglect common in urban areas of both industrialized and underdeveloped countries. These neglected and undersupported landscapes include schools, playgrounds, parks, and public spaces, as well as underfunded or disinvested sites of housing, infrastructure, and service provision.

The quality and care for neighbourhood infrastructure and institutions is central to the ease with which social reproduction can occur. Likewise, lack of upkeep of the built environment of urban neighbourhoods can signal the disinvestment of capital (Harvey, 1985), which—especially in low-income communities with concentrations of subsidized and low-cost housing—can initiate a vicious cycle of commercial and capital disinvestment, which further complicates social reproduction for their residents.

This urban geography of travel for food procurement, while highly uneven and political, does not fit neatly into existing geographies of consumption. Gregson (2000), in her commentary on the home-work-consumption nexus, suggests that

On one hand there is the radical political economy tradition, which thinks in terms of chains of global-local dependencies, and of retail spaces as sites/spaces of paid work, but which “brackets out” the home and the activities of consumption occurring therein. On the other is a culturally oriented version of economic geography, which tends (though not exclusively) to “bracket out” production considerations, centering instead the geographies, practices and knowledges of consumption-as-use. (p. 319)

Food travel occupies an awkward space with respect to production and consumption; it is not consumption in the strict sense of intake of energy through eating and drinking; at the same time, however, food and drink do not simply materialize in one’s home for consumption. The travel for food (especially given most food’s unique level of perishability and single-use compared to other consumer durable goods [Gregson, 2000]) is a necessary consumptive practice that has yet to be analyzed from this lens. Indeed, most studies of food and consumption focus on scales such as the body, household,
community, or globe (e.g., Bell & Valentine, 1997; Grigg, 1995). While many Marxist geographers focus on the geographies of production to understand class struggle as the root of uneven development and class inequalities, I focus on the ways that capital manipulates geographies of consumption in the city to reproduce dominant class relations, including intra-class conflict and poverty.

In addition to my interest in the costs and burdens of uneven landscapes of food access, I am also interested in normative concepts for understanding declining retail food access as a social injustice. Because food is treated simultaneously as a public, private and essential good by the institutions of Canadian society, questions of food and food access as a right, responsibility or entitlement are political and normative in nature. Human geography is a well-suited discipline for this type of enquiry, as geographers have an extensive recent history of political activism, activist writing, and conducting research that addresses justice, values and ethics\textsuperscript{16}. The ‘normative turn’ in human geography and the social sciences more broadly is an ongoing call for scholars to re-engage with questions of ethics and morality in social scientific enquiry—something Sayer and Storper (1997) argue has declined with the divorce of positivist social science from political and moral philosophy. A ‘normative turn’ would see more social scientists engaging carefully with complex ideas such as values and ethics, morality, liberal and Marxist notions of freedom, universalist and relative notions of the good life, ‘justice’, ‘community’ and other forms of social organization. A normative turn would be open to utopian visions as long as they reject groundless moralizing, and it would take into

\textsuperscript{16} See Kobayashi and Proctor (2003) for a review of these advancements.
account the politics of difference and identity. The normative turn would build on existing work around political movements around feminism, antiracism and postcolonialism, ecologism and sexuality, the increasingly multicultural character of many societies, the breakup or diversification of families, and the growth of reflexivity all brought to the fore a range of ethical and political concerns that went far beyond the simple class or distributional agenda of the old Left and the rights-based agenda of liberalism. (Fraser, 1995; Taylor, 1992) (Sayer & Storper, 1997, p. 2)

Meanwhile, some geographers have already taken up this task: geographer David Smith has engaged with questions of morality and reflected on the possibility of a ‘moral turn’ in the discipline (e.g., 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). McDowell (2004) and others (Gilligan, 1982; Morgan, 2008) have explored the spatial limits to people’s ‘lens of care’ as an interesting counter-argument to the supposition that social justice demands universality and uniformity. Olson and Sayer (2009) have recently reviewed normativity and morality within radical geography, rejecting accusations that normative research is essentialist, ethnocentric, subjective, and authoritarian. Instead, they promote a more radical radical geography that considers what constitutes human flourishing and well-being, arguing that “normative, particularly evaluative, thinking about the social world is essential not only for developing critiques of it but for describing, explaining and understanding it” (Olson & Sayer, 2009, p. 194).

In response to these calls for human geographers to critically engage with difficult questions about values and the human condition, I attempt to apply normative thinking about uneven urban retail food access through the lens of social justice, considering the relationship between liberal, critical political economic, and postmodern formulations of urban social justice. The political economy approach to questions of justice has an important place in the discipline, particularly with questions of urban problems. Fainstein
(1997, p. 19) notes that urban political-economic analysis includes “efforts at understanding urban development that start their explanations with economic processes and which criticize capitalist outcomes primarily on the basis of their impacts on the welfare of relatively deprived groups”. Likewise, a political economic approach to urban planning defines urban social justice through measures of economic equality, social rights, and material equity (Cardoso & Breda-Vásquez, 2007). The urban political economy approach embeds economic relations and class relations in the space of the city, exploring the role that urban development and planning can play in relieving or exacerbating inequality. The approach also looks to capitalism as an overarching economic system and its urban manifestations—namely, the spatiality of uneven power relations and distributional outcomes in the city (ibid.).

The political economic approach’s focus on uneven material outcomes among disadvantaged populations is also appropriate for practical distributional issues around access to food, water, health care, housing, and other essentials, matching resources with need (Harvey, 1973; Young, 1990). Perhaps the earliest influential political-economic contribution to social justice questions in geography comes from Harvey’s Social Justice and the City (1973). Here, Harvey draws from Marxian urban political economy, suggesting that the urban spatial form is tied to uneven distributive outcomes. He explores the possibility that social justice (i.e., greater equity) can be achieved through income redistribution and relieving financial burdens for those who can least afford them. He is most concerned with the question of spatial systems and social justice, asking if there is some spatial structure or set of structures that can maximize equity and efficiency in the city. While there is no one value or criteria through which all conflicts can be
resolved, Harvey follows Runciman (1966) in prioritizing need as the basis for territorial
distributive justice. While he ultimately concludes in the latter half of the book that
injustice can only be truly overcome by addressing the underlying structures that
perpetuate the injustice, Harvey’s initial willingness to engage with liberal formulations
of justice have made the book an enduring social justice exercise for urban geographers.

While I use class (as both a means of categorization and a set of social relations)
to understand North Kingston’s food desert problem through a critical political economy
lens, liberal political economic notions of social justice are important for this project.
Liberalism is a political philosophy, or doctrine, whose roots can be traced back to 19th
century philosophers such as John Locke. Katznelson (1997, p. 50) notes that liberalism
“as a doctrine and as a set of institutional devices was created to grapple with beliefs that
are more than diverse, but are charged, intractable, and characterized at times by huge
asymmetries of power”, and has searched for “rules and procedures, in the here and now,
to discover a balance between the acceptance of authority by convention as necessary for
the creation of order and the maintenance of judgment, conscience, and choice” (ibid.).
As such, liberalism considers issues around the relationship between institutions of
governance and the individual, and the values of individual freedom, preferences choice,
and dignity (Pattanaik, 2009). In its most basic form, Sen (1970) writes that liberal values

\[
\text{Seem to require that there are choices that are personal and the relevant person should be free to do what he likes. It would be socially better, in these cases, to permit him to do what he wants, everything else remaining the same. (p. 87)}
\]

Katznelson emphasizes that liberalism and the urban spatial form are closely intertwined
because of cities’ inherent diversity and uneven power relations. We see liberalism
manifested in urban landscapes in the regulation and division of property rights,
Democratic institutions of governance, and the division of public and private lives of citizens. Liberalism “makes assumptions about the equal standing of members eligible to participate in a polity within a demarcated territorial zone, and it theorizes those institutions and rules that join that state to the economy and the state to civil society” (p. 55). Notions and regimes of citizenship at multiple scales are also influenced by political liberal thought.

Many theories of social justice—both old and contemporary—fall within the liberal tradition, however two are worth noting here for their continuing centrality to debates about social justice. John Rawls’ famous original position/veil of ignorance exercise advanced in *Theories of Justice* (1971) falls within the social contract tradition and upholds the idea that individuals possess inalienable rights and freedoms that are the basis of social organization upon which a theory of justice can be built. Rawls is primarily interested in the conditions of redress and redistribution, which he terms the ‘difference principle’, which

> is the principle that underserved inequalities call for redress; and since inequalities of birth and natural endowment are underserved, these inequalities are to be somehow compensated for. Thus the principle holds that in order to treat all persons equally, to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions. (p. 100)

The redistribution that would result, Rawls argues, from the veil of ignorance exercise should only be pursued to the extent that it is does violate the basic principles of liberty—rights and freedoms—that all individuals enjoy.

Economist and philosopher Amartya Sen has developed his ‘capabilities approach’ over the past thirty years as a critique of Rawls’ preoccupation with the distribution and possession of primary goods. Instead, Sen’s capabilities approach is
more interested in people’s ability to express and realize their wishes and desires. As Sen (1985) has expressed, it is not commodities—objects and things—in themselves that are important, but rather how commodities enhance and enable our functionings, “what the person succeeds in doing with the commodities and characteristics at his or her command” (p. 10). Functionings are ultimately individually subjective and constituted by individual choices and preferences, and they essentially form a vector. A person’s overall capability set is made up of capabilities—“the various alternative functioning bundles he or she can achieve through choice” (p. 27)—and this can fall anywhere on the functioning vector.

As Robeyns (2009) summarizes, the main claim of the capabilities approach is that in making interpersonal comparisons of advantage, we should focus on people’s real or effective opportunities to do what they want to do, and to be who they want to be, instead of focusing on peoples’ holdings of social primary goods or their mental states (as in certain forms of utility). These beings and doings are called a person’s functionings, and include such basic functionings as being healthy, being sheltered, not being mentally ill, engaging in social relations, and more complex and specific functionings such as combining a career with a gender-equalitarian family life. Capabilities are the effective opportunities that a person has to attain these functionings. (p. 43)

One significant element—among many—of the capabilities approach is that it acknowledges the diversity of goals, desires, and aspirations among a heterogenous population of individuals. The approach falls within the liberal tradition because it holds that individuals can and should make their own decisions about which capabilities they hope to realize. It is particularly helpful because it provides an opportunity to assess the institutions and systems of economic production and social interaction, and whether these provide the opportunities that people need to realize their capabilities. In other words,

The capability approach directs our focus to people’s capability sets, but insists that we also need to scrutinize the impact of social norms, the context in which
economic production and social interactions take place and how that affects people’s well-being, and whether the circumstances in which people choose from their opportunity sets are just. (Robeyns, 2009, p. 405)

Others, such as Martha Nussbaum (2000) have sought to develop the capabilities approach further, for example, to be more explicit about universal basic minimums in the case of gender inequality. While a person may achieve any number of things within his or her life given a wide enough capability set, Nussbaum is primarily interested in advancing the idea that there are certain universal, inalienable capabilities that must serve as the basis of entitlements and human rights to overcome gender inequality. These include political liberties, freedom of association, free choice of occupation, and other social and economic rights (Nussbaum, 2006). Nussbaum’s (2006, p. 59) list of central human capabilities includes a more elaborate list, including life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination, and thought, emotions; practical reason (entailing protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance); affiliation (entailing protection for the freedom of assembly and political speech); other species; play; and control over one’s (political and material) environment.

Because of its flexibility toward individual difference, Sen’s capabilities approach is particularly useful when addressing the issue of normative attitudes towards the poor—and cultures of poverty more generally. For this, it has been endorsed by geographers (e.g., Olson & Sayer, 2009) because

It focuses not on reductive, single criteria like “freedom” or “utility” which tend to favour traditional liberal conceptions of the good society and the western liberal individual—adult, male, unencumbered, and treating all relationships as akin to contractual relations—and which allow all the familiar forms of inequality, domination and avoidable suffering that modern liberal societies foster (p. 194).
The approach explicitly respects the wishes and aspirations of diverse people of different class backgrounds and, rather than showing contempt for peoples’ behaviours within cultures of poverty, argues that we critically examine the social and economic structures that create chronic poverty.

As I discussed above, from the 1990s onward, postmodern geographers, political philosophers and other social scientists advanced several important critiques of the preceding political traditions that are important to mention here, and that shape my own unique understanding the changing retail food landscape of North Kingston\textsuperscript{17}. Young has been particularly influential for her writings that advocate a new politics of difference, calling for the recognition of multiple ‘faces’ of oppression and the need for affirmative group recognition along multiple dimensions of identity and affiliation. Young notes several critiques of the liberal tradition in her book, \textit{Justice and the politics of difference} (1990). She writes, for example, that liberal humanism treats each person as an individual, ignoring differences of race, sex, religion, and ethnicity. According to this logic, each person should be evaluated only according to her or his individual efforts and achievements; it is therefore inconsistent with any notion of group autonomy (pp. 166-7).

Critics of liberalism and its individualism often find solace in the ideal of community, as writers such as Sandel (1982) and Barber (1984) take issue with liberalism’s posit that human nature operates according to principles of self-interest, individualistic understandings of consumption, and the individual as the central figure in social and political relations (Young, 1990). The problem, Young writes, is that

\textsuperscript{17} Sayer and Storper (1997), for example, note several classic criticisms of liberal political philosophy, including liberalism’s negative conception of liberty, and its endorsement of freedom of opportunity rather than entitlement to basic resources.
Liberal individualism denies difference by positing the self as a solid, self-sufficient unity, not defined by anything or anyone other than itself. Its formalistic ethic of rights also denies difference by bringing all such separated individuals under a common measure of rights. Proponents of community, on the other hand, deny difference by positing fusion rather than separation as the social ideal. (p. 29)

Because of her dissatisfaction with both approaches, Young (1990, 2000) develops ideas about a celebrated politics of difference and identity, exploring the possibilities and limits of models of democracy to groups’ genuine and substantive participation in facets of public life.

In addition to her critique of the liberal political worldview, Young has critiqued the political economy approach to issues of justice, including through a dialogue during the early 1990s and continued for over a decade that decentred the political economy approach to urban social problems. This academic dialogue was primarily between Young (1990, 2000) and political economists such as David Harvey (1973, 1996) and Susan Fainstein (2001). In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), Young acknowledges the distributive paradigm—“the morally proper distribution of benefits and burdens among society’s members” (p. 15)—that has dominated thinking within political economy tradition. She criticizes its dominance in the social justice literature, however, because for her the paradigm misrepresents non-material issues such as rights, opportunity, power, and self-respect. Instead, she uses the idea of ‘five faces of oppression’. She aligns herself with postmodern writers in rejecting claims of a universal principle of justice, arguing that they are too abstract to be useful for evaluating actual practices and institutions. Rather, justice must be considered contextually. For Young, an important part of social justice is participatory democracy, meaning the active participation of all people in democratic processes. To overcome some groups’
disadvantage and lack of access to these processes, she suggests that some groups require special representation and special treatment to ensure equality of opportunity—the idea of just processes coinciding with just outcomes. Because special representation and treatment can only come from acknowledgement and recognition, it is important that groups as well as the polity as a whole positively identify and celebrate diverse groups based on race, ethnicity, and gender.

Responses to Young’s ideas are equally compelling. In Harvey’s (1996) response in *Justice, nature and the politics of difference*, he admits that poststructuralists’ reasons for refusing to apply universal principles of justice across heterogeneities do carry considerable weight. He rejects, however, the reliance on “particular, competing, fragmented, and heterogeneous conceptions of and discourses about justice which arise out of the particular situations of those involved” (p. 342) because “politics and discourses both seem to have become so mutually fragmented that response is inhibited” (p. 346). Fainstein (2001), as well, notes that the concept of a just city must acknowledge the need to formulate social values explicitly, and that the just city combines inclusive processes with a concern for just outcomes, recognizing that the two can conflict. She argues, for example, that

> If […] we accept multiple definitions of social difference rather than simply a class-based analysis, we face very difficult problems in describing a just city, for the living of meaningful lives by various constituent groups may produce irresolvable conflict. (p. 886)

Young’s work on the politics of difference, then, is one important contribution on an ongoing scholarly dialogue around cities and social justice, as well as the values, ideals, and practicalities of envisioning different visions of urban social justice.
In light of this ongoing conversation between theoretical approaches, I maintain my theoretical focus on critical political economy, however as Fainstein (2000) argues, this is a ‘new’ political economy and interest in the Just City that engages in explicit normative positions concerning the distribution of social benefits and the consequences for non-class groups (Harvey, 1992, 1996; Merrifield & Swyngedouw, 1997). While I attempt to pay close attention to the food desert problem through non-class lenses, I ultimately use this dissertation to advance the argument that scholars should revisit issues of class in the city, for two reasons. First, Sayer (2005) has written extensively about moral responses to class and the need for class-conscious social justice research. In light of this call, I ultimately maintain my focus on economic class, as low income, generational cultures of poverty, and chronic unemployment are some the defining common realities that unites those people who were disadvantaged by the 2006 and 2009 grocery store closures. I do, however, recognize that this group is heterogeneous, and that retail food access is complicated by gender (i.e., the prevalence of single-parent, female-led families in Rideau Heights), ability (i.e., the physical and income disadvantages faced by people receiving provincial disability support payments) and other factors. Young’s writing is also helpful here to move beyond a conception of social justice that emphasizes that the problem of poor retail food access is simply an issue of redistributing retail food outlets throughout the city (as research in the positivist tradition has often prescribed). Rather, her writings on deliberative democracy and inter-group communication raise the important issue about the (lack of) social acceptability of poverty and low-income groups. While academic and political activism has accomplished a tremendous amount to gain the formal and public recognition of discrimination along these identity lines (N.
Smith, 2000), a parallel recognition and celebration does not exist—and perhaps cannot exist—for class,

Whereas racism and increasingly sexism are rightly seen as objects of official disapproval, class is either ignored or euphemized as ‘social exclusion’. This allows class contempt and other forms of symbolic domination and misrecognition to pass unnoticed. Differences in the distribution of respect, contempt, envy, resentment or condescension and deference are partly a product of inequalities in economic distribution, not merely because wealth is often taken as an index of worth, but because economic inequalities make objective differences to people in terms of their chances of achieving things that are likely to win conditional recognition. (Sayer, 2005, p. 225)

While economic inequalities have persistent and compounding consequences, class disparity and notions of economic justice are not formally recognized in the Canadian public arena, but go unnoticed, ignored, or inappropriately named. Moreover, if Sayer’s (ibid.) arguments are correct, people who share common class injuries are unlikely to demand formal recognition and compensation, or even recognize a common claim of injustice. Whereas shifting political and cultural norms have increased the acceptability (and even celebration) of being a member of minority groups, no such acceptance or celebration exists between people of greatly different class memberships, and none is likely to come about. While lay reactions to class can involve productive emotional responses such as empathy, compassion and respect, they can involve discomfort, contempt, blame and disgust (ibid.), only heightening and reinforcing inequalities and discrimination. Hence, a difference-based anti-oppression approach to the case study of retail food closures in North Kingston and the urbanization of capital may be less appropriate than a political economy framework that includes class-based analysis.

This class focus echoes other emerging work by geographers that looks at class difference and class experiences in the city: McDowell (1997, 2000, 2003; Ward, Fagan,
McDowell, Perrons & Ray, 2007) has done extensive work on gender, class, labour and economic restructuring. Her work often uses the city as a backdrop for questions around the ‘new middle class’, changing women’s roles in the paid labour force and multiple masculinities in a post-Fordist economy. Ward and Jonas (2004; Jonas & Ward, 2007) also explore the intersection of class and urban politics of everyday practices and spaces. They examine current thought about city-regional and interregional competition that characterizes the most recent phase of ‘state spatial rescaling’ in Western countries (Brenner, 2004). Because the authors are concerned with the more ‘ordinary’ or ‘mundane’ elements of everyday life such as infrastructure, land use and collectively consumed good and services, they argue “for a complementary view of city-regional forms of territorial development rooted in class relations, conflicts around production and collective provision, and strategies for securing conditions of social reproduction” (Ward & Jonas, 2004, p. 2130). Issues of class inherently speak to the social reproduction of labour, which is central to the capitalist project; for Jonas and Ward (2007), then, the city-region literature would do well to take class into consideration, as it informs our understanding of the spatial politics of consumption, distribution and collective social agency.

The second reason why scholars need to pay closer attention to class in the city is the classism that can be prevalent among alternative food system advocates and activists, yet is only just being explored in the academic literature. Many food system advocates’ work contains an inherent class bias when they assume that lower-income groups can seamlessly make the transition from the present-day, unsustainable food system to a one that is more just, sustainable, local, organic or some other goal. This alternative food
system writing and advocacy is primarily interested in the production elements of a new food system rather than questions about consumption. They neglect the important questions about disadvantages peoples’ standards of consumption, wishes, resources and ideals about acquiring food in a new food system. The question of how lower-income groups in spatially-segregated neighbourhoods such as North Kingston will—and are expected to—adapt to a new food system is essentially an under-explored problem. This literature and advocacy speaks highly of community-based market and non-market alternatives such as community gardens and farmers’ markets, as well as the need to ‘reeducate’ people to be better ‘eaters’ for a new food system. In doing so, however, this material condemns individual behaviours instead of engaging more profoundly with underlying urban class politics. The alternative food systems literature, then, has not adequately addressed questions of class dynamics in cities or the more conceptual elements of a post-capitalist urban food geography; it fails to engage deeply with the everyday politics of urban food consumption—especially among people with lower incomes.\(^\text{18}\)

As a final note on my approach to this research project, I draw conceptually from the political economy tradition to understand class and the urban capitalist process, however I argue that liberal notions of freedom and dignity deserve renewed scholarly attention and radicalization. While a critical urban political economy approach best helps us to understand how the capitalist urban landscape is producing poor retail food access in low-income communities, we cannot undermine the heterogeneous values, preferences, 

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opinions and dignity of low-income spatially-segregated residents—even when they reinforce the very retail capital model that is at the heart of their access problem. This premise creates a nearly insurmountable theoretical dilemma in the transition to a more just, non-capitalist urban food system, however it is a necessary complication. Jacobson (2007) notes that attention to dignity is thriving in health research but that the term is difficult to define because of its malleability across time, space and context. In social justice literature, dignity is considered a basis for judgements about morality and moral correctness, “our beliefs about what is involved in living a good life, and ideas of the Good more generally” (Feldman, 1999, p. 686, as cited in Jacobson, 2007, p. 297). Between individuals, dignity obliges us to treat each other with care and respect, while it obliges collectives such as communities and nations to develop social orders that promote fairness, equality and equitable access “to the basic resources that ensure ‘dignified living’” (Jacobson, 2007, p. 297). Theorists have even responded with dignity-based theories of justice, with the goal of promoting dignity through social processes that are democratic, non-discriminatory and that promote opportunity and well-being (e.g., McDougal, Lasswell, & Chen, 1980). In their typology of dignity as it relates to the city and health, Jacobson, Oliver and Koch (2009) emphasize that social dignity—“generated in the interactions between and among individuals, collectives and societies” (p. 726)—is determined partly by ‘dignity in relation’, meaning “the ways in which respect and worth are conveyed and mirrored through individual and collective behavior as enacted in interpersonal interaction” (ibid.). Jacobson, Oliver and Koch suggest that dignity can be violated or promoted at the scale of city in two dimensions: the city as the quest for resources, and urban spaces and places. Following the authors’ typology, purchases,
places, and practices related to household food procurement in cities stand to impact individual and collective dignity of low-income people, and are important to consider in this study of the everyday politics of class and retail food capital in cities. As I argue throughout this paper, dignity and personal choices in the food procurement experience are thus necessary conditions that must be given adequate attention as scholars proceed with the idea of a more just urban food system.

For the theoretical framework of this project, then, I attempt to straddle the liberal and critical political economy approaches to understanding the consequences of the changing urban retail food landscapes of Canadian cities. In Chapter Four, I present an extensive analysis of the present-day geography of poor retail food access in class-segregated communities. I argue that this geography can only be understood as a dialectical relationship between the spatialization of the urban poor and the rescaling of retail food capital—globally but seen most prominently in North America. In Chapter Five, I explore the many factors that compound the burden of poor retail food access among spatially-segregated low-income communities, including the diverse elements of social exclusion and institutional discrimination that the poor encounter in their daily lives. In these chapters, I suggest that the imperatives of capital ultimately create an unsustainable retail food landscape that cannot internalize the non-exchange values that low-income people assign to retail food experiences and places; in other words, retail food capital cannot function profitably in areas of chronic low income, no matter how much the community appreciates retail food spaces for their historical, social or other use values. Nevertheless, the immediate priority that I assign to the dignity of the individual (measured in the short term through freedom of choice) demands that if Canadian society
is to transition to a post-capital food procurement system, no one should expect low-income people—those with the fewest resources and the highest likelihood of making changes to their consumption patterns based on desperation rather than values.

**Conclusion**

In the latter half of this chapter, I have explained my particular theoretical approach to this research project about retail food access in low-income communities. This research project reflects calls for a ‘normative turn’ in the social sciences to engage with explicit questions of values, ethics and social justice. The food desert problem is also an excellent avenue to address the current research gap in class-conscious research on the urban politics of social reproduction and consumption. I focus my research on the study of North Kingston as a class-defined community, and my interest in class stems from other concurrent urban geographical research promoting a return to class-centred research, as well as the classism that currently pervades some writing and activism around alternative food networks and community responses to food access problems. Finally, while my interest in class is consistent with the critical political economy tradition, I place great importance on (liberal) values of dignity as freedom of choice. This creates a difficult theoretical dilemma, but it can also function as a way to radicalize ‘dignity’ by placing emphasis on middle class consumption norms as the standard to which low-income people aspire in their own daily consumption activities; low-income people, therefore, should never be expected to be the leaders of change in consumption norms or alternative food pursuits that have yet to see widespread adoption among the general population. While political economists have often looked to production to
understand class struggle, I emphasize that capital uses the urban geographies of consumption to reproduce poverty and intra-class conflict to further its own imperatives. In Chapter Three, I describe the methodologies that I used to carry out this research.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGIES

In Chapter Two, I reviewed some key theoretical traditions that inform my normative and critical analysis of the changing retail food landscape of North Kingston between 2006 and 2009. These consisted primarily of critical and liberal varieties of political economy. In this chapter, I address the methodological approaches used to address the three research questions that drive this project:

(1) How are the processes of globalized retail food capital creating uneven retail food access for class-segregated communities?

(2) What principle(s) of justice are most helpful to understand this case study as a social injustice?

(3) What types of new institutional arrangements are helping to achieve a just urban food system?

To discuss the methods that I used to answer these questions, I first discuss the value of the case study to qualitative research. Next, I explain the various methods and data collection techniques used to address the research questions. I also discuss the coding and analysis processes, and the ethical and bias issues arising from these methods and my attempts to address them. Copies of survey, interview and focus group materials are included in the appendices.

Case study

Food has been noted by several prominent researchers to be an excellent lens to understand larger social processes, as “food is one of the best prisms through which to
explore more sustained possibilities to ‘actually existing neo-liberalism’” (Donald, 2008, p. 1252). That said, the case study of food issues in Kingston, Ontario provides an excellent microcosm through which to interrogate larger issues of justice, class, inequality, the global capitalist corporatization of food, and state spatial rescaling. A case study is “intensive study of an individual, group or place over a period of time” (Hay, 2000, p. 184). Case studies are an appropriate tool to explore the dynamics of a location-based process such as Kingston’s changing retail food access in depth, in order to understand the complex local political and economic conditions that affect urban food access. Stake’s (1995, p. 2) writing affirms the case study approach for this research, suggesting that a case is “a specific, a complex, functioning thing […] an integrated system. The parts do not have to be working well, the purposes may be irrational, but it is a system”. According to Rice (2003, p. 226), case studies “may present unique opportunities for understanding the mechanisms that underlie empirical observations”, thereby providing the basis for examining both a case study and the underlying theoretical questions that are the core of a research problem. They “should not be judged by their representativeness (or lack thereof) but by the quality of the theoretical reasoning they generate” (ibid.). A case study, then, may be the best approach to learning about the politics of a particular place at a particular time and abstracting relationships and phenomena to broader underlying forces and theories.

19 In fact, Morgan (Morgan, 2009; Morgan, Marsden & Murdoch, 2006; Morgan & Sonnino, 2008) has recently explored institutional food procurement policies in Europe. He has also examined the United Kingdom’s neighbourhood food policy efforts, as policy interventions to improve health behaviours in adults and children, as well as overall well-being and sustainability.
For this dissertation research, North Kingston is both an instrumental and intrinsic case study. It serves an instrumental purpose in that the City of Kingston is vital “to accomplishing something other than understanding this particular” subject of interest (Stake, 1995, p. 3), as this case study ultimately will inform research problems around urban social justice and retail food capitalism. The study of Kingston, itself, however is more than random or purely functional. The intrinsic value of this case study—wherein “we are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case” (ibid., p. 3)—began with the North Kingston food desert projects in 2006 and 2007. My contact with North Kingston’s changing retail food geography began when a local non-profit organization, the Kingston John Howard Society, contacted Dr. Betsy Donald in the Queen’s University Department of Geography in hopes of collaborating on a survey of Rideau Heights about the impending closure of its only full-service grocery store in late 2006. I became acquainted with this area of Kingston and its inhabitants by having a leadership role in this survey. My choice of Kingston as a case study was, and continues to be, intrinsically interesting as an extension of my initial 2006-2007 Rideau Heights research and continuing engagement with this community, its social and economic dynamics and its relationship with the City of Kingston.²⁰

²⁰ Indeed, a publication titled “Revisiting the politics of class in urban development: Evidence from the study of the social dynamics of economic performance”, co-authored by Dr. Betsy Donald and myself, is forthcoming in Urban Affairs Review. Here, we use Kingston, Ontario to understand the intersections between urban economic stagnancy and failure on the part of local political, business and civic leaders to confront persistent class inequalities.
Methods of data collection and analysis

Because the research questions deal with three distinctly different types of problems (to paraphrase, how did we get to this situation? How is this a social injustice? Where do we go from here?), multiple methods of data collection were helpful for several reasons. First, the temporal point of interest varied between research questions, ranging from historical questions about the changing relationships between the retail food industry and municipal growth over time, to present-day questions about retail food access in Kingston. Therefore, different methods were needed to examine the past and present. Most methods fall within qualitative research, which is “reflexive and process driven, ultimately producing culturally situated and theory-enmeshed knowledge through an ongoing interplay between theory and methods” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006, p. 5) (emphasis in original).

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the relationship between this project’s methodologies, research questions and conceptual frameworks. The methods involving human participants consisted of qualitative interviews and focus groups, attendance at public meetings and the quantitative results from the Rideau Heights surveys from 2006 and 2007. I describe these in greater detail below.

Rideau Heights surveys

The first and second Rideau Heights surveys were designed to be short, door-to-door surveys that could be circulated by student and community volunteers to residents of Rideau Heights. The quantitative survey instrument for the 2006 survey went through several drafts and was initially developed by our colleague at the John Howard Society (see Appendix A). To do a pre-test, a Department of Geography graduate student brought
Table 4: Organization of methodologies and methodological framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main research question</th>
<th>Conceptual and methodological frameworks</th>
<th>Methods, data sources, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is Kingston’s changing retail food geography creating uneven retail food access for class-segregated communities?</td>
<td>Political economy critique of capitalism; periodizations of sustained accumulation (i.e. regulation school); historical geography; food industry research</td>
<td>Literature review; focus group material; interviews; survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What principle(s) of justice are most helpful to understand this case study as a social injustice?</td>
<td>Various contemporary debates, ideals, principles of urban social justice, i.e., political economy and liberal traditions</td>
<td>Literature review; critical engagement w/ literature; interview and focus group material; survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What types of new institutional arrangement are helping to achieve a just urban food system?</td>
<td>Critical evaluation of retail capital and alternative food systems; abstract engagement with scale and moral economy; public policy approach</td>
<td>Critical literature on post-capitalist politics; policy analysis and evaluation; interview and focus group material; alternative economic models</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

twenty copies of the survey to an adult literacy school and we made further edits based on identified shortcomings. To develop the second survey instrument independently, I consulted references such as Sudman and Bradburn (1982) and Jackson (2003) and received feedback from Dr. Gerry Barber from the Department of Geography. Questions for these surveys focused on respondents’ shopping and travel patterns, their food budget, their use of charitable food programs, and incidence of food insecurity (see Appendix B).

There are important limitations of these surveys. To ensure the safety of volunteers going door-to-door through Rideau Heights with the survey we required that they only canvass during daytime/daylight hours. Because of this, canvassers likely missed many households whose adults worked outside of the home during the day, and surveyed a disproportionate population of people at home during the day, i.e., people most likely not active in the labour force, people with disabilities, and seniors. While it is precisely these people whose voices are most important to the survey, this bias is nevertheless important to acknowledge. As well, the surveys were conducted in the
months of December (when the weather was already cold and harsh) and October (when the weather was mild) respectively, suggesting that peoples’ answers to questions about, for example, whether or not they had purchased fresh fruits or vegetables in the last two weeks, may have been influenced by the timing of the surveys. As well, the survey results must be considered in light of selection bias, whereby the residents most likely to complete a survey were those for whom the topic was important.

The 2006 survey results were tabulated using Microsoft Excel by the John Howard Society collaborator. The 2007 survey was analyzed by a Master’s student in the Department of Geography, who had experience with the statistical data analysis program SPSS. In both cases, analysis consisted of a simple process of imputing survey results and generating basic univariate totals and percentages for each question. For both surveys, respondents’ comments were collected and stored as computer files for later analysis.

**Qualitative interviews**

Between November 2008 and June 2009 I conducted forty-two loosely-structured qualitative interviews. I initially developed categories of interviewees based on several types of normative and objective information that I hoped to collect for the purposes of informing and answering my research questions (see Table 5). Based on the information I hoped to collect, I developed five categories of interviewees: civil society actors (including food and poverty activists), food retailers, elected city officials and bureaucrats, historical informants and commercial real estate and property experts. Within these five categories, I purposefully decided on prospective interviewees to contact by several means:
Table 5: Types of qualitative information gathered through interviews

| Informational/ background data | • Background information on related commercial industries, i.e., commercial real estate, commercial retail development and management  
  • Historical accounts of Rideau Heights and North Kingston more generally  
  • Historical accounts of Kingston’s retail food stores |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Attitudinal/ subjective data  | • Perspectives on food access in North Kingston as an issue/non-issue  
  • Perspectives on grocery store closures in general as an issue/non-issue  
  • Perspectives on municipalities’ ability to manage retail food access  
  • Perspectives on improving the food system through conventional or alternative models  
  • Accounts of the urban experience in North Kingston, poverty in Kingston  
  • Historical and present-day accounts, challenges, etc. from local retail food business owners |

- My own personal networks in Kingston’s small and relatively closely-knit ‘foodie’ community to contact a broad range of people
- Maps and local directories to locate food businesses
- Snowballing techniques during interviews to learn about other prospective interviewees
- Contacting City of Kingston departments and researching appropriate individuals
- Contacting elected city councilors known locally\(^21\) to have diverse political and ideological perspectives

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\( ^{21} \) One frequently heard selling point of Kingston is that it is ‘a small town that feels like a big city’. Given its small size and relatively compact local government, it is quite easy to develop a level of familiarity with local public figures simply by overhearing local conversations, reading local newspapers and participating in daily political life in Kingston. Based on my understanding of different officials’ activities around Kingston, their voting patterns on local issues, their outspokenness on key issues or lack thereof, I contacted diverse individuals for the purposes of the interviews.
• Contacting firms of interest without a predetermined individual target, describing my project and asking for a referral

• Making note of prominent names in more recent (i.e., 1950 or later) archival City of Kingston materials

I developed five interview schedules based on the categories. The schedules were nearly identical except for a small number of questions that I hoped to ask particular categories of interviewees (see Appendix C). All but three interviews took place in Kingston, in person, with the remaining three happening by telephone due to distance or illness.

While I began with interview schedules tailored to a semi-structured interview format, I quickly abandoned this strategy for several reasons: several interview questions were appropriate for one type of interviewee but not others; other questions were inefficient in that they required too much interview time for the modest amount of information that was gained; finally, many of my interviewees were in a position to contribute something unique to my data, requiring interview questions that were appropriate only to them. In response to the limitations of my initial interview schedules, I used a highly flexible, targeted interviewing strategy that allowed me to get the most relevant information from each interviewee. As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) discuss, I used different techniques, such as coming to interviews with a customized set of interview questions to ask, or maintaining a very conversational tone, where questions developed naturally as dialogue progressed. As a result, my interviews are characterized by a high level of rapport and mutual regard, as they make the most out of each interviewee’s unique insights and perspectives. I practiced important elements of active listening such as non-verbal demonstrations of genuine interest such as eye contact, using
markers to pursue points mentioned in passing and using probes to indicate agreement or encouragement (ibid., pp. 128-9). See Appendices D and E for sample letters of information and consent, respectively.

**Focus groups**

Between February and June 2009 I conducted four focus groups with two different groups, low-income food-insecure Kingston residents and senior citizens. The objective of the focus groups with the former population was to record the accounts of Kingston’s low-income population to understand the multidimensionality of their intimate experiences of hunger, food insecurity and poor retail food access. Following work by Dwyer (2002) and others, the focus group as a research methodology promotes an abductive strategy that “takes the explanations [...] seriously and recognizes the capacity for ordinary citizens to inform a more comprehensive understanding of the world” (Dwyer, 2002, p. 276).

The point was not simply a group interview, however; rather, the objective was to compare the diverse experiences of individuals and record the group’s interactions, conversations, opinions and attitudes on a number of questions about food, food shopping and coping strategies. The focus group methodology is an appealing approach to acquire this information, as it is “an efficient and interesting way of gaining insight into the ways in which people construct environmental and social issues; share their knowledge, experiences and prejudices; and argue their different points of view” (Bedford & Burgess 2001, p. 121). Ideally, I hoped to hear the experiences and perceptions of diverse people within this low-income group, including single and attached people, men and women, younger and older people, parents and those without children, and people of different
racial identities and levels of ability—thereby achieving what Bedford and Burgess (2001, p. 124) call “homogeneity within the group and heterogeneity between them”.

I conducted two focus groups at the St. Vincent de Paul Society (in the Inner Harbour) on February 3, 2009, and one at St. Matthews United Church (in Rideau Heights) on June 16, 2009. To recruit participants, I constructed posters that used simplified language to requested participation of people who met several criteria: specifically, I targeted people who did most of the food shopping for their household, prepared most of the meals, had had trouble getting to a grocery store when they needed to, and demonstrated one or more basic indicators of food insecurity at least once in the past year. I advertised using these posters in several North End locations, including telephone poles, public bulletin boards, bus shelters, daycare buildings and public schools, convenience stores and apartment building lobbies. As well, I advertised at local social service and charitable organizations including Kingston’s Better Beginnings Better Futures headquarters, the North Kingston Community Health Centre, the Partners in Mission Food Bank and the Katarokwi Native Friendship Centre. On the posters, I made it clear that the focus groups were for academic research, and that they would last approximately two hours in length. Participants would be paid thirty dollars, and free childcare and snacks would be available (see Appendix F for poster). I recruited Queen’s University undergraduate students to act as volunteers, to assist with childcare, setting up, and notetaking. Nineteen undergraduate students assisted between three focus groups.

22 These indicators, pursuant to those used in the 1998-99 National Health Population Survey (Dietitians of Canada, 2005) consisted of, at anytime in the last year, not having enough food to eat because of lack of money, worrying that there won’t be enough to eat because of lack of money, or not eating the quality or variety of foods that you would like, because of a lack of money.
All focus group participants were able-bodied, English-speaking and Caucasian. I devised eleven questions that would solicit a variety of responses, including participants’ preferences, opinions, habits and behaviours, and creative visions (see Appendix G). As with the posters, the questions were simply worded and structured. I wrote these questions on large pieces of cardboard so that participants would not only hear the question, but refer to a visual reminder. Following Bedford and Burgess (2001), I used a relaxed tone with respect to communicating ground rules, allowing people to create their own nametags and beginning with a ‘ice breaker’ activity that was positive, non-threatening and encouraged all participants to share. I also had students keep track of speaking order, and followed the focus group with a de-briefing to share thoughts and compare notes (ibid.). Appendices H and I contain the letters of information and consent used for the focus groups, respectively.

The second type of focus group involved speaking with senior citizens about their memories of grocery shopping. I developed this method of data collection as a more efficient way of collecting food shopping memories than through individual interviews. I contacted a local residential care facility that welcomed the project as an opportunity to do a ‘reminiscing exercise’ with residents. Fifteen residents attended this exercise, which lasted nearly two hours. The average age of the participants was between seventy-five and eighty years of age. I spoke into a microphone to be audible to as many participants as possible. The discussion was also supervised and facilitated by a facility worker who moved throughout the room with a microphone, inviting each attendant to share their memories of Kingston and other places where they had shopped for food throughout their lives. Some residents had even worked as clerks or managers of food stores and could
speak to this aspect. Overall, my approach to this exercise was very flexible and unstructured as I did not know exactly what data would emerge. Appendix J offers a sample of discussion questions.

**Data collected via public meetings**

In order to immerse myself in the diversity of opinions and perspectives on the ongoing restructuring of Kingston’s retail food geography, I attended public meetings about the closure of Grant’s No Frills, which led to the creation of the New Frills Downtown Redevelopment Project between 2008 and 2009. Attending the public meetings was also an excellent way to hear and record the comments of concerned citizens, ranging from emotional responses to the loss, the persistence of rumours and speculations, the history and advice provided by the local councilor involved, and the strategic actions taken by the organizers. In this sense, using multiple methods was beneficial for grasping the “complexities, contradictions, ambiguities and messiness of human behaviour and everyday life” (Valentine 2001, p. 45), as I followed up my attendance with individual interviews with certain attendees. The limitations of this type of meeting are well-documented. The range of views and opinions presented must be considered in light of selection bias as those people with the most extreme or passionate perspectives about the retail food issue may have self-selected to attend the meetings. Also, such meetings can be undemocratic in the sense that dissenting views may be undermined, marginalized, dismissed, if they are even expressed at all (Young, 2000). Nevertheless, I attended these meetings and identified myself as a graduate student conducting research. I recorded and transcribed these meetings, attempting to take note of peoples’ affiliations and positionalities with respect to the grocery store closure issue.
Archival research

My first research question more or less asks ‘how did we get here?’ with respect to the changing retail food geography of cities. Such a question necessarily invokes the historical-geographical roots of a complex and contemporary socio-spatial issue. To understand Kingston’s present-day retail food geography as well as the history of the spatialized class relations in the city, I examined how these subjects have evolved from Kingston’s commercial food past. Such a historical-geographical endeavor finds precedence in the growing use of mapping software to reconstruct the historical landscapes of land use and the spatial economy within the discipline of geography (Knowles, 2008, pp. 8-10).

As Gregory and Healey (2007) note, database creation and evidence gathering were the initial time-consuming steps to this historical research. I explored primary source material available at the Queen’s University Archives and the Kingston-Frontenac Public Library, including archival fonds and City of Kingston records. Useful primary sources ranged from inventory records of Kingston food stores to records of the 1966-67 Rideau Heights redevelopment. I also located many secondary source books about Kingston, written by local authors and historians. These books often contain information about the histories of Kingston’s waterfront as a centre of transport, trade, and shipment activity as well as Kingston’s commercial history and its many commercial buildings. They also provide some sense of the diets, agricultural activity and food-related struggles of the early United Empire Loyalist settlers to the Kingston area, which helps to contextualize the early food economy of the city and region.
As Gregory and Healey (2007) suggest, the 19th century is a significant time of transition in terms of North American public and government record keeping and census data gathering. In light of the complications that accompany such a transition, I took a flexible approach to recording and coding the directory records because the categories under which food merchants in Kingston fall varies according to time and publisher. Rather than hoping for strict, scientific treatment of the data, I used this historical research to gain a more general view of Kingston’s retail food history. In doing so, I learned about the variety of food-related employment occurring in the city at any given time (for example, many tradespeople such as grocers, wholesalers, dealers, butchers, confectioners, bakers, fruiterers, merchants and dealers).

Like the Rideau Heights surveys, there are important limitations to this data. First, the accuracy of the city directories and the other archival or secondary source material must always be suspect, due to publishers’ errors, author bias and other inconsistencies. The city directory entries are likely based on peoples’ own self-identification in terms of their trade, so this information must be taken as subjective. Also, historical recordings may tell us certain details—such as store locations—but not others, such as store size and scale, community relations, or the cause of eventual closure. The 1960s Rideau Heights records tell us about the process of redevelopment, but is virtually silent on the reactions within the community. The available information must be considered in relation to the broader socio-economic context, then, as I use this information to develop qualitative arguments about regimes of accumulation, tendencies of retail capitalism, and urban planning orthodoxies (ibid.).
Coding and analysis

To prepare for the coding and analysis phases, I familiarized myself with texts such as Jackson (2001), which address these phases of the qualitative research process. Transcribing is an important step in the research/analysis phase, as this is a time when the researcher refamiliarizes himself or herself with material and can begin to recognize and synthesize repeating themes and arguments. I transcribed all interviews, meetings, and focus groups as soon after completion as possible. This timing was important for recording my initial observations and themes that surfaced during the very early transcription phase. Being aware of the subtlety of verbal and non-verbal communication, I left notes for myself during interviews to address non-verbal cues indicating (through my subjective understanding) discomfort or careful negotiation of words and meanings by interviewees. Pursuant to Oliver, Serovich, and Mason’s (2005) description of different transcription methods, I used a blend of naturalized (where virtually all non-verbal cues and verbal utterances are kept in the transcript) and denaturalized (without the recording of involuntary cues and vocalizations) transcription, depending on the content and context of the interview. In the case of the latter, I rarely recorded cues during interviews that were more informational in content. I did, however, record verbal and non-verbal cues during focus groups where the questions and discussions were more subjective and emotional in nature.

To code my transcript data, I read through the transcripts one or more times and began to ‘sort’ portions of texts and ideas according to several levels of ‘meta’, ‘meso’, and ‘micro’ data. I developed several ‘meta’ categories based on my observations from my initial transcriptions:
1) historical details
2) present-day retail food industry details
3) attitudes and perceptions of ‘access’ and the experience of poverty
4) ‘social justice’
5) ideas and perspectives on creating new institutional arrangements

This initial sorting also helped me to focus on answering my three key research questions: categories one and two would help to answer research question one (how are the processes of globalized retail food capital creating uneven retail food access for class-segregated communities?); categories two and three would provide the basis for answering question two (what principle(s) of justice are most helpful to understand this case study as a social injustice?); category five would help to answer research question three (what type of new institutional arrangements are needed to achieve a just urban food system?). From here, I further sorted transcript data into ‘meta’ and ‘micro’ categories, so that different interpretations, opinions, debates, and perspectives from separate transcripts could be understood in relation to one another. This is, for example, how I tackled the many perspectives on social justice and retail food access, by organizing perspectives according to categories such as multiple dimensions of access and philosophical approaches to a just urban food system in preparation to write Chapter Six. Table 6 provides an example of how I coded participants’ diverse testimonies and experiences around accessing retail food into manageable categories. This way, I could understand how experiences are complex, multidimensional, overlapping, and are ultimately compounded by the problems of low income and chronic marginalization from
Table 6: Example categories used to code data on the multiple dimensions of poor food access

| Financial/affordability | Cost of food | Regular expense of food in relation to income  
<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food price inflation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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| Quality and quantity of food | Declining food quality  
|                          | Declining portion sizes                         |
|                         | Must sacrifice quality for quantity when feeding household with many people |
| Low income              | Insufficient social assistance                   |
| Cost of travel          | Expense of buses, taxis                           |
| Sales, pricing          | Must travel to different stores to take advantage of different stores’ and parent companies’ respective sales  
|                          | Best sales during middle of the month, when money is low |
| Geographical            | Physical ability                                   
|                         | Difficulty reaching nearest store because of physical disability, age, etc. |
| Transportation          | Public transportation is costly in time and inconvenience  
|                          | Must use unconventional low-cost travel such as ride-sharing and walking long distances |

basic social institutions. This insight informed my conclusion that a just urban food system must consider many issues, including the geography of retail food outlets, housing and social policy at multiple scales, and urban planning discourse.

**Ethical issues**

When conducting research that involved human participation and observation, I strove to act in an ethical manner over questions such as participant compensation, treatment of confidential information, and informed consent. As I have alluded to throughout this chapter, I made every attempt to educate potential research participants about the purposes and future uses of research material. This included following the guidelines set out by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board (GREB) to provide materials such as letters of information and consent, which clearly outlined the potential risks, benefits, and compensation (where applicable) of participation (see Appendix K for GREB approval).
and focus groups with low-income people), I took additional measures such as outlining these details verbally or using plain language. Where discomfort, emotional risk, or potential harm were possibilities (such as during the focus groups), I took many opportunities to tell participants about the right to refuse questions or cease their participation at any time. I deliberated over the use of financial compensation to encourage low-income participants in join my focus group, and this effectively holds the participant ‘captive’ (e.g., Grady, 2005; Sheilds & Pearn, 2007). This concern, however, is predominantly an issue within the medical and public health research communities where participant captivity is a greater issue during physical and medical research testing; from my perspective, the thirty dollar payment I offered to all focus group participants was adequate yet not so much as to hold the participant ‘hostage’. Finally, I treated the information and identities of participants confidentially; I treated my files and documents in a secure manner as outlined by GREB, I assigned numbers to all participants and omitted any information that might allow for their identification (see Appendix L for the coding keys that I developed for interview and focus group participants).

As well, I attempted to conduct the primary research for this project in such a way that I was cognizant of other ethical issues, including researcher bias and positionality. Such reflexivity, England (1994) argues, entails engaging in “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher” (p. 244), and its value is not just in ethically sound research but an enriched understanding of the relationship between theory and fieldwork. In particular, geographers working in feminist, postmodernist, and poststructuralist traditions have, over time, emphasized the importance of positionality. Awareness of one’s relationship to research settings and
participants demands that we avoid assertions of universality, instead paying attention to
the subjectivities of the process of knowledge production and diverse human experiences,
and the power relations inherent in fieldwork due to the privilege afforded by academia
(e.g., Butler, 2001; Haraway, 1988; Kobayashi, 1994; Rose, 1997).

With respect to my own potential biases, I made an effort to avoid the ideological
bias that can be endemic to research around issues of class and poverty, and I attempted
to remain sympathetic and open to a variety of perspectives—even those that were, to me,
shameful in their degrading views of the poor. As well, I struggled during my interactions
with research participants whose contributions were of particular interest because of their
‘blue collar’ or low-income class status. At times, I was highly aware of things such as
my age, gender, vocabulary, dress, and my subtle expressions of class in relation to my
participants—that of a well-educated young woman who was affluent enough to be
pursuing full-time graduate studies instead of paid work. Moreover, I understood myself
as a sympathetic researcher due to my upbringing in a small, working class,
predominantly white city and some familiarity with cultures of poverty. My background,
however, was unknown and irrelevant to some participants who perceived me to have
experienced a vastly different ‘class experience’. I felt particularly uncomfortable and
challenged during my focus group in Rideau Heights, for example, where one focus
group participant—a middle-aged man—interrupted our discussion to emphasize my
ignorance about the experience of poverty and challenge my authority on the subject
matter at hand:
Can I ask you a question? What’s your thesis for? What’s your main thesis actually for?²³ (C-4, male)

Interviewer: It’s about trying to look at how does… if we were to think about how people get food, we use this system where we are supposed to make money, be able to have our own money to buy our food, but that system is obviously not working for people; how do we think about a new system that is a fair system.

Okay, what’s your main line of studies?

Geography.

Geography. And you’re doing a study on food. Hmmm.

Yup […] And I’m also thinking about the accessibility in terms of these neighbourhoods.

Here’s a plan for, if you don’t me sayin’ it, but here’s a little plan. I studied business and accounting, business and administration, when I went to college. Why don’t you take your thesis, apply it to all that, take your thesis to the government, tell them to look at it? [...] Take it and let the produce minister, and minister of finances look at this. This is from the average, everyday, ordinary citizen, I’m sorry to say, but you’re getting it from people on welfare, disability, old age security, alright? They don’t have the money to go and buy the groceries that everybody thinks they do! And that includes, pardon the expression, but this fucked up government! [...] See, that’s why your little thesis here doesn’t involve foods, it involves finances, okay?

While this was the only time my focus groups became outwardly tense, I was consistently reminded in more subtle ways that I continually expressed my positionality through various indicators of class. In this instance, a participant’s perception of my class ignorance and misguided research incited him to assert his authority and, for a moment, upset the unspoken gender-, age-, and class-defined power relations that had presided until that point. This was a defining moment that reflects my constant negotiation of my relationship with this project’s research participants, through the subtleties and multidimensionality of class, as well as my age, gender, and other qualities.

²³ This information was made available in my letter of information; I also provided this information verbally, to all participants before beginning the focus group.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodological approaches that I adopted for this research project. I first discussed the usefulness of the case study approach for broader issues of urban capitalism and the everyday politics of retail food landscapes in low-income, class-segregated communities. I also described my research methods, including qualitative interviews, two door-to-door surveys of the Rideau Heights community, focus groups (three with low-income North Kingston residents and one ‘reminiscing exercise’ with older people at a residential care facility), data collection at public meetings, local newspapers and other media, and archival/historical primary and secondary source research. I also detailed the processes by which I coded and analyzed my data. In the final section (and generally throughout the chapter) I addressed some ethical issues that arose throughout the research, including ethical treatment of data, maintaining participant confidentiality, informed consent, minimizing participant harm, and compensation. I also discussed the issues of researcher bias and positionality, briefly discussing my efforts to be aware of my own expressions of class and negotiate class difference in relation to my research participants. In Chapter Four, I share my first set of research results, focusing on the historically- and institutionally-embedded roots of North Kingston’s poor retail food access. In particular, I argue that this can be best explained through the relationship between factors such as the area’s persistent geography of public housing, poverty, and marginalization, and the radical rescaling of North American retail food capitalism in recent decades.
CHAPTER FOUR: A POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CRITIQUE OF THE RETAIL FOOD INDUSTRY AND THE SPATIALIZATION OF POVERTY

The first research question of this project about retail food access and social justice is ‘how is Kingston’s changing retail food geography creating uneven retail food access for class-segregated communities?’ To answer this question, it is necessary to develop a greater understanding of the ways that the North American retail food sector has changed dramatically over time, even in the last ten to fifteen years. The pace of change in the industry—reflective of broader global economic restructuring trends—continues to accelerate, with profound consequences for disadvantaged communities in spatially class-segregated cities such as Kingston.

The changing retail food industry, in combination with increasing socio-spatial polarization of the poor, is creating greater unevenness of retail food access. This is happening by way of the industry’s adherence to the imperatives of advanced capitalism, specifically the tenets of a quasi-Fordist model of retail operations that is unresponsive to the contemporary socio-spatial dynamics of cities. The locational patterns of retail food stores—historically as well as today—reflect the varying importance of centralization, corporatization, and economies of scale to particular models of retailing over time. As such, we can understand the current retail food geography of low-income communities as having emerged from a set of historically-embedded institutional factors related to the changing North American political economy of food.

To explore these industry-level changes and their sociospatial consequences further, I proceed with the chapter in the following sections. First, I provide a brief overview of the critical political economy tradition’s understanding of retail capital, as
well as recent contributions on the ‘new retail geography’ that have emerged since the 1990s. I also introduce Harvey’s analysis of spatial fixes and circuits of capital investment as strategies for crisis aversion and Ducatel and Blomley’s discussion of retail capital. Next, I briefly describe the emergence of the spatialization of poverty in North Kingston, to provide some context for understanding the emergence of the North End as a place characterized by commercial disinvestment. I also offer a brief historical account of Kingston’s changing retail food geography beginning in the 18th century, to show the changing locations, scale, and degree of social embeddedness of retail enterprise over time. Next, I provide an overview of major changes to the Canadian and North American retail food industry over the past several decades, including new technological, organizational, and managerial practices that are increasing retailers’ power over the supply chain, changes to labour in the industry, and the ‘lean retailing’ model epitomized by Wal-mart but seen increasingly amongst major food retailers in Canada. This rescaling and disembedding of the distribution and retailing aspects of the food industry reflects a much broader shift in the post-war industrialization of the food system, and it illustrates the changing social significance of retail spaces, from use value to exchange value. I link these industry-level changes to a new spatiality of retail food in cities, suggesting that the industry has become ‘locked in’ to a certain scale of operations and corporate imperatives that reduce retailers’ ability or interest in responding to the needs of low-income communities.
Retail capital and the new retail geography

According to Ducatel and Blomley’s (1990) interpretation, retail capital has a distinct role and importance in the process of capital accumulation. Retail capital is “that part of total social capital which is located between productive capital and the final consumer” (ibid., p. 213), while its distinctive function within the wider circuit of capital is the final exchange of commodities. Retail merchants’ transactions are distinct from other transactions, which normally lead to the final consumption of a produced good. Rather, they belong to another type of consumption, the maintenance of the private sphere of reproduction. These transactions—consisting of the purchase and resale of goods—occur between retail capitalists and the general population. In other words, retail capital accumulation involves retail capitalists purchasing goods already imbued with value, which are then converted into money upon resale to the public. Its logic is the same as that of commercial capital, in the sense that its purpose is the creation of value and accumulation of capital (exchange value), rather than fostering actual consumption (use value) (ibid.).

This phase of accumulation is not without its own contradictions. Ducatel and Blomley suggest that production and retail capital are part of the same process and are dependent upon each other, yet they compete for their own share of total capital. Likewise, the consumer and retailer meet and transact for vastly different reasons: the consumer seeks use value in products, while the retailer seeks exchange value. As we will see later, retail is a valuable example of one of the key contradictions of capitalism—that commercial capitalists face continual pressure to depress labour costs, thereby confining the purchasing power of the working class and inadvertently eradicating the very market
of consumers that it needs to survive. As well, a crisis of realization can occur when
surplus value tied up in commodities fails to be realized through the exchange of money
capital for commodity capital. A final crisis can involve competition between retailers,
whereby the higher profitability that accompanies fast turnover of goods is cancelled out
by the declining profitability with each additional unit of an item sold. Retail capital,
then, involves its own contradictions and offers examples of many of the inherent
contradictions of capitalism.

Ducatel and Blomey also provide invaluable analysis of recent Western retail
restructuring through a Marxist lens. They situate concentration in the retail sector within
the broader thinking on appropriation of market share, competitive strength through
economies of scale and capitalism’s elimination of independent, petit bourgeois retailers
through mergers and acquisition, all of which have occurred in Canadian retail
restructuring. The authors discuss two further trends, namely the backward integration of
the production and distribution process into retailer ownership, and the reduction of
circulation (i.e., overhead) costs through the restructuring of labour forces and
geographies of store locations, sizes, and central distribution locales. Moreover, the
manipulation of the interior geographies of retail spaces such as grocery stores (most
notably in the post-war era) has increased marketers’ and retailers’ confidence in their
ability to manipulate the consumer into more purchases (ibid.)

Harvey’s analysis of the relationship between urban geography and capital offers
a theoretical perspective through which to understand changing urban retail food
geographies, most helpfully through his discussions of the spatial fix and secondary
circuit of capital. As we will see later in the chapter, food retail restructuring in North
America follows a quasi-Fordist spatial logic and a particular model of built retailing environments by virtue of the economies of scale permitted therein. In *The urbanization of capital*, Harvey (1985) argues that capital makes productive use of the built environments of cities as a means of accumulation or a strategy to avert crises of overaccumulation, during which “too much capital is produced in aggregate relative to the opportunities to employ that capital” (Harvey, 1985, p. 4). In such a case, capitalists may switch the investment of capital from the primary circuit of capital—which encapsulates Marx’s general law of accumulation—to the secondary circuit of capital, through financial and state institutions and the creation of fictitious capital within the credit system (ibid., p. 16). This second circuit includes investment in fixed capital in the built environment that can facilitate production, consumption, or both. Examples of investments that facilitate production might include investments into the physical structures that facilitate production, such as factories and warehouses, while investments that facilitate consumption include sidewalks, housing, and other urban infrastructure. The transport network facilitates movement throughout the built infrastructure of the city.

The built environment, then, can say much about the state of capitalist regimes of accumulation. In times of stable growth, the built environment that encompasses retail capitalist enterprise—such as new store formats—can reflect a temporarily successful means of accumulation. Individual capitalists, however, will generally overinvest in the primary circuit of capital while neglecting this secondary circuit. Sinking capital into the secondary circuit, however, has been a “kind of last-ditch hope for finding productive uses for rapidly overaccumulating capital” (ibid., p. 20), as Harvey shows how economic downturn and recession in the United States and the United Kingdom have been preceded
by a boom in building and construction activity by individual capitalists and governments (ibid.).

Cities are one form of social organization that capital reshapes for its own needs, seen through landscapes of production, class struggle and social reproduction. Urban politics—understood partly through the ideology of urban planning—inherently serve, manage, and facilitate the processes of economic growth and social reproduction (notwithstanding periods of civil strife). This is also the sphere through which allocations of investment into the built environment are legitimized and managed, suggesting that urban politics “appear as the powerful and often innovative but in the end disciplining arm of uneven accumulation and uneven class struggle in geographic space” (Harvey, 1985, p. 127). Throughout the chapter, I return to Harvey’s arguments to suggest that the changes seen in the urban retail food landscape over time reflect retail capital’s manipulation of the built environment as a by-product of the accumulation process. It also serves as a circuit of capital investment providing a temporary spatial fix to capitalist crisis.

Work by Wrigley and others further informs our understanding of the ‘new retail geography’ that has emerged in advanced capitalism. The new retail geography, as an area of scholarly research and theorization, has its roots in the flourishing of political-economic theorizing and empirical work that inspired the ‘new economic geography’ from the 1980s on (Lee & Wills, 1997). Scholars such as Wrigley and Lowe (1996), however, show concern that the sphere of consumption and retail spaces are neglected and undertheorized in this new economic geography. To respond, Wrigley and Lowe argue that a new retail geography has emerged in light of industrial and labourforce
restructuring. They identify six dimensions that illustrate the profound change within retail restructuring: corporate structures, retailer-supply chain interfaces and power balances, distribution, labour practices and social relations, the spatial penetration, manipulation and switching of retail capital, and regulation of retail restructuring. These transformations can be situated as responses to the crisis of Fordist accumulation of the 1970s.

The new retail geography has been characterized by its internationalization, as well as the growth in merger and acquisitions activity in recent years. Wrigley (2000a, 2001), for example, notes that the 1990s were a decade of unprecedented merger and acquisition activity amongst the world’s largest retailers and their parent companies. This has allowed for the sharing and adoption of new best practices in human resources, storage and transportation, and supply chain management and distribution. The internationalization of retail has meant that the world’s largest transnational corporations (TNCs) have become more internationally aggressive and recognizable in their global expansion plans—both geographical and, in the case of Wal-mart, into new sectors such as food (e.g., Wrigley, Coe & Currah, 2005). Food retailers such as Walmart, Tesco and Carrefour have formed an elite group of the world’s largest companies expanding into new markets such as South Asia, Eastern and Central Europe and South America (Wrigley 2000b), as explored in a 2007 special issue of the *Journal of Economic Geography* on transnational retail. Retail restructuring, then, has been a highly spatialized process that has created a new international geography of production, distribution, and consumption. For the remainder of this chapter, I explore the local-level implications of this global restructuring.
The history of the spatialization of class in North Kingston

To understand the significance of North Kingston’s changing retail food geography to its low-income residents, it is helpful to briefly review the history of spatialized class relations in Kingston. As we will see throughout the chapter, the present-day retail food geography of North Kingston emerges from a combination of spatialized, concentrated poverty and the accelerated processes of capitalist accumulation within the retail food sector, creating an unevenness of retail food access that has been unforeseen until now.

Kingston was of some importance to the history of British North America for its role as an administrative, military, and commercial centre of Upper Canada. By the late 18th century, the area had served as a critical location for Loyalist immigrant settlers, British armed defense activity, commercial and subsistence agriculture, and merchant activity. Its continuing importance into the early 19th century is reflected in its ample urban infrastructure, including hospitals, military infrastructure, government buildings, the Kingston Penitentiary, banks, a commercial downtown, a public market, and Queen’s University, all founded in the 1830s and 1840s (City of Kingston, 1961).

Historically, Kingston was also home to a stricter than average class divide compared to other early Upper Canada towns. Part of this is due to the presence of government officials and administrators, military leaders, and professional classes who occupied Kingston’s advanced urban infrastructure. Guillet (1933) suggests that Kingston’s social fabric is a result of its earlier military functions and English heritage. He notes, for example, that social life in the early Upper Canada towns such as Kingston,
Toronto, (then called York) and Niagara were patterned after that of English towns of the same period, owing to the military character of these early garrison towns,

At Kingston, Niagara and York, and to a lesser extent at Amherstburg, the presence of government officials, officers of the army and navy, and other “gentlemen”, gave a higher tone to social life than was usually to be found elsewhere during the period of settlement […] Class distinctions were very rigid in early days, and the fashionable society of these first towns was restricted to a comparatively small section of the population. (p. 69)

These economic and social aspects of Kingston’s early historical geography help to explain the very beginnings of its distinct class divide that persists until today. Moreover, more obvious socio-spatial segregation began to emerge in Ontario cities during the 19th century. Harris and Warkentin (1974, p. 160) write, for example, that

In general, the rich remained near the center of the city, there to manage its life and enjoy its benefits, while the poor tended to collect at the peripheries, where the inconvenience of transportation eliminated competition for land. Between these extremes of class and location, most of the city lived amid the confusion of shop and residence, occupation and class … .

The distinct socio-spatial composition of early cities suggests that strong social hierarchies and class relations manifested themselves geographically in the urban landscape. As the authors later note (ibid.), this segregation was amplified through a combination of government-sponsored and private entrepreneurial land transactions and developments.

19th century geographies of class segregation are very much a reflection of industrialization and labour patterns of the time, in the sense that waterfronts and railway lines were important locations of industry infrastructure such as factories, warehouses, and shipping and receiving. As such, by the mid-19th century Kingston waterfronts such as Lake Ontario and the Cataraqui River were home to industrial sites such as the locomotive works, leather tannery, woolen mill, and countless importers, merchants, and

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dealers. Although by the late 19th century Kingston was not, per se, an industrial town, new industry had begun, such as a cotton mill, hosiery factory, a bottling plant, and ship building, adding significantly to its blue collar employment opportunities, which nevertheless were unstable in the following decades (Harris, Levine & Osborne, 1981). Thus began the spatialization of blue collar households who lived in close proximity to these places of work, due to the limits of transportation, “when foot, cart, or buggy were the principal means of travel, urban mobility was not great, and the workers, managers, services, and goods relevant to a single enterprise needed to be located in close proximity” (ibid., p. 160). Parts of Ontario Street, Sydenham Ward, and the Inner Harbour area are especially notable for their industrial/blue collar character that, in some cases, persists in the communities’ landscapes today

Kingston’s relative political and industrial importance declined following 1844 when the nation’s capital was moved from Kingston to Montreal. Nevertheless, the city’s post-war industrial boom led to an increase in working class employment and new

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While Kingston experienced post-war housing and industrial booms that concentrated the city’s blue collar workers in the north end (Harris [1981] concludes that, generally speaking, by the 1970s “the North End was working class and the rest of the city mainly middle class” [p. 537]), it is important to note that Kingston has never been a typical, uniform ‘Fordist’ industrial city. As I suggest throughout this chapter, Kingston’s employment profile has never been dominated by the private sector; rather, the city’s economy and employment profile has been more heavily shaped by the public sector and its function as a regional commerce and governance centre than other Ontario cities. As I discuss in the following section, this suggests that the Fordist mode of accumulation was not even, totalizing or uniform in its spread through cities, regions and industries, and that what Jenson (1989) calls ‘permeable Fordism’ is a better way of thinking about Kingston’s economy. Canada’s Fordism, for example, was unique in its focus on continental economic integration, federal nation-building initiatives and the expansion of both mass production and mass consumption, while other developed countries adopted distinctly different varieties of Fordist economic policy during this time. The variability of Fordism across space and time is important to understanding the diversity in industrial and employment character amongst Canadian cities during this time.
housing developments, solidifying the north/south divide that constituted Kingston’s class segregation. The character of Kingston began to expand and change, with the 1952 annexation of communities such as Portsmouth and Rideau Heights and new planned suburban-type neighbourhoods such as Calvin Park (Harris, 1988). There was also a boom of new ‘war-time’ housing developments such as Kingscourt (City of Kingston, 1961), which were deliberately located near industrial employers, suggesting their important roles in both post-war re-employment and social reproduction. The city also expanded services such as roads, electricity and sewage to areas such as Rideau Heights, in an effort to provide more uniformity of services. The City of Kingston began to play a greater role in municipal affairs through zoning, and in 1972 it approved its first official plan that granted the City authority to direct land use (Harris, 1981, p. 680).

By the mid-20th century, it was increasingly evident that North Kingston was the city’s so-called ‘wrong side of the tracks’, owing to a combination of factors. In the Inner Harbour, (which housed a mixed social composition of the working class, students, and unemployed people) housing included some beautiful historical structures, however the majority was aging and declining. Much of this housing was deemed too small and substandard (Harris, 1984; City of Kingston, 1961). Rideau Heights, prior to its redevelopment in the late 1960s, was little more than a settlement of rural migrants living in shacks and poor-quality houses. Formal documents, as well as interview testimonies, suggest that the homes in Rideau Heights had dirt floors and were severely inadequate. Figures 5 through 8, taken by the City of Kingston, illustrate the condition of these dwellings before 1966. These materials offered support for the redevelopment of Rideau Heights in 1966-67, and—while they are a biased portrayal of life in the North End—
suggest the City’s growing awareness of the concentration of poverty and social problems clustering in the area.

Politically, the North End was long-understood as the ‘adopted child’ of the rest of the City of Kingston, and its elected officials made efforts to represent the area that was seen to be so neglected by the rest of the city. Harris argues that business interests within the city were strongly tied to local politics, making it difficult for the issues facing the North End residents to ever be seriously addressed by local government. Amongst
North End residents, then, political apathy was chronically high and voter turnout was low, as local politics were hardly a promising avenue for change,

people had resigned themselves to the fact that local politics was not a channel through which their lives could significantly be changed or bettered [...] to the extent that local government did have any significance for peoples’ well-being, its structural bias was towards the needs of the middle class. (Harris 1981, p. 674)

Nevertheless, the area has a history of strong political and spiritual leaders calling attention to the poverty and segregation, including local elected officials such as Ken Matthews and Bill Jamieson, outspoken advocates such as Bobbi Sparks, and spiritual leaders of St. Matthews United Church and the St. Vincent de Paul Society (ibid.; Lukits, 2009). That is not to say the area was economically homogenous: stigmatization and class contempt for the poorer residents of Rideau Heights was high within the area, as one document suggests that

the major social distinction made within the neighbourhood is between private and public housing residents [...] there is little doubt who is ranked the lowest—not just in socio-economic status, but in overall neighbourhood esteem…. (Piker, 1977, as cited in Harris, 1981)

In response to the economic and social status of these North Kingston communities, the City of Kingston planning document argued that given the blight and insufficiency of neighbourhoods north of Princess Street, public low rental housing was “the only alternative” (Stephenson & Muirhead, 1961, p. 40). The situation of political inefficacy and strong ties between political and business figures in the city recalls Logan and Molotch’s (1987) growth machine theory, which Donald (2007; Donald & Bedore, 2009) argues characterizes Kingston’s local political arena and geography of affluence and economic growth within the city. Logan and Molotch suggest that in certain urban contexts, local political agendas are dominated by elites—local people who invest time
and energy into local affairs because they have vested financial interest in land-use decisions. Members forming a ‘growth coalition’ may consist of local politicians, business owners, real estate owners and brokers, local media, quasi-public industry, and education, arts, and culture groups who subtly manipulate urban agendas to shape the city into

a growth machine, one that can increase aggregate rents and trap related wealth for those in the right position to benefit […] elites use their growth consensus to eliminate any alternative vision of the purpose of local government or the meaning of community. (p. 50-51)

Social agendas around poverty alleviation, they theorize, are formally endorsed by the growth coalition, however they are only undertaken to the extent that they enhance land values and rents to the coalition’s own benefit. Understood within the authors’ theory about the entrepreneurial nature of urban decision-making and land use politics, it is not surprising that Kingston’s North End residents have been at the losing end of this growth machine, playing little role in land-based economic development and instead acting as a catchment area for the city’s poor and working class.

These events help to explain the demolition and redevelopment of much of Rideau Heights in 1966-67, which solidified the geographical segregation of the City’s lowest-income populations. This project was undertaken in the interest of slum clearance, much like other housing projects of this era, including—more famously—Toronto’s Regent Park development. While the details of Regent Park have been covered by Purdy (2003a, 2003b, 2004) and others, it is notable that the Regent Park and Rideau Heights redevelopments are similar in their style of design (predominantly low-rise apartments and row housing), their geographic segregation and their well-meaning goals of providing affordable housing to low-income individuals and families. This type of housing project
is somewhat characteristic of government social housing initiatives of the post-war era. Wake Carroll and Jones (2000) note that the federal government engaged in housing policy during the post-war period between 1945 and 1986, after which housing was devolved by the Conservative government of the time. From 1945 to 1968, a large housing industry developed in Canada based on the suburban model of home ownership, however this is also a time when alternative models of property rights and residential forms (condominiums and co-operative housing, for example) emerged (Hulchanski, 1988). In the 1960s especially, government funded high-density housing projects aimed at helping the working poor and other low-income people. These housing projects consisted of slum clearance in the name of urban regeneration,

planning visions of the period turned their back on the prewar urban form, depicted as ill-suited to prevailing preferences and needs because of traffic congestion, inadequate parking, deteriorating housing conditions and insufficient green space. The spread of slums was indeed an obsession of the time which sanctioned the call for extensive redevelopment and revitalization efforts. (Filion 1999, p. 428)

Although the intentions may have been good, several consequences arose that set the stage for the permanent segregation of much of Kingston’s low-income population and the slow withdrawal of commercial services. As with Regent Park, the housing was isolated, there was little through-traffic to provide natural means of surveillance and class intermingling, and the areas suffered from a lack of nearby activities and formal work opportunities for young people25. The North End became the formal home of Kingston’s largest concentration of low-rent, and government-subsidized public housing, including several clusters of public housing units on Montreal and Compton Streets (see Figure 9).

Moreover, the geographical segregation of Rideau Heights was solidified—physically and symbolically—in all directions. One interviewee with the City of Kingston observes that

this is the old industrial area of the city, this is what’s left of it […] if you look at this neighbourhood, they are completely segregated, because you have the [highway] 401 to the north, the Cataraqui River to the east, to the west, Division Street, which is a major arterial road […] And to the south you have a railway track, and industrial. So it is really segregated, spatially, in terms of geography. [One of my coworkers] is very aware that the whole area, collectively, has this stigma attached to it, but I think geographically the segregation probably did not help, in terms of the boundaries around it. (Interview no. 36)

This geographical segregation helps to explain how the North End became ghettoized, with a permanent and concentrated element of poverty and social problems. While
traditional subdivisions were developed nearby (such as the Markers’ Acres development), pulling up the average home value for the North End, the area become synonymous with economic struggle, dilapidated buildings, and vicious cycles of disinvestment, neglect, social problems and class bias.

This historical overview suggests that the North End that residents and visitors perceive today has arisen from long-standing spatialized class relations, tied to broader changes in the social and economic fabric of Canadian life. The pervasiveness of growth machine politics in Kingston—as well as the overall transition to urban entrepreneurialism in developed nations—helps to contextualize North Kingston’s geographical segregation and lack of political sway over time. The entrenched class relations seen in Kingston’s urban geography necessarily affect the social reproduction of poverty in the city and the continuous concentration of low income that, as we will see here and in later chapters, creates an insular community that fails to sustain commercial vitality or attract private investment or services. With this difficult dilemma in mind, I return to a political-economic critique of the restructuring of the retail food industry and its effects on the retail food geography of low-income areas.

**A political-economic critique of Kingston’s retail food geography**

To understand the ‘new retail geography’ of food in Canadian cities (and its consequences for retail food access in low-income communities), it is helpful to explore some key trends that have fundamentally changed the retail food industry in North America and globally. New labour relationships, retailing models, managerial and organizational practices, as well as the increasing use of fictitious capital in food retailing
are components of a ‘fix’ that has emerged over several decades that furthers accumulation through a distinct scale and spatiality of retailing. Before reviewing these changes, however, it is useful to explore the historical geography of food retail in Kingston, to gain an understanding of how drastically its scale, embeddedness and organization have changed from the pre-Fordist to Fordist eras.

As I show in the following pages, however, there is no clear break from these pre-Fordist, Fordist and post-Fordist regimes of accumulation; the onset of crises of capitalist accumulation occurs and unravels over time, and as such the transition between accumulation systems and modes of social regulation is uneven, uncertain and fraught with struggle. Because economic transition is uneven across time and space (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 1992), regimes of accumulation and overarching governance projects such as neoliberalism can evolve into unique region- and nation-specific forms. Extending this argument, my analysis of the retail food industry suggests that specific industries evolve and transition at different rates. This explains why, amidst a mid-20th century boom in food technologies and innovations fueling new consumption patterns, it takes more time for the food distribution and retailing systems to rescale and begin to resemble the industries that we recognize today. Likewise, there is a lag in the time needed for the urban built form to adapt to these retail food industry changes.

**Kingston’s pre-industrial retail food geography**

A survey of Kingston’s pre-industrial retail food geography suggests that the city’s local food economy was competitive, diverse and decentralized well into the emergence of the Fordism. From the early 19th century to the 1930s, the food supply for Kingston and outlying areas such as Portsmouth Village came from diverse sources,
including local agriculturists, merchants, dealers, and importers who dealt in foods arriving by waterway or, later, railway and truck (McKendry, 1996; Mika, 1969; Osborne & Swainson, 1988). Archival records suggest that by the late 19th century, Kingston’s commercial food trade revolved around an array of actors, including local and international suppliers and dealers, institutional buyers and sellers (including the penitentiary farms, hospitals, and armed forces base), grocery retailers, and specialty retailers such as butchers, bakeries, and ‘fruiterers’ (e.g., Kingston butcher’s fonds, n.d.). Food retailing often took place in small commercial spaces such as that of Cooke’s (see Figures 10 and 11), market stalls, or in part of an owner’s house. The remnants of this can be seen in variety stores in older city neighbourhoods, and in remaining small-scale independent grocers such as Bearance’s (see Figure 12). Retailers often sold fresh foods by circulating horse-drawn wagons throughout neighbourhoods. Senior focus group participants recalled their families buying fresh fish, produce, and milk this way. Grocers also delivered customers’ orders to their homes and businesses. Patrons of local grocers over this period were large-scale (such as local hotels) and small (including individual households).

Kingston’s City Directories tell a great deal about earlier retail foodscapes. The retail food sector of the city was diversified and market share was distributed amongst a large group of merchants. Boothman’s (2009) study of retail transition in Canada confirms that Kingston’s decentralized pre-industrial food geography was common. He describes this geography, whereby
Retail food shops displaced stalls in public markets in towns and villages during the nineteenth century, as merchants began to specialize in different forms of commerce. The firms dealt with one form of food distribution: dry groceries, fruits and vegetables, or meat. Located near residential areas for access to customers or to minimize property costs, the proprietor-controlled shops relied on trade from local street traffic and offered delivery services or credit to regular clients […]. Clients shopped on a daily basis since they lacked storage space or refrigeration at home. (p. 24)
This description of retail food locations and shopping patterns helps to explain the vitality of the small-scale decentralized retail food economy in the 19th and early 20th centuries. A small city such as Kingston sustained many dozens of independently operating food merchants and retailers who operated in neighbourhoods and on main commercial streets.

Several older focus group participants and interviewees recalled the scale of retail in the early 20th century, noting that families converted the front of their house into a retail space and lived in the back (Interview no. 42). One person also remembered her family’s shopping routine, which included trips to several small-scale, local producers and retailers in shops and markets:

I was born in Deseronto and lived there practically all my life. And I can remember when I was quite small that I would go with my mother or my grandmother to market. And there was quite a big market in Deseronto, this takes you way back of course! And I can remember my grandmother with the little basket on her arm, she’d put her groceries in it, like vegetables and whatever they had at the market, my mother also. And then my mother shopped at a store called Therien Grocery Store, in Deseronto. And we had a bake shop […] [you could get] things there if you didn’t have a garden, you’d need vegetables, fresh vegetables…[milk, dairy] was bought at the store, at the grocery store. I can remember my mother when she’d pay her bill at the end of the week, they would always give her a little bag of candies for us children […] you could buy until the end of the week and then my mother would pay her bill […] I knew [the Therien family] as I grew up. I knew the younger ones. (D-01)

Clearly, there were a strong ‘social economics’ operating within this decentralized, neighbourhood-embedded retail system, which saw an overlap between the retailer-customer relationship and other non-economic relationships between families.

Participants’ recollections of household food purchasing patterns highlight a particular

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26 Communities such as Rideau Heights and Inner Harbour also sustained food stores. According to the 1956 City of Kingston directory, for example, there were six food stores in Rideau Heights and over twenty in Inner Harbour.
scale and decentralization of retail, as well as the close connections between retail
business owners and the community in the early 20th century. Meanwhile, this is also a
key period where revolutionary innovations within food retailing began, including the
emergence of self-service shopping (Tolbert, 2009) and the invention of mobile shopping
carts (Grandclément, 2009).

Social economics and embeddedness are themes that continuously emerge from
the study of Kingston’s early 20th century retail food history. Because retail shopping
outlets were greater in number and often catered to the needs of a particular
neighbourhood, food stores had important roles as community meeting places, sources of
employment, kinship, and trust. Patterson (2009, p. 208) writes, for example, that “the old
counter-service, corner-store model has tended to bring people together who lived near
one another within a single neighborhood, with a higher chance that customers and
employees would have or develop social relationships beyond the shop.” One
interviewee, a retailer himself with a long family history in the business, recalls the extent
that one local grocer tailored his inventory to the needs of his working class
neighbourhood,

I can remember delivering to a little wee grocery store, no bigger than 900 square
feet [...] the fellow was up on First Avenue, that was a poorer part of Kingston.
And his name was Olly Martin, and he could sell bananas like nobody could sell
bananas […] they were cheap. It was a cheap food. All those [retailers]
disappeared. And they were all families, and usually they lived in the back of the
store, and they worked in the front of the store. That whole thing disappeared.
(Interview no. 15)

Likewise, these early neighbourhood-embedded retailers are the subject of fond
recollections about owners, managers and service clerks who knew their patrons and their
children by name, who employed local young people, who were considered respected and
knowledgeable members of the community and who cared about their customers, whether through offering interest-free credit or sending flowers upon the death of a long-time customer. One older interviewee recalled that his family’s butcher shop extended credit to his mother, a widow with children who survived on a pensioner’s salary, for example (Interview no. 41). These and other services such as free delivery suggest that the high levels of service characteristic to this period in food retailing history may have enhanced the physical and financial accessibility to food for disadvantaged households. These common characteristics of earlier retail businesses suggest that, indeed, a more ‘social economy’ prevailed at the time. This is not meant in the sense of ‘social economy as a ‘third sector’ operating outside of the logic of capital (Amin, Cameron & Hudson, 2003); rather, the character and quality of services and social interactions between customer and retailer suggest that retailers had much stronger social ties (in other words, a deeper social embeddedness or a different moral economy) than that which characterizes the scaled-up, consolidated retail industry that we know today.27.

Employment in the retail food sector also reflected a pre-industrial logic, being a life-long skilled trade that demanded extensive training. As one retailer described,

it was a very respectable job, or profession, I guess, to be a clerk in a store, okay? […] Well my grandfather came and worked here in 1910. He had to apprentice four years before they’d even let him serve a customer […] ’cause there was a lot to learn, ’cause they had all the wines and liquors and they had meats and they would’ve had produce and they—he did coffee roasting for them and that kind of thing, so there was a lot to learn, and at the time, in those days, if you were apprenticing, it was going to be your life’s work. As opposed to now, it’s not. (Interview no. 20)

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27 See Granovetter (1985) for an often-cited review of the scholarly discussions and debates surrounding the topics of embeddedness and social and economic relations.
This employment type reflects a level of labour intensity and hands-on craftsmanship that is characteristic of a pre-industrial logic. There is no clear and easy transition from this phase of retailing to a classically Fordist arrangement. As I discuss in the following section, it takes many years of innovation in food production before a gradual rescaling and consolidation of food distribution and retail takes place. This, again, reinforces the importance of ‘hybrid’ or ‘permeable’ modes of accumulation (Jenson, 1989). It also lets us understand the evolution of an uneven retail food geography that is at the heart of the access problem for spatially-segregated communities such as North Kingston.

**Kingston’s present-day retail food geography**

While Kingston’s 19th and early 20th century retail food geography reflected a pre-industrial, decentralized, pre-Fordist spatial logic, this is not to say that the sector showed no early signs of innovation in terms of economies of scale. Boothman’s (2009) study of early Canadian grocery retail experimentation points out, importantly, that the earliest versions of the modern-day grocery store were emerging in Europe and North America by the 1840s, when retailers experimented with chain networks and multi-unit operations (although this clearly was not the norm). The earliest Canadian versions occurred between the 1890s and 1910s, offering the benefit of cost savings through economies of scale. Theodore Loblaw, for example, from 1910 on was experimenting with new store formats, vertical integration, new price/volume groupings and wholesaler relationships, with great success (ibid.). By the 1920s, the sector was experiencing simultaneous chain retailer expansion (due to its increasing popularity and viability) and contraction (through mergers and acquisitions), however these slowed until the dominance of large retail chains emerged in 1945. In fact, the archival records of Kingston’s business community
foreshadow the coming expansion of today’s major retailers in the 1940s with the first small-scale Loblaws, A&P and Dominion grocery stores. These were located in the small shops along Kingston’s downtown Princess Street and, at first, co-existed with the dozens of other independent, small-scale retailers around the Kingston area.

This co-existence did not last, however. Post-war factors such as new highway systems linking regions, better formal education, popular culture, and new consumption standards facilitated large-scale food merchandising that overpowered small-scale retailers (Boothman, 2009). Moreover, the built retail environment began to change in Kingston in this period, including the growth of retail formats such as the enclosed shopping mall and various early incarnations of the ‘power centre’ model of planned commercial space. These commercial and retail models represent a growing role of scientific, rationalized, formalized urban planning in the construction of new commercial districts, as well as modernist planning ideologies around the use of zoning and land use policy to segregate residential, commercial, and other land uses. Grant (2000) notes that this was not the earliest time in Canadian history where cities and towns were deliberately planned according to abstract principles and designated functions. The post-war period was, however, a time of renewed optimism and faith in science; during this period, cities across the country established planning departments and undertook planning as a science. Modernist planning endorsed the aforementioned slum clearance and urban regeneration (discussed earlier), separation of land uses, low-density development, shopping concentrated in retail malls and strips, closed streets such as cul-de-sacs and crescents, buffers of green space or high-density housing to protect single-detached housing, and extensive open space systems (ibid.). Filion (1999, p. 428) also
notes the change to retail planning in the modernist period, characterized by “increasing land use specialization and functional diversification (this is a period of accelerated shopping centre and industrial park development)”. A good early example of this new geography in Kingston was the Kingston Shopping Centre, opened in 1957 (Kingston Historical Society, n.d.) at what was then the periphery of the city.

While urban retail food landscapes do begin to shift around this time, it is important to understand change in food retailing and distribution within a continuum of food system change. In North America’s immediate post-war period, there was incredible innovation with respect to food production itself. New food ingredients, packaging and preservation techniques, dyes, flavour additives, and preservatives were all designed to enhance the shelf life, taste, safety, nutrition, convenience, and affordability (with questionable health and environmental impacts, nevertheless). Belasco (2007) notes, for example, that following the deprivation of the 1930s and 1940s, food marketing and technological innovation saw a ‘golden age’ from 1950 to 1970. Here, marketing-dominated technological advancements of questionable use included “an outburst of genuinely new convenience products incorporating new technologies: e.g., Kool-Aid, TV dinners, salad dressing mixes, toaster pastries, nondairy creamers” (p. 187). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that cost-cutting innovations in food transport, distribution and retailing lag behind these other industry innovations. It necessarily takes time for the urban built form, as well as distribution infrastructure, to catch up to the profound change that occurred throughout the North American food production industry. This further emphasizes the permeability of what we might call a ‘Fordist’ era for retail food capital.
As such, from the second half of the 20th century, major retail franchises continued to expand into Kingston. The spatiality and the built environments of food retail changed over time, although the process is not uniform. Retailers such as Dominion, A&P, and Loblaws barely registered on the retail food landscape (City Directory records suggest there were two in Kingston in 1927, four in 1937, and three in 1946, for example). The Kingston City Directory for 1956 listed four Loblaws, Dominion, and A&P franchises, as well as fifty-seven other retail groceries (excluding butchers, markets, dairies, and bakeries), suggesting that the model of neighbourhood-embedded retailing and shopping patterns still dominated at this time. From 1966 (when the City Directory lists seven retail food franchises, including IGA), the geography of retail food franchises further reflects the modernist aesthetic of strip malls and shopping centres. This pattern continued from the 1970s to the 1990s, when the City Directories reveal shrinking numbers of independent grocers, while older-style neighbourhood grocery stores either closed or were converted into a new phenomenon, the convenience store.

Kingston’s present-day retail food geography is very much a reflection of those trends that came to dominate the urban retail food landscape in the 20th century. As Figure 13 shows, Kingston in 2009 hosted eleven medium- to large-scale grocery stores, including seven freestanding structures and four stores that are connected to shopping centres and strip malls. Many are located on arterial roads, close to other commercially-zoned property. Many are also located on the peripheries of the city and are most
Figure 13: Kingston’s retail food geography, 2009
conveniently accessed with a personal vehicle. Direct-to-the-public wholesaling (such as Costco) operates in Kingston, as well as several independent small-scale stores that persist despite the consolidated retail environment. Corner stores are located throughout the city, including older residential neighbourhoods and main roads in the newer west- and east-end parts of the city. A growing number of traditionally non-food retailers are entering the retail food market in recent years, as one interviewee observes,

I think the North American trend, for sure, we’re getting bigger super markets that more product that isn’t food, we’re seeing department stores like Zellers starting to sell food; we’re seeing the Shopper’s Drugmarts and the Pharma Plus selling food; and it’s sort of a weird mixture between milk and bread and chips and crackers, it’s very hard to understand what they’re thinking. (Interview no. 33)

This includes discount retailer Giant Tiger’s expansion of its food offering, Wal-mart’s recent expansion to a Supercentre format that includes a full grocery component, and a Canadian Tire home and hardware store, which recently introduced a large frozen and packaged food section (Moody, 2009).

**Explaining uneven retail food access as a function of retail food restructuring**

To this point, this chapter has explored the historical evolution of both the spatialization of poverty in Kingston and the city’s retail food geography over time. The former reflects infamous north-south class divide through the enduring work class character of the area as well as the City’s role in concentrating public housing in the North End. The latter can be understood as part of a historical continuum of socio-economic transitions and changing built environments that facilitated the scaling up of capitalist accumulation. Retail food rescaling signifies the ongoing transition of food outlets from use value to exchange value, meaning that in contemporary times they are
rarely sites of embedded trust-based relationships between capitalists, workers and consumers. For the remainder of this chapter, I describe key elements of the present-day retail food industry in Canada and North America, arguing that Kingston’s retail food geography is bound to the logic of capital and is unable to be responsive or flexible to other needs or desires of low-income communities. This disembedding of commercial services and the departure from the more intimate social economy of food retailing changes the meaning of retail food spaces and complicates food access in older inner-city neighbourhoods. This historical approach to housing and food retailing in the North End suggests that the retail food restructuring occurring in Kingston’s North End between 2006 and 2009 can best be understood as a dialectical relationship between the socio-spatial polarization of class and the tendencies of retail food capital.

In recent years, the Canadian food distribution industry—that is, wholesaling, retailing and foodservice—has become more consolidated (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2007). Between 1990 and 2006, the approximate number of food stores in Canada declined by about 10,000 stores, from about 34,000 to about 24,000 (ibid.). This number declined even further to 21,805 stores28 by late 2008 (Condon, 2008). Average annual sales per store increased between 1996 and 2006, from about $1.25 million to over $3 million (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2007), while the total grocery spending in Canada for 2008 was over $78 billion (Condon, 2008). These changes are occurring despite the turmoil that global economic recession and drastic food price inflation had on

28 Canadian Grocer counts corporate chain supermarkets, major banner convenience stores, voluntary group franchise stores and unaffiliated independents in its count (Condon, 2008).
consumer spending in recent years, to which retailers responded through aggressive promotions (ibid.).

While the total number of stores of all varieties is declining, store size (measured by square footage) and sales per square foot of retail space are increasing (Wen, 2001). In the late 1990s, the five largest food retailers in Canada accounted for about 60% of national grocery sales, an increase from 50% a decade earlier (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2007). This fact holds true in 2008, when the market share of chain stores increased (60.3% of total sales, up from 59.8% the previous year) (Condon, 2008). The portion of independent food retailers comprising Canada’s retail food industry declined between 1996 and 2006, from 47% to 39% (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2007), and their market share also declined slightly from 2007 to 2008 (4.5%, down from 4.8%) (Condon, 2008). The five largest retailers in the country are Loblaws, Sobeys, Metro, Canada Safeway and Costco, while Wal-mart is quickly making inroads into this market (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2007).

Consolidation amongst the top retailers in Canada is greater than in countries such as the United States, but less than countries such as Sweden, Germany, France or the United Kingdom, where some of the world’s largest food retailers such as Tesco and Carrefour are headquartered and dominate the retail food landscape. In fact, the consolidation of market share is not unique to North America: as early as 1990, the top

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29 The Market Survey makes the important note that chain stores are defined by four or more stores with the same owner, sorting several successful smaller Canadian chains into the same category as Sobeys, Metro and Loblaws, for example (ibid.).
30 The additional category, voluntary franchises, also declined in market share, from 35.4% to 35.2% from 2007 to 2008 (ibid).
31 For more information on the ‘store wars’ of the 1980s and 1990s and the wave of merger and acquisition activity during this time, see Wrigley (1994).
five British grocery corporations enjoyed as much as 61% of total grocery sales (Wrigley, 1993, cited in Alexander & Pollard, 2000). The retail food industry operates on tight profit margins (2.8% annually), however this is comparable to other sectors in the non-food retail trade (2.1% annually) (ibid.). On the subject of concentration and anti-competition within the retail food industry, Wen (2001) concludes, using benchmarks such as retailing monopoly and buyer monopsony, that “there may be supermarket seller power in highly concentrated local retail markets, but probably not much otherwise” (p. 53), meaning that the sector is still ‘broadly competitive’ even if the retail food geography of local markets such as Canadian cities are dominated by major retailers. Similar results have been reached in US and UK state-led enquiries about grocery retailing competition (Wrigley, 2001). Larue and Bonray (2009) imply that this concentration that characterizes local markets is uneven across the country, since areas such as Ontario are key markets for large retailers and targets for the new Wal-mart Supercentre format (which includes a full-service grocery component), while in Québec the small-scale store/dépanneur model still has much cultural and economic resonance, cutting into the market share dominance of larger retailers.

The retail food landscape of modern-day Canada is largely based on the logic of ‘lean retailing’ model that depends on economies of scale to realize surplus value; it is a retailing model based on high sales volumes, low prices and low operational costs. Because Wal-mart, the world’s largest retailer, has used lean retailing to earn this status and force its retail competitors to change dramatically in order to stay competitive, it is worth exploring Wal-mart in some detail here. Wal-mart pursues an aggressive international expansion program and has, in recent years, entered international retail
markets in Europe, South America and Asia, although this expansion has faced unforeseen challenges and its success far from certain (e.g., Aoyama, 2007; Christopherson, 2007; de Rocha & Dib, 2002; Fernie & Arnold, 2002). Its international expansion and investment objectives are frequently successful because it assumes a cost leadership position. This is facilitated by a strategy that maximizes its corporate dynamism and management capacity: first, Wal-mart maintains hard control over factor inputs such as labour and supplier firms. This allows the company to reduce product cost, time-to-market and inventory storage costs. Second, Wal-mart undertakes measures to maintain its ability to react rapidly and autonomously to changing market conditions (Christopherson, 2007). Wal-mart entered the food retailing sector in North America in the 1990s, most notably through its new Supercentre format featuring typically 44% food-related merchandising. By the end of the decade, Wal-mart had over $40 billion in ‘supermarket-type’ sales and was the US’s second largest food retailer (Wrigley, 2001). Wrigley (2001) explains that following the need to avert a crisis of saturation, Wal-mart found new avenues of accumulation in the Supercentre format, whereby the company faced by the late 1980s a future of increasingly saturated markets in the United States for the continued expansion of its traditional discount store format. In response, it began to experiment with a potential new growth vehicle, the 180,000 sq ft “supercenter” – a format pioneered in the 1980s […] in which about one-quarter of the floor space of the store is devoted to food and food-related merchandise, generating a little over 40% of the store’s sales. The economic logic of the supercenter format for Wal-mart rested on the increased frequency of consumer visits (relative to the traditional Wal-Mart general merchandise discount store) generated by food, and the potential cross-shopping from food to nonfood… . (p. 499-500)

The sales volumes, market share and buying power that Wal-mart has achieved are testaments to the innovativeness of this pioneer lean retailer. The company’s unique corporate hierarchy, use of facilitative technologies, and ability to attract customers from
wide areas have given it a unique price advantage (Christopherson, 1993, and Graff & Ashton, 1994, as cited in Hallsworth, Taylor, Jones & Muncaster, 1997). The company’s success also alludes to the tremendous transformation this single corporate entity has necessitated for other North American food retailers trying not to lose market share to the retail giant. Indeed, many retailers for this project noted the extent to which Wal-mart has forced their parent companies and the industry more generally to change,

the box stores have to compete with Wal-marts […] everybody’s worried about Wal-mart […] they’ve cost the grocery business a lot; a lot of peoples’ jobs, good paying jobs, like it used to be the big five: Steinberg’s, A&P, Dominion, Loblaws, IGA, and that was it. And every contract [would] come up, we’d all get the same, everybody’d always get raises, the industry was good, you know? We were very competitive; everybody made the same wages for years and years, each chain, same benefits almost […] and Wal-mart started coming in, they started getting rid of people and it was becoming a low paying job, part-time job… they don’t want anybody full-time anymore. (Interview no. 24)

In fact, Wal-mart has come to dominate the discount retailing sector based on its low-price principle and its ability to move successfully into new consumer areas that participants observe that price has become the most important—if not practically the only—basis of competition between food retailers. Food retailers have reacted to Wal-mart’s threat by attempting to compete based on price as well as by horizontally integrating—adding new non-food merchandise (including whole sections devoted to clothing, housewares and pharmacies) to their stores, or seek out new opportunities to diversify into new geographic or commercial markets (Burch & Lawrence, 2007).

Even without the influence of Wal-mart, between the 1970s to the 1990s, the retail food industry began an accelerated path of ‘scaling up’ that would lead to today’s access problems for disadvantaged communities. Retailers participating in this project explained several changes in the retailing industry leading to today’s predominant lean
retailing model. While concentration in capitalist retailing has been theorized using concepts such as vertical integration\textsuperscript{32}, retailers involved in this project noted several interesting trends that led to the gradual ‘scaling up’ of retail through economies of scale. These include minimum volume ordering from manufacturers and new transportation innovations in response to the inflation of the 1970s North American economic crisis:

the business became more complicated, and the fact that the trucks became larger, the goods, the shipments, the quantity of the ship keeps increasing, okay? Like a truck might’ve held 200 cases, then it held 400 cases, you went from, like a one-tonne transport was 24 feet long, then it went 30, then 36 feet, then 42, then 47. Now, a transport’s 53 feet long. So that’s double and a bit, because you need to move the same goods for less money, ‘cause your costs have doubled or tripled or quadrupled to run that same vehicle the same mileage, right? Gasoline’s no longer ten cents a gallon, twenty cents a gallon. So you need to have economies of scale in order to bring your operating costs down. (Interview no. 15)

There was ongoing consolidation within the food industry, but what we were seeing was, quite simply, to sell to larger and larger clients; this was before box stores or anything like that. Clearly, you could see the trend was there; they would rather ship 10,000 cases of one customer than 1,000 to 100 customers. It’s just the nature of food distribution. I think it relates to the costs of shipping, fuel, labour, trucks, handling… and the bottom line is, it just became obvious that you had to change the way you were retailing […] Everything today in retail is you either have to go through large wholesalers, or if you’re going to deal directly with a manufacturer, you’re dealing with a manufacturer on a much larger scale. I think the world’s just become more consolidated. Others would argue that it’s more cost-efficient, because instead of shipping to smaller retail stores like they used to do, they just ship to large warehouses, so if you want to purchase Campbell’s soup, you have to go to a wholesaler like a Loeb or a National Grocers which is owned, of course, by Loblaws, you’d have to buy it through them, they’d make their margins, so there was a lot of centralization in the distribution of food. So that’s certainly affected our ability to compete. ‘Cause as the end of the day, you still want to be competitive. (Interview no. 11)

We might understand the above testimonies as evidence of spatial or scalar fixes to a crisis that struck the grocery retailing industry just as the broader model of Fordist accumulation began to decline in North America in the 1970s. While this was uneven, it

\textsuperscript{32} See Boothman (2009) for a brief review of theoretical approaches to vertical marketing and integration.
is important to be aware that the Fordist phase of retail food capitalism takes on many principles of Fordist production, including Taylorist labour practices, wage labour, industrial mass production of consumer goods, standardized labour conditions, advances in technology and productivity, and the linking of incomes with productivity (Esser & Hirsch, 1994). While the relationship is far from perfect, it is clear that by the 1970s, retail food capital faced a crisis of unsustainably high costs; the labour-intensive, high-cost, high-wage model of grocery retailing that dominated until that point could no longer be sustained and became subject to penetration by the low-cost retailing model.

The model that emerged between the 1970s and 1990s reflects an uneasy mixture of Fordist and post-Fordist elements. The new grocery retailing model reflects Fordist logistics of vertical integration, mass production and economies of scale as the means of achieving cost savings. A post-Fordist logic co-exists, however, and is evident in lower service levels and a new low-cost, low-skill organization of wage labour, seen in depressed labour costs and industry de-unionization. New corporate priorities and the new retail geography noted by Wrigley and Lowe (1996) dominate in this increasingly competitive retail food environment, impacting the spatiality of the urban retail food environment in ways that I explore in the following section. Moreover, the food retailing industry can be characterized by a mixture of ‘Fordist’ large-scale, highly integrated major food retailers and many small-scale, independent food retailers that focus on niche and specialty markets (Donald, 2009) that have more resonance with flexible production, outlined earlier in Table 3.

Vertical integration is an important element strategy employed by Canada’s major food retailers to enhance their market share and control over the supply chain. Store
brands (or private labels) are “commodity lines that are packaged with a label that either has the name of the retailer in place of a brand manufacturer or has a supermarket-inspired generic term” (Burch & Larence 2007, p. 104); Loblaw’s President’s Choice line is a well-known example. Store brands are a good strategy for achieving vertical integration because they allow retailers increased control over their supply without assuming managerial authority. They offer higher profit margins in a sector that now operates on low margins, and by giving prime shelf space to their own brands, retailers can also create a market for shelf space by charging brand manufacturers ‘sloting fees’ to occupy this key eye-level space in grocery aisles (Burch & Lawrence 2005, 2007). As one retailer suggests, the benefits of own-brands are obvious,

now these chain stores want to sell President’s Choice ‘cause there’s more money in it, there’s more profit in your own brands, so. They don’t have a lot of room throughout the stores, President’s Choice is always at eye-level. Master’s Choice, eye level, because that’s what they want you to buy, because that’s where their highest margins are. (Interview no. 24)

Overall, this trend grants the retail capitalist greater ability to innovate, control production and distribution, and absorb and depress costs associated with these production phases and eliminate the need for bargaining with other corporate entities.

There are several other benefits for major retailers who have capitalized on the store brand. It functions as a strategy to maintain consumer loyalty through quality associations, and allows retailers to grow their market share when facing stiff competition from other major retailers. Lastly, it facilitates horizontal integration by helping food retailers to diversify into new non-food sectors, finding new opportunities for profit (Alexander & Pollard, 2000). Private labeling has grown in Canada, to the extent that private label sales represent no less than 20% of the total sales of major Canadian
retailers. Sales of President’s Choice represented more than a quarter of Loblaw’s total sales (28%) in 2003 (Agriculture and Agro-Food Canada, 2007, p. 77).

Retail food restructuring in Canada has also meant that store franchisees and managers face continual pressure from corporate headquarters to control their labour costs. As one retailer explains,

One of the things you can control is your labour, that’s one of the things you can control. You gotta have your heat, you gotta have your hydro, your pricing, your taxes, your supplies that come in, something breaks down, you have to budget each month for repairs because stuff breaks down [but] with any business, your number one expense is labour. [...] I have to try to keep my labour about nine, nine and a half percent, ‘cause the figure—and that’s the big figure that I have to supervise, they monitor, you know your labour costs, your sales costs, if you’re sales are going down, you’re in trouble, [corporate management] see[s] that, ‘you gotta cut your labour, try to get your sales to flatten out’. (Interview no. 23)

Depressing labour costs is an essential element of the lean retailing model, and can be understood as an important ‘fix’ to the high-cost grocery model that dominated in Canada until the 1970s. This deskilling and de-unionization are endemic to the retail industry and the lean retailing model, however we can return to Wal-mart once again to see them most clearly. Wal-mart, along with the world’s other large-scale retailers, have been key players in the internationalization of light manufacturing and production for North American markets, meaning the transfer of production functions to low-cost labour in the developing world. In the case of Wal-mart’s store-brand product lines, a significant amount of production occurs in international manufacturing plants, performed by migrant workers. This new low-cost, international division of labour is a reflection of the shift in power from manufacturers to retailers, who “stand at the apex of the world’s supply chains” and are able to exert growing control over the available distribution channels of manufacturers (Appelbaum & Lichtenstein, 2006, p. 111). Moreover, Wal-mart has a
strong record of opposing union activity, and because of its business model, its
subsidiaries perform better in countries with weak labour organization, regulation and
enforcement (Durand & Wrigley, 2009). Wal-mart had, by 2009, closed two of its
Québec stores following employees’ attempts to organize and negotiate union contracts,
and abandoned its expansion into Germany due, in part, to its inability to implement its
strict labour management systems (Christopherson, 2007; Tibbetts, 2009).

For one franchisee, their parent company’s competitive advantage in meat prices
is directly influenced by the company’s depression of labour costs,

> you’re even seeing the small little meat stores are having a hard time now. How
can they touch, for example, I put t-bones on for 4.97, they can’t touch that! […]
Like I don’t have any butchers on site here. All my meat’s cut in Toronto. It
comes in a tote, you open up the bag and put it on the shelf. Butchers make 20, 22
bucks an hour, so look at that added expense for that place if you had a butcher,
you know? I can pay my guys seven, eight, nine bucks an hour to put something
on the shelf, so that’s how we get our better cost to the customer too. (Interview
no. 22)

This downward pressure on labour is an important part of the historical trajectory of food
retail restructuring. Hughes (1999) suggests that entry-level supermarket positions offer
low (even minimum wage) rates of pay in the United States, which is a significant change
from the higher wages traditionally paid within the food retailing industry until the 1970s.
A major shift in labour costs and relations began in the early post-Fordist period in the
United States. This was a time of neoliberal workforce restructuring in response to factors
such as economic instability, increased competition, trade liberalization, continental
integration, new flexible labour force policy, and heightened internationalization of
capital and divisions of labour. As a result of these forces an ‘employers’ offensive’ was
launched against the high costs of labour (Crow & Albo, 2005). In the 1980s, particularly
during economic recession early in the decade, major retailers underwent corporate
restructuring and used the threat of layoffs or closures to gain concessions from unions (ibid.). As a result of the circumstances, corporate retailers introduce two-tiered pay systems that meant lower wages to new employees doing the same work as senior employees. Moreover, part-time work has become more prevalent in the industry (especially in supermarket employment), contributing to declining unionization rates, wages and job security. As Hughes (1999) suggests, there is an important gender dimension to this new division of labour, given that ‘behind the scenes’ retailing elements such as transportation and distribution tend to be labour-intensive, male-dominated and remain more highly unionized. Meanwhile, ‘front line’ customer service work in employment settings such as supermarkets is dominated by women and young people (e.g., Statistics Canada, 2010c) and this is where wages, unionization and job security are lower (e.g., Bernhardt, 1999).

The accelerating pace of technological and managerial systems change—broadly defined—has further contributed to the industry’s rescaling and is an essentially Fordist element of the lean retailing model. Something as simple as the proliferation of electronic mail (e-mail) as the most common means of corporate communication was consistently noted in retailers’ interviews as a profound change in companies’ adoption of new technologies. New management systems and technologies have also changed the relationship between corporate headquarters and franchise owners. One retailer suggests that, in process of constantly adopting new industry-level technologies to remain competitive, management has become more controlling in the incremental decisions.

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33 As recently as 2003, Loblaw’s demanded and achieved concessions from the United Food and Commercial Workers, in response to pressure felt from Wal-mart’s growth in the food retailing sector in Canada. UFCW leadership agreed to the concessions and presented the changed to members as a done deal (Crow & Albo, 2005).
involved in the daily running of a franchise. They have also become more insistent about expectations of earnings. One franchise owner notes that

Like one time, you took a franchise, away you went, follow the program, no big deal. But now, that’s all changed because of different criteria they want, programs to follow, planograms… it’s just the way the business has changed, there’s more pressure on everybody to, you know, have a bottom line, or, you know, it’s changed a lot since, like, I guess we got involved in the early ‘90s. (Interview no. 23)

We might understand this observation in light of management practices that have increased the pace and efficiency of the retailing process. Food retailers have been key drivers of technologies that increase efficiency and minimize waste, achieving the economies of scale already discussed as essential to the large-scale retailing model. In their review of union disputes in the grocery industry, Lund and Wright (2002) review of management practices such as just-in-time production and supply chain management, which are designed to eliminate waste and inefficiency throughout the operational process. Supply chain management aims to develop closer, longer-term supplier relations, and focuses broadly on entire-enterprise efficiency through the integration of manufacturing, distribution and retailing functions. New information technologies are more streamlined to respond quickly to inventory needs and customer demands. This system, however, with its increased interconnectedness, is also more vulnerable to collapse due to work stoppages and other disruptions.

Further, Kumar (2008) provides an extensive review of recent technologies at use in the food retailing industry aimed at increasing efficiency and responsiveness in an era where food retailers face challenges of intense competition, limited market growth, economic instability, and changing customer demographics (not to mention fundamental challenges around the perishability of food in a globalized food system). New
technologies fall within the framework of efficient consumer response (ECR) standards, which takes the approach that the customer is the driving force of the retailing system, and aims to eliminate inefficiencies at every level of the supply chain. The world’s largest food retailers have implemented many logistical enhancements that fall within the ECR approach, including new distribution arrangements between suppliers and supermarkets, computized ordering systems that track the thousands of SKUs in each store, reverse logistics systems to return slow-moving, damaged or expired goods to suppliers, wireless data collection technology to facilitate inventory management, and new transportation and storage technologies. The adoption of these and other technologies suggest the persistence of the imperative of efficiency that is characteristic of the Fordist production model in this industry, including centralized control over incremental elements of production, the application of scientific production and management principles, and extensive organizational hierarchies. These management systems facilitate economies of scale through their creation of uniform and standardized operating procedures, as well as greater control and predictability throughout the production, distribution and retailing processes.

Lastly, the rescaling of the retail food industry in North America has fuelled—and been fuelled by—the increasing role of fictitious financial capital in everyday commercial transactions. In particular, there has been a slow transition in the increased social acceptability of using credit cards to pay for food purchases. Anecdotally, retailers and other interviewees noted that, for example,

you’d find years ago, you didn’t use your credit card, I never thought I’d see people use their credit card [to buy food], but today you use them ‘cause of the rewards and the points and stuff, and we’ve seen credit cards just skyrocket the last couple of years. (Interview no. 23)
While at one time cash or cheque were standards means of payment at groceries, the variety of payment methods available has widened to include debit card or credit card—a change fuelled by major food retailers, who were early adopters of debit card technologies (Klee, 2008). Today, major retailers often offer financial services such as store-based debit cards in partnership with major financial institutions (Alexander & Pollard, 2000). While a study of American grocery payment methods suggests that cash, cheques and debit cards are all more popular payment methods (Klee, 2008), the same may not be true for Canadian retail more generally: a 2006 survey of retail merchants by the Bank of Canada suggests credit cards payment is a costly but necessary offering for Canadian retailers (see Table 7).

Table 7: Profile of methods of payment for general retail merchants, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Payment method and related data</th>
<th>Cash</th>
<th>Debit card</th>
<th>Credit card</th>
<th>Cheque</th>
<th>Store-value card</th>
<th>Private label credit card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents that accept this payment method</td>
<td>99.6%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment method as a % of revenue</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents who prefer customers to use this payment method (2% have no preference)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who rate this payment method as “not at all costly”</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average transaction value by payment method</td>
<td>$35</td>
<td>$47</td>
<td>$63</td>
<td>$106</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bank of Canada, 2006

Most notably, 92% of retailers accept credit cards as a method of payment and an estimated 31% of revenue comes from credit card payments, however they are not a
preferred or inexpensive means of payment for retailers; only 5% of respondents list this as their preferred method of payment, and only 3% suggest that it is not at all a costly method of payment. This new reality suggests that credit card companies—and the food retailers working in partnership with them—have changed national attitudes around money, credit, debt and payment for essential services. The poor face a double-threat due to this situation: people living with low-income may find credit cards easier to acquire (and more attractive due to incentive programs and their growing social acceptability) and helpful when they are lacking cash at a certain point in the month, however interest charges may become insurmountable and cause financial turmoil for a household (e.g., Bird, Hagstrom & Wild, 1999).

Moreover, the fee systems of credit card companies privilege larger corporate actors while marginalizing smaller retailers. Interviewees for this project are keenly aware of the differential pricing that credit card companies offer for different types of grocery retailers and the preferential fees that large-scale retailers are able to negotiate because of their sales volumes,

Visa, Mastercard, our fees are minimal compared to what other businesses pay. That’s all cost that we get as a franchisee, which helps a business, but the smaller guy, he’s not gonna get the breaks that I got […] you’re using Visa and Mastercard, it’s a certain percentage, where I’m a quarter of that, a tenth of that. (Interview no. 23)

This situation of preferential fees for the world’s largest retailers speaks to their incredible bargaining and purchasing power, while presenting another consequence for small-scale retailers operating on a service-intensive business model than a corporatized, lean retailing model. Finally, it alludes to credit card companies’ more recent innovations to normalize the use of credit for everyday purchases.
Consequences of the new retail food geography in Canada

The previous section described several elements of the concentration and rescaling that has occurred in the Canadian food retail industry. Much of this change took place from the 1970s on, as a ‘scalar fix’ to the high-cost, decentralized model of food retailing that dominated the Canadian commercial landscape. In an era of major economic recession, growing competitiveness, and consolidation, this model became unsustainable for capital. Changes in food retailing are best characterized by a hybrid of Fordist and post-Fordist business logics: on the one hand, large-scale capitalist retail firms gain cost savings through the adoption of more efficient and standardized technologies and economies of scale throughout the production, distribution, and sales processes. Nevertheless, the industry has abandoned the Fordist wage relation in its drive for a de-unionized, unskilled and poorly-paid front line workforce in its stores. The retail food industry no longer maintains the elements of the ‘social economy’ model that improved households’ financial and physical access to food even into the 1950s and 1960s. In the final section of this chapter, I argue that the contemporary urban built environment that encompasses retail food enterprise reflects the successful accumulation strategies of retail capital and the necessary spatial fixes to avert crisis and sustain accumulation. It becomes increasingly evident why the ‘food desert’ problem has emerged in this unique era of land use and urban planning laws, scaled-up retail food capital, unique geography of store locations and consolidated environment that threatens small-scale retail competition. The unevenness of the new urban retail food geography illustrates the ways that capital reproduces class-based disadvantage and reshapes social
reproduction patterns through its manipulation of the built environment. This uneven urban retail food access, I argue, is what deserves scholarly attention through a social justice lens.

**Locational decision-making and large-scale retail**

While previous sections detailed the small-scale of the built environment needed to accommodate pre-industrial food retailing (market stalls, small shops and neighbourhood homes, for example), retail capital requires a distinctly different built environment to function following the rescaling and restructuring of the industry. Canadian downtowns—once commercial, employment, social and cultural centres that accommodated the smaller scale of food and other retailing (Hernandez & Jones, 2005)—often cannot accommodate new larger store formats due to lack of available and low-cost land. In their discussion of new store formats, Jones and Doucet (2000) introduce the idea of ‘big box’ or ‘category killer’ retail in the Canadian context, that is, large-format retailers whose stores typically range from 20,000 to 150,000 square feet in size. Retailers in this category use information and management technologies to achieve high sales volumes despite low product prices and margins, and are fundamentally altering the Canadian retail landscape.

Based on their study of ‘big box’ retail in the Greater Toronto Area, Jones and Doucet note that large-format retailing began in the food sector from at least the early 1970s, which is also the case in Kingston based on archival data. In fact, 73.9% of large-format food stores in the GTA in this study were built before 1990. The average size of these earlier stores is 61,000 square feet, while new stores built after the 1990s economic
recession period are an average size of 74,250 square feet, supporting the earlier assertion that store sizes have increased with time (ibid.).

Locational decision-making has had an important and changing role for retailers over time. It was once considered an intuitive ‘art’ before developing into a sophisticated science to support new stores expansion and, in today’s business climate, the optimizing of current locations (Hernandez & Bennison, 2000). Locational decisions are not to be taken lightly, as they represent a major long-term capital investment for a firm (Hernandez, Bennison & Cornelius, 1998). Hernandez and Bennison (2000) note that retailers use a variety of statistical analysis and modeling techniques, as well as more subjective practices, to weigh the merits of many types of locational decisions. These can include options to open, close or relocate stores, renovate or re-image store interiors or exteriors, or re-merchandise with new product ranges. Locational decision-making and management ranges from macro- to micro-level, including store establishment and maintenance (see Table 8).

The geography of urban food retailing that has emerged in this era of scientific locational management and industry rescaling follows a distinct pattern of large-scale built environments on lower-cost, peripheral/suburban greenfield land with close proximity to major transportation routes. As one interviewee from a retail development corporation explains,
Table 8: Retail locational planning and decision-making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paternal environment</th>
<th>Decision making</th>
<th>Location management</th>
<th>Property portfolio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Corporate and marketing strategy</td>
<td>Aggregate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meso</td>
<td>Monadic</td>
<td>Location strategy</td>
<td>Spatial extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>Tactical</td>
<td>Locational positioning</td>
<td>Mkt penetration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Location strategy**
  - Location mix
    - Roll-out/extension
    - Relocate
    - Rationalize
  - Refascia
  - Refurbish
  - Remarchandise

- **Local marketing**

Adapted from Hernandez, Bennison & Cornelius, 1998

Typically what we own is this sort of suburban, enclosed mall, and new development, typically, is edge-of-town, fringe, suburban development. And there are a few reasons for that. One is where the available land is, available and affordable land. City centre land tends to be at a premium both in terms of how much space there actually is that’s up for grabs, and how much it costs, both in terms of initial purchase and the tax impact over the years. So, in general, probably the bulk of shopping centre and retail complex development is suburban (Interview no. 27).

Moreover, the lean retailing model, with its emphasis on low input costs, is best served by designing and building new stores with low costs in mind. This means that store designs are easily identified and replicated in new markets with minimal deviance from the carefully-planned exteriors and interiors. It also means that new stores can be quickly and easily assembled or disassembled, while the companies face little cost of leaving their buildings unoccupied if necessary\(^34\). The capacity for retailers to undergo these plans ultimately depends on the broader regulatory environment (Christopherson, 2007).

\(^34\) Examples of the growing problem of abandoned or vacant large-format retail stores (‘dark stores’) endemic to lean retailers are available at www.newrules.org/retail
**Inner city blight and vacant stores**

Writer and food activist Mark Winne (2008) explains that the industrialized retail food system creates and perpetuates a spatial logic in which it is unjustifiable, irrational, if not nearly impossible for major retailers to sustain accumulation through a strategy that targets inner cities or older urban areas:

the operating expenses of inner-city supermarkets, including rent, insurance, and security, are higher than those of non-inner-city stores […] they have moved to a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach to new store development. For efficiency’s sake, they need to build larger stores that all look alike and are configured in the same way. This means the oddball-size stores that used to exist in inner-city locations, with one small loading dock that could not accommodate an eighteen-wheeler, do not fit the future for corporate expansion. Since densely built urban areas do not have sufficient land to accommodate the larger stores, which need huge parking lots and ample turning space for large trucks, new stores are rarely built in cities. (p. 88)

Due to the extensive criteria required to accommodate large-scale retailing, there is little hope that large-scale retailers can fill the voids that are plaguing low-income communities in cities of all sizes. In fact, in the United Kingdom it is only since several government policy statements and planning guidelines (such as the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance [PPG] series) were issued that large-scale retailers such as Tesco have begun to experiment with new formats in low-income neighbourhoods or with social inclusion mandates (Guy & Bennison, 2007; Wrigley, Guy & Lowe, 2002).

Further to this dilemma, major grocery retailers, to sustain their market share, may maintain proprietorship of older, vacant property and stores in a community rather than sell them to a would-be competitor. In the case of the former Grant’s No Frills store in Kingston, participants at public meetings—dealing with incomplete information—had
many discussions speculating that Loblaw’s may hold onto the land for as long as necessary until a non-rival buyer could be found,

Since April we’ve been trying to track down Loblaw’s […]. There was rumours, but really nothing to go on. And their approach was—and it’s important to know who you’re dealing with—[…] was that ‘we’re not gonna tell you. We’re not gonna tell you what we’re doing. We don’t have to, and we won’t.’ So, nevertheless, it was very heartening to see people respond to the first meeting which was called. So, at this moment, KEDCO is monitoring the situation, by being in touch with the real estate community. And we do know there’s corporate interest on a couple of fronts. I can’t get more specific than that. But that is the situation. I still think that we have an important thing to do here in the community, because we wanna lean on the city, and basically what the city can do is lean on Loblaw’s, so perhaps we can modify the covenant, that’s gonna be in there. A lot of people don’t realize that, but usually what they have is a covenant, which says ‘you cannot sell this to another food store for the next five years’ or whatever. And we would like to see that weakened. Or removed. So we want to try to persuade them to do that. (January 8, 2010)

Moreover, one retailer interviewee used an example from a nearby city to illustrate the corporate rationale of this strategy,

And that old store’s still empty, eh? And [parent company] owns it. So that shows you they can sit on property for a long time. ‘Cause they won’t let another grocery store go in there, they’ll only sell it to someone else, like a carpet place, you know what I mean? They won’t even sell it to a drug store.

Interviewer: Even though they’ve got their well-established [new large-scale store] that’s obviously popular.

Oh sure. Well think about it, if a new store went down there, they’d probably do a hundred thousand a week, there’s a hundred thousand they won’t do up the street, so that’s the way it works, you know […] Because again, no companies are that dumb, like, you know what I mean? (Interview no. 22)

With their tremendous amount of financial backing, it is of little consequence to major retailers to let one piece of property sit, unproductively, for as long as necessary. Not wanting to assume any more costs than necessary, parent companies will close stores where the company is essentially competing with itself. Uneven geography of access, then, emerges as a product of the lean, low-cost model of retailing predicated on
economies of scale—namely, fewer, larger stores located away from residential areas.

Moreover, capital’s inherent tendency to concentrate is apparent in the consolidated food retail industry in Canada; in response, individual capitalist entities take liberties with the built urban environment given the fierce competition for market share.

**Restrictive covenants and legislative protections**

Retail capital is also able to use legislative tools at its disposal to reshape the retail food landscape, creating further uneven retail food access in urban areas. Restrictive covenants have received some local and national media attention in cities such as Edmonton and Vancouver (Cameron & Chong, 2008; City of Vancouver, 1998) because major grocery retailers can, and do, restrict future land use for a property they are selling. In other words, a food retailer such as Sobeys or Loblaw’s can prevent rival food retailers from buying and using the property for new food retail. This strategy is important for retailers to maintain their customer base in a certain geographic area, however the barring of new competition in an area—for years, if not decades—can be emotionally and practically devastating for communities of lay people, as I show in Chapter Five.

Nevertheless, their use is rationalized in commercial real estate as a legislative tool to ensure to regulate free market competition. As one interviewee argues,

> what [a restrictive covenant] can stop is the flooding of excess businesses in a market. If you went downtown and there was a fast food restaurant on every single corner, you’d be thrown off by that. Same thing, if you went to a neighbourhood where there was six different grocery stores to choose from, all six are going to do a little bit of business, or two or three that do the right amount of business, that’s what keeps the economy flowing properly. So from that perspective, that’s the reasoning behind it, that’s why it can’t be overturned. ‘Cause it’s a big circle, it’s a big cycle, right? So when they do that, if they decide to eliminate the chances of someone else coming in and doing the same thing, it’s not necessarily to squash all business—although the media will paint it that way—and myself, working in this business, we can understand it as that way too
sometimes, but also at the same time, that’s essentially what is built in too, it’s simple economics, really. (Interview no. 26)

The dangers not addressed in this explanation, of course, are that restrictive covenants can be enacted regardless of the needs or wishes or the surrounding community; similarly, they can be applied indiscriminately to essential commercial land use such as food retail. In the case of the Loblaw Corporation’s closure of the Bagot Street location of Grant’s No Frills, interviewees were certain that, should the company sell the Bagot Street property, it will enact a restrictive covenant preventing new food retail, to enhance the likelihood that nearby residents will adjust their shopping habits and travel further to the new large-format Grant’s No Frills,

the people around that [old No Frills] area who are the ones most affected by it, they’ll hate No Frills [for closing]. But No Frills knows, if No Frills opened up a place anywhere in that area again, they know almost for certainty that people would shop there. So there’s nothing lost, you know what I mean? (Interview no. 32)

In addition to single instruments, interviewees suggested that legislative frameworks operating at multiple scales serve the needs of capital,

Interesting that the land-use planning framework that we have in Ontario has made it very, very clear that municipalities like the city of Kingston cannot dabble in influencing the free market dynamic of the commercial sector. We can do it only insofar as something may affect the ‘planned function’ of a commercial area. […] The OMB [Ontario Municipal Board] has told us repeatedly ‘that is not your role to worry about that. That is the dynamic of the free market system, and there will be losers and winners, so long as at the end of the day, we have a healthy downtown, we don’t care whether—‘care’—we cannot concern ourselves from a policy perspective about whether or not S&R exists or not, because of something opening up somewhere else’. (Interview no. 37)

Here, a City of Kingston employee notes that various regulatory bodies that govern urban and land use planning in the province of Ontario inherently prioritize free market dynamics. This would suggest that the ‘urbanization of capital’, as Harvey (1985) has
discussed, is legitimized and institutionalized at many points throughout the regulatory/legislative environment. Moreover, scholars such as Mitchell (2003; Staehli, Mitchell & Gibson, 2000) and Blomley (2004a, 2004b; Blomley & Pratt, 2001) would argue that urban planning and politics internalize a specific understanding of rights that protects the idea of ‘property’ and property ownership. Rights are often uncertain, contested, and subject to struggle between urban actors. They are also, however, very effective tools to uphold and legitimize the rights of individual property owners while generating landscapes of poor access. As such, they manage and regulate the social relations embodied in a place (Mitchell & Staehli, 2005) or, as I have argued, prioritize exchange value at the expense of use value—the intangible social values or meanings that a community attaches to a place.

**Predatory behaviour and threats to small-scale retail**

Small-scale and independent retailers occupy an awkward space in this new retail food geography. While earlier data suggested that the number of these retailers in Canada is declining, those who survive are doing so by providing a niche market that major retailers cannot profitably capture. For retailers participating in this project, the key to survival is to compete based on customer service (which large retailers do poorly) rather than price (where large retailers dominate). This leaves these niche retailers in a more precarious position, given that the new world of lean retailing operates so fundamentally on price advantage, selection, and volume. Small retailers recognize that low-income areas such as Rideau Heights in North Kingston are a challenge to service, because they
may have the right density of people but not the income needed to sustain their service-based business model. As one retailer explains,

[low-income community’s] the kind of setting I don’t think you’d ever see working for [our business model]. The reason being, it’s the type of buying, it’s the product purchase, and I think to some extent, those stores do exist now, because as an example there’s a real hierarchy in grocery stores, in supermarkets, okay? You don’t normally see a No Frills in the middle of a subdivision, but you see a Loeb’s. So the No Frills kind of idea is really geared to low-cost and low service. So as I said, they do exist now, but that kind of store can’t survive without volume. It needs the volume. It needs to sell a thousand loaves of bread in a day, not ten. (Interview no. 20)

Conversely, this retailer’s store is based on higher margins and lower sales volumes, a combination that cannot function in an area of concentrated poverty, and cannot compete with a low-cost, large-format. The dilemma of servicing low-income neighbourhoods becomes more apparent in this current socio-economic climate: as retail capital has consolidated and adopted a low-cost ‘fix’, socio-spatial polarization and contempt for the poor has also increased, as I show in Chapter Six. This collision creates a two-fold disadvantage for low-income communities.

In fact, small-scale and independent retailers have a paradoxical relationship with the retail food giants, as they are simultaneously under threat due to their inherently predatory behaviour and contributing to their success, as they frequently use their wholesale operations to stock their own stores. While numerous independent grocery and convenience store owners noted that they purchase inventory from retailer-owned wholesale-to-public stores such as National Grocers and Costco, these stores’ parent

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35 In fact, many small-scale retailers who have survived or thrived during this period of retail consolidation are doing so through the sale of valued-added products, including high-end specialty foods, organics, fair trade, locally-produced goods and other niche markets (i.e., Donald, 2009; Donald & Blay-Palmer, 2006). In this case, these retailers’ inventories have little resemblance to the affordable, basic foods that are needed in underserved, low-income areas.
companies inherently seek to eliminate their competition (as well as other intermediary actors). One retailer provides an example of how this process might work,

very often those big chain stores have guarantees of shipment, so if there’s a shipment of product, you [the wholesaler] actually have to pay a penalty if you don’t deliver. So to avoid paying the penalty, they will shorten all their little customers, right? Instead of paying a penalty for not delivering to Loblaws, they will not bring it to us, because they know we can’t force them to pay a penalty. And they destroy that market. And instead of having, you know, a bit of mixture of the big stores and little stores, they screw all the little stores, destroy that market, and then [customers] are completely dependent on the big stores. And of course the big stores know that, and the big stores will milk them until the point where they go bankrupt. And then they take the next one.

Interviewer: So it’s not even a process of buying them up.

Why would they bother? It’s much better if you ruin them [laughter]. You don’t make any money buying them up, it’s much more profitable to ruin them. It makes sense, doesn’t it? (Interview no. 17)

Once again, this anecdote suggests that large-scale retailers, in their drive for ever-increasing efficiency, use many tactics that increase their power and control over the food system. Aside from vertically integrating manufacturing and distribution functions as discussed earlier, large retailers—with their enormous buying power—are also able to use the wholesaling process to eliminate small business competition. Over the long term, this may even affect the wholesaling industry as the number and diversity of their clients shrinks and an ever-larger share of business comes from more demanding large-scale clients. This changing wholesaler-retailer relationship, then, is affecting the broader regional and national-scale geographies of food wholesaling and distribution, for affiliated and unaffiliated food retailers alike. (Larue & Bonroy, 2009)

At the same time, innovative unaffiliated retailer-entrepreneurs are under constant threat of appropriation by retail capital. One business educator notes, for example, that
[grocery chains]’ll make business choices and investment based on what they expect consumers to do in the future. And if they see consumer trends moving in this direction, they’ll follow it, is what they’ll do. They have to, or they’ll die! And the grocery chains, I mean, a Loblaws or any of those places, what they’ll do is they’ll let companies start up, the smaller neighbourhood shop or whatever, and they’ll watch it. Keep watchin’ it, and then if it becomes a big enough threat to them, they’ll try to buy it. (Interview no. 32)

Retail capital’s need to seek out new markets and constantly innovate to remain competitive and profitable puts marginal, independent retailers in peril of being subsumed once they begin to show profitability and represent a new, untapped market. Like the previous points about restrictive covenants, holding onto old, vacant stores, and putting smaller competitors out of business, this tactic calls into the question the hope that large- and (low-cost) small-scale retail models might co-exist in a competitive environment. It also illustrates that geography matters to individual retail capitalists in their drive to accumulate greater profits and market share, because peoples’ movements and behaviours with respect to food shopping are ultimately bounded by distance. The ability to control and manipulate the built retail food environment, then, is a critical spatial strategy of capital.

Lastly, ‘power centre’ retailing formats create uneven retail food access in cities, and are now the most popular form of new commercial development in Canada and the United States (i.e., Jones & Doucet, 2000). One interviewee in the commercial real estate sector suggested that power centre development and management companies purposefully recruit retail tenants with national-level reputation and financial backing to

36 It should be noted that some retailers such as Dollarama (www.dollarama.com) are attempting to fill underserved market with accessible, affordable food. The problem, however, is that Dollarama and other similar companies offer little or no fresh food; rather, they sell highly processed food designed for low cost and long shelf life. As I discussed in earlier chapters, this example highlights the problem of defining food deserts purely in terms of physical distance and ‘giving them a store’.
create a ‘complementary’ and ‘synergistic’ shopping experience for customers. They explain, for example, that

you’re looking at a mix that’s gonna create a centre that will draw from the broadest possible cross section of potential customers. And within that centre, there’s synergy between and among the tenants in that if you’ve got three or four strong retailers in that property, that, say, sell housewares and house furnishing things, you can complement that with other retailers who, their customers will cross shop between those kinds of retail, it becomes a kind of destination for a certain type of shopping. [...] So while you’re there you’ve got comparison shopping because you’ve got three or four of the same type of merchandise, and you’ve got complimentary shopping. (Interview no. 27)

Like the higher costs of credit card payment options that smaller businesses must bear, it may be difficult for independent or small-scale retailers to fit within the power centre model that is now so dominant in the new retail environment. Real estate brokers participating in this project explained that real estate companies who develop and lease power centre-type recruit, rent, and build specifically to the needs of retail national-level dependability, recognizability and reputation. This maximizes the likelihood of success for the tenant and the landlord. While neglecting potential tenants without the same ‘national covenant’ of chain companies, the power centre retail format also has the effect of rendering the retail landscape more monotonous, as the lean retailing format discussed earlier depends on ‘cookie cutter’ built structures that are recognizable, easily built and replicated across different markets (Interview no. 26). While it is true that landlords of other retail formats might be more amenable to tenants without this backing, small-scale and independent grocers have a disadvantage in a real estate environment that seems to privilege those corporate entities—especially as older, downtown-type infrastructure continues to age and power centre retailing becomes more popular, numerous, and convenient (Hernandez & Jones, 2005).
**Conclusion: The political economy of poor retail food access and retail food restructuring**

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide greater context to the 2006 and 2009 grocery store closures in Kingston’s North End by exploring the histories of the city’s class segregation as well as the restructuring of the retail food sector in North America. This is in an effort to answer the first research question of this thesis project, ‘how is Kingston’s changing retail food geography creating uneven retail food access for class-segregated communities?’

To answer this question, I first explored the history of how North Kingston’s Rideau Heights and Near North End communities that have constituted the ‘wrong side of the tracks’. This persistent reputation is partly explained by the stricter-than-average class divide that has existed throughout Kingston’s history, as well as the industrial, blue collar character of these communities in the pre-industrial and industrial eras. Rideau Heights, in particular, has been the subject of tremendous stigma, from its time as a cluster of substandard housing in the 1950s to its redevelopment as the setting for most of Kingston’s low-income and subsidized housing the 1960s, to its present-day cyclical poverty and lack of visibility or commercial vitality.

Following this brief history of the North End, I then illustrated how that Kingston’s retail food geography has changed drastically over time. It slowly evolved from a highly decentralized, neighbourhood-embedded pre-industrial model to a model that reflected the growing consolidation, standardization and industrialization occurring in many North American industries. The post-war retail food geography is notable for the growing importance of scientific urban planning and land use zoning that separated
residential from commercial uses, as well as the slow decline of the small neighbourhood store and its replacement with chain stores such as A&P, Loblaw’s, and Dominion. This transition lagged behind other sectoral change in food production innovation, and the built environment only began to reflect the up-scaling of retail food capital in the 1970s. Kingston’s contemporary retail food geography reflects the continuing consolidation of the industry; stores have grown bigger in size and scope of inventory while shrinking in number. Where there is sufficient population and income, small-scale retail persists, as well as direct-to-public wholesaling and discount retailers entering the food market.

In the second half of the chapter, I drew connections between the restructuring of the industry and the distinct spatial logic that enables the new lost-cost, high-volume, lean retail model while disadvantaging low-income, class-segregated communities. I suggested that major food retailers have adopted the lean retailing model as a ‘fix’ to the crisis of Fordist-style production with its high costs. The new model is a mix of Fordist (economies of scale, efficiency gains through technical and managerial improvements, vertical integration, and standardized operating procedures to maximize predictability throughout the system) and post-Fordist (depressed labour costs, deunionization and deskill, especially of frontline service workers) elements that illustrate the need for caution in assuming clean breaks between the Fordist and post-Fordist regimes of accumulation.

Because of increasing competition amongst major food retailers in Canada and the dominance of the low-cost retailing model, the retail food industry has come to embody a specific spatial logic. This new spatial logic took time to develop in cities, as change in distribution and retailing systems lagged behind fundamental mid-century
change in food production and innovation. Economies of scale can only be achieved by establishing retail operations on increasingly large properties that can accommodate large stores, large delivery trucks, large parking lots and room for future store expansions. As such, locational decision-making has become a complex science, usually looking to inexpensive greenfield locations that are peripheral to urban areas, where personal vehicles are the dominant mode of travel. To enhance their control over an urban retail food geography, major retailers will hold onto old stores or place restrictive covenants preventing new food retail on a piece of sold property, potentially devastating an inner city community’s hope of new food retail opening in its place. The legislative and regulatory environment that enables this predatory and anti-competitive behaviour can be understood as the legitimization of capital’s use of the built urban environment to further the accumulation process. The spatiality of the new retail food geography leaves little hope for small-scale or independent retail to prosper, as they are constantly under threat of elimination or assimilation by large-scale retailers, and have little place in the new power centre retail format. Where they are successful, it is often through serving niche and specialty markets rather than supplying consumers with essential, affordable basics.

Taken together, these socio-economic changes of the growing socio-spatial polarization of the urban poor and the imperatives of advanced capitalist retail help to explain the inevitable changes to the retail food landscape of North Kingston between 2006 and 2009. They provide a clearer sense of capital’s manipulation of urban landscapes and political agendas—through the segregation of people and the restructuring of the commercial built environment—at the expense of retail food access and the use value embedded in retail food spaces. The built environment of Kingston has both
facilitated the accumulation of retail capital in times of economic stability and provided a ‘fix’ to its crisis of accumulation. The result has been an increasingly uneven retail food access for Kingston’s low-income communities. Whereas Kingston’s pre-industrial retail food geography likely facilitated households’ food access through high service levels, delivery, credit, and other measures, the contemporary rescaled food system and its urban built form is reshaping social reproduction by proliferating class-based uneven retail food geographies. In Chapter Five, I explore North Kingston residents’ responses to this unevenness, to gain a greater understanding of the complexity of ‘access’ and the access burdens borne by the poor as a social injustice.
CHAPTER FIVE: POOR RETAIL FOOD ACCESS
AS A SOCIAL INJUSTICE I—COMPOUNDING POOR ACCESS AND MARGINALIZATION

In the previous chapter, I used a political economic critique of the retail food industry in North America to argue that the present-day situation of low-income spatialized communities with poor retail food access can be partly understood as a product of the advanced capitalist tendencies of the retail food industry and related factors such as land and housing development and the marginalization of the poor. This approach helped to answer the first research question of this project, ‘how are the processes of globalized retail food capital creating uneven retail food access for class-segregated communities?’ To understand changing retail food landscapes and spatialized poverty from a social justice perspective, I turn to the second research question, which asks ‘what principle(s) of justice are most helpful to understand this case study as a social injustice?’.

In this chapter, I use social justice concepts outlined in Chapter Two to understand North Kingston’s changing retail food geography from the perspective of its low-income residents. In the first half of this chapter, to gain a better understanding of retail food access’ relationship to other everyday struggles in low-income people’s lives, I explore the testimonials that emerged from North End residents during discussions of grocery store closures, living in poverty, and managing daily challenges. The key finding that emerges from the research material is that ‘access’ in the case of retail food can only be understood as a process that is both geographical and profoundly socio-economic. As I show in the following pages, spatial and socioeconomic factors are virtually inseparable;
poor retail food access results from simultaneous spatial challenges of distance and travel, financial challenges of low income and chronic poverty, and a host of other burdens and prejudices borne by the poor that weakens public concern and government action. This broader sociospatial view of the compounding burdens experienced by the spatialized poor suggests that the unfair and disproportionate distribution of resources, expectations and burdens is at the heart of the food desert problem for residents of Kingston’s North End. As such, this chapter also presents one of three more focused interpretations of the food desert problem as a social injustice—the argument that retail food access disproportionately increases the relative burden of the food acquisition process for those with the fewest financial resources to absorb that burden.

In the second half of this chapter, I confront a difficult conclusion: on the one hand, low-income research participants often value the meanings, interactions, dignity and status attached to ‘average’ shopping experiences in retail food stores such as major grocery chains. On the other hand, however, retail food capital does not—and cannot—operate in a way that reflects non-exchange values. In other words, retail food capital can neither operate profitably in areas of concentrated low income, nor derive financial benefits from the historical, social, or other non-economic values that retail food outlets may hold for class-segregated, low-income communities.

**Understanding food access**

Food has been an important component of human rights work in the 20th and 21st century, including food insecurity issues tackled by international organizations, governments, and scholars. Most recent definitions of food security build on the United
Nations definition from the 1996 World Food Summit, which was endorsed by the Canadian government,

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 1996, para. 1)

Here, the United Nations acknowledges the physical and financial dimensions of access to food, as well as its appropriateness for health and personal preferences. Physical, economic, and cultural appropriateness have also been addressed in public health documents such as that of the Community Nutritionists’ Council of British Columbia (2004, p. 3), who adapt a definition of community food security from Hamm and Bellows (2003), “a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice” (p. 37). Such an approach to food security addresses access in physical terms (through a food system that is community-based), culturally appropriateness (through personal acceptability of food options implying a dignified experience) and a strong foundation of entitlement (by guaranteeing the universality of access).

Social policy and food policy analysts have examined a rights framework with respect to food, which further advances an understanding of access as an issue of proximity, affordability, and dignity. One scholar has suggested that the right to food entails

A condition in which each person can eat food which, by prevailing medical standards, is judged adequate for the full realization of physical and mental health. A person’s diet should also consist of food which satisfies cultural preferences. The food should be obtainable in a manner which is not an affront to the dignity or self-esteem of the person. The process by which the food is made available should be stable and sustainable, thus ensuring continuing access to food of acceptable standards. (Robertson 1990, p. 188, as cited in Riches, 1999)
Similar to the criteria for food security, the right to food entails its increased accessibility through a more sustainable food system as well as stronger social supports at the individual level, speaking to both the food systems and anti-poverty approach discussed by Power (1998).

Recent research suggests that, indeed, a growing portion of the Canadian population may be experiencing income-related issues of food affordability as part of an increasing trend of widening income disparity emerging in Canadian cities. Statistics Canada data released in 2007 show that inequality in after-tax family income increased throughout the 1990s. Between 1989 and 2004 the incomes of the 10% of highest-income families rose by 22%, while the incomes of the 10% of lowest-income families fell by 11%, demonstrating the widening income gap in Canada. The study also proved the decline of the middle class, as the portion of Canadian families that fell within a given ‘middle income’ range fell from 52.1% to 47.3% between 1989 and 2004 (Statistics Canada, 2007). In 2008, 9.4% of Canadians in the ten provinces had after-tax low income as defined by the Low-Income Cut-Off measure, which was a slight increase from the previous year (9.2%) (Statistics Canada, 2010d). This represents some three million Canadians, however, and these data, collected for the 2007 year, does not capture the effects of the 2008-2009 economic recession, because of which unemployment rates remain high (7.4% in June 2010, down from 8.1% in June 2009 [Statistics Canada, 2010e]) and new employment growth is split between full-time and part-time work (e.g., Statistics Canada, 2009b).

Those on the losing end of this growing income inequality have faced further challenges with persistent food price inflation over the past several years. The Canadian
Consumer Price Index indicates that food price inflation for May, 2010 was 0.8%, following a 1.0% increase in April (Statistics Canada, 2010f). This inflation has slowed since more shocking figures from earlier years: in 2008 food contributed increasingly to the overall increase in consumer prices. In the fourth quarter of 2008, the food price index accounted for over 60% of the consumer price index. There was a 3.9% increase in prices for food purchased in stores, including sharp price increases for staples such as bread, rice, flour, milk, and eggs (Statistics Canada, 2008). In the 2007-2008 peak, food purchased from stores rose dramatically in price: The greatest inflation occurred in product categories such as bakery and cereal products (increases of 21%, 34.3% and 38% for bread, macaroni, and flour, respectively), dairy (over 5% increases in milk), and some fruits, vegetables and meats (Statistics Canada, 2010g) lending credence to the participants’ observations about the rising costs of basic staples and healthier foods such as fresh produce. Income pressures, combined with persistent food price inflation, have led to initiatives such as the provincial ‘Put Food in the Budget’ campaign, led by the Social Planning Network of Ontario, to lobby for a $100 healthy food supplement for social assistance recipients to close the gap between the cost of nutritious food and current assistance rates (Poverty Watch Ontario, 2009).

Like the literature on food security, income, and the right to food, much of the health geography literature informing our understanding of the complexity of access understands access to essential services such as health care to be a multidimensional equation that involves questions of geography, economics and suitability. A general and comprehensive definition of access, however, has not always been at the disposal of researchers, as the term is heavily used but at times has been ill-defined or difficult to
operationalize (Penchansky & Thomas, 1981). For example, Penchansky and Thomas (1981) conceptualize access as a set of dimensions—availability, accessibility, accommodation, affordability, and acceptability, while Joseph and Phillips (1984) consider access through dimensions of locational accessibility and effective accessibility. Similarly, Rosenberg (1983) considers economic access and physical access as important dimensions of access. According to Field & Briggs (2001), access to essential services such as health services can be influenced by a variety of geographic and socioeconomic factors that are reflective of the broader social geography of a population, including employment activity, access to transportation, travel distance and cost, and other factors, indicating a complex geography of access. Lastly, Allard (2004), writing for the Brookings Institute, underscores the importance of the changing urban geography of poverty to the physical accessibility of social services for low-income populations in American metropolitan areas.

There is a certain consensus, then, that access to an essential good is shaped by a multitude of factors. A key question for the purposes of this research, however, is how do we understand the problem of poor retail access to food, which is different from access to any or all food or staple foods in a dire situation? This is important because unlike work by Sen (1982) and others on the issue of famine and chronic hunger in developing countries, retail food access speaks more to individuals being able to acquire food in a way that is a convenient and accepted social norm (speaking to cultural acceptability and dignity), as well as affordable and geographically accessible. This is not to say that ‘retail food’ is somehow materially different from a more general idea of food; rather, the ‘retail’ qualification suggests that food is acquired through particular types of
transactions, built environments, and scales of food inventory and selection. As described in Chapter Four, ‘retail’ necessarily implies a process founded in the idea of market exchange and division of labour rather than other visions of the right to food that focus more heavily on re-establishing basic rights to self-sufficiency and self-determination.\(^{37}\)

As we will see throughout the chapter, retail food access for people living in low-income communities is about acquiring food in the same culturally entrenched manner that ‘average’ people do. It is also about the process being economically feasible, convenient in terms of travel and location, and with minimal barriers to participation in what is often a taken-for-granted type of financial transaction. For the remainder of the chapter, I explore the barriers to retail food access that low-income people identify. These are barriers that speak to low income, spatial segregation and Canadian society’s many covert discriminatory practices around poverty and class divisions. As such, they represent—and contribute to—a continuous process, whereby poor retail food access and its associated burdens are reproduced in low-income, class-segregated communities.

**Financial dimensions of access**

For residents of Kingston’s North End communities experiencing the closures of the Kingslake IGA or Grant’s No Frills in 2006 and 2009 respectively, the problem of poor retail food access is profoundly financial. This includes problems of low income,\(^{37}\)

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\(^{37}\) The food sovereignty approach, for example, focuses on several types of peasants’ rights: these include the right to repossess and work agricultural land, as well as the right to open access to agricultural implements such as seed technology for greater self-sufficiency and resistance to global neoliberalization. Desmarais (2007; 2008), for example, explores La Vía Campesina, a farmers’ movement that addresses and opposes, among other things, privatization of common lands, the imposition of genetically modified organisms in food, environmental degradation, and negotiation of international trade agreements.
chronic poverty, and cost of food. This is not a surprise, given the unfortunate and now-
familiar dilemma where adults in low-income families must choose between affording
shelter and feeding themselves and their children (e.g., Hurtig, 2000). Income—money—is so essential to the access equation in the case of retail food access that, as one public
health worker noted during this project,

You could have a farmers' stand right next to you [...] and if you don't have any
money to buy it, you know, it's right there! You could live, like, right across the
street from the grocery store, and you can't buy any groceries. (Interview no. 6)

Lack of money is a constant factor that constrains participants’ access to retail food that
meets the criteria for food security—food that is physically and economically accessible;
is sufficient, safe, nutritious, and meets people’s dietary needs and preferences for an
active, healthy life (Canada, 1998, as cited in Dieticians of Canada, 2005). Low income
indicates that not only can the cost of travel to a food store—such as bus or taxi fares—
cut into people’s food budgets, but the price of food itself impedes participants’ efforts to
maintain a healthy diet for themselves and their families. As many participants noted,
healthy food such as fresh produce is often relatively expensive. For low-income
households who face consistent monthly food shortages, the primary goal of keeping
their children feeling full ultimately overrides the goal of health and healthy food. One
interviewee in the field of community health noted that a bag of fruit might be a better
long-term investment than a bag of unhealthy snacks, yet for parents the priority is price,
volume of food, and duration of fullness rather than healthfulness,

We have it all [in Canada], and yet we have people who are starving, people who
can’t afford to purchase a bag of apples so they buy Cheezies instead because it
fills up tummies [...] people make choices based on what they feel they can afford
and what’s gonna keep their kids’ tummies full the longest, and it doesn’t have
anything to do with nutritional value. (Interview no. 9)
This observation of the higher relative cost of a healthier diet holds true in numerous studies. The higher cost of switching from a low-cost unhealthy diet to a healthier, more ‘prudent’ diet has been demonstrated in countries such as the United States and France (Drewnowski & Darmon, 2005; Drewnowsky, Darmon & Briend, 2004). Canadian studies such as Vozoris and Tarasuk (2003) suggest that as income declines, the likelihood of reporting food insufficiency increases, which is in turn related to higher rates of poor health and many diseases and health conditions. With respect to diet, health literature suggests that inferior food choices—including for children’s diets—is a popular coping strategy for managing food insecurity. In one study of families who use charitable food pantries in Washington, DC, for example, focus group participants noted the importance of low-cost foods that will “fill the kids up” (Hoisington, Shultz & Butkus, 2002, p. 330), as well as low-cost meals that were either made from scratch, “inexpensive, highly processed convenience foods that were quick to prepare” (ibid., p. 329) or higher-priced but pre-made meals that offered taste appeal and convenience (ibid.). This is only one of many coping strategies that low-income households use in their food management strategies from month to month, many of which involve risks around nutrition, food safety, and illegal activity (Kempson, Keenan, Sadani, & Adler, 2003).

Even budget-priced chain grocery stores can represent an unaffordable option for some people, and thus do not automatically contribute to greater accessibility. Participants suggested that this is due to increasing food prices in discount grocers, as well as fresh foods that are near expiration and are visibly old, limp, discoloured, etc.,
presenting such a potential waste of money as to make buying fresh produce something to avoid altogether. One focus group participant noted, for example,

Well, for me, it’s about finding decent fruits and vegetables I find that’s tough and it’s frustrating, especially at No Frills, the old No Frills, I would get frustrated because you could never get decent bananas in there, they’re always green and they go black, not yellow. Potatoes, five or six bags in a row, I bought, you know, you can get very frustrated, you just get discouraged. well, maybe I’ll get something else, so—I end up with something canned, which isn’t very good either. (A-5, male)

Participants are not alone in their frustration to find a desirable variety or quality or fresh produce, as other research has begun to explore the links between fresh produce availability in retail food stores, access inequalities, and dietary intake. In their review of literature on neighbourhood food environments, Larson, Story, and Nelson (2008) note several recent studies that observe, for example, healthier and more diverse food inventories in more affluent neighbourhoods, as well as the impacts (obesity, for example) that poor food choice and quality can have for traditionally marginalized and at-risk populations. Moreover, one interviewee, a grocery retailer with extensive experience in the retail and wholesale distribution system, suggested that major grocery warehouses supplying parent companies of multiple retail banners have a tiered system that distributes fresh produce according to its age and quality and is designed to minimize waste. Using hypothetical banner names of Loeb, A&P (which is now Metro) and Food Basics, he confided that

The quality of the stuff going to Loeb had to be perfect. They would not allow anything to be in there that’s off-grade. Loeb, A&P, Food Basics, have the exact same warehouse […] So your product is already one week old when it gets to the [Loeb] shelf, which is the number one banner store, Loeb, okay? […] All of a sudden, Loeb can’t sell it all. ‘Oh, we’re sending it back to the warehouse’. They send it back, it goes to A&P. ‘Oh, we can’t sell it’, it goes to Food Basics. Food Basics gets the last of the stuff, and by the time you get your product to your house, from Food Basics, it’s probably two to three weeks old. (Interview no. 12)
It is little wonder, then, that regular customers of lower-priced retail banners have difficulty finding good value for money when healthier foods such as fruits and vegetables may be near the point of expiration.

Moreover, budget-priced stores may present an interesting challenge of strategic pricing: during the focus groups with low-income Kingston residents, participants consistently noted that different stores (i.e., different retail banners of the same parent company such as Metro or Loblaw) offered higher-priced meats, for example, while offering lower-priced produce, while another retail banner offers the opposite. In this case, low income creates additional burden, as most focus group participants must visit several stores to benefit from each banner’s particular price advantage, requiring extra trips by whatever means of transportation is available. This phenomenon, known as price dispersion or price distribution, has been abundantly studied and theorized within business and retailing disciplines (Aalto-Setälä, 2003). The practice exists in various dimensions, including food price disparity between towns, between urban and suburban areas of single cities, between product brands, different stores, and complementary food products (i.e., Badahir-Lust, Loy & Weiss, 2007; Mulhern & Leone, 1991; Zhao, 2006). It is well-acknowledged by scholars that consumers rarely do all their grocery shopping at one store at one time; rather, they will respond to price promotions and price uniqueness by ‘cherry picking’ (i.e., selective shopping) across space and time (Gauri, Sudhir & Talukdar, 2008). While more affluent people may ‘cherry pick’ voluntarily, people living on fixed incomes may have little choice but to learn which retailers have strategic pricing on which food categories and travel throughout the city to capitalize on each retailers’ respective price advantage.
Without good financial access to food, participants describe a food shopping experience that is an exercise in restraint, denial, and frustration. Participants consistently described situations where there simply is not enough money, and in turn they react through a variety of coping mechanisms and emotional reactions: buying less healthy lunches for their children; buying more junk food than healthy food; buying brands and products that are of questionable quality; being overwhelmed by choices while having only a small amount of money to spend; never having enough money to afford the food that is needed; and being embarrassed about removing items at the checkout when they have accidentally exceeded their budget. Such regular practices frame the grocery shopping experience as one of denying and cutting out necessities as well as frivolities, as one interviewee describes,

> When I had kids, I had to feed my kids on twenty bucks for that week. And you have to stop and think and say ‘Okay. What don’t we need?’ And that’s where you go and say ‘okay, fine, we’ve got three rolls of toilet paper so I’m not gonna buy toilet paper. I’ve got maybe enough laundry soap to do another load of laundry so I’m not gonna buy laundry soap […] then you go and you hit the bruised produce, the clearance, the dented tins […] and you think: Meat. We need meat. Okay, you’ve got two choices: you’ve either got ground beef or you’ve either got hot dogs. (C-7, female)

This is far from the ideal shopping experience that most participants would like to have, and represents a classic example of a food procurement practice that deprives a person of dignity, self-esteem and ease of access, noted above as important elements of food security.

In fact, during discussions where participants described their ‘fantasy’ food shopping experience, participants described, sometimes in almost a dream-like tone, shopping atmospheres that were relaxing, comfortable, affordable, and dignified—
going in with as much money as I wanted, getting good food—yeah, going out with money—getting good food for a good price. [...] And I don’t know, walking in with my husband and my fourteen-year-old and they each take a cart and fill up the carts and not have to worry about what we’re spending. (B-3, female)

When responses arose during this exercise, participants seemed to be wishing for more or less the experience of the average middle-class person—one of good accessibility, defined by ease of travel, proximity, affordability, comfort, time, selection, and freedom to indulge (see Table 9 for a selection of comments regarding the ideal shopping experience). Simply leaving a store with good quality, healthy food as well as money leftover was a modest ideal for some. Such an exercise confirms that access is enhanced through numerous dimensions of the food acquisition process, including economic, physical, and cultural. One interesting theme is the scaling back of the shopping experience, in terms of store size, prices, and distance to travel. As well, participants imagined higher levels of customer service, and an inclusive experience that respects people’s dignity: they would like to feel accepted and entitled to be in this retail space that reflects the character of the community.

Furthermore, they are able to participate in various socially acceptable food trends, including buying more local foods and organic foods. While some participants wish for a one-stop-shop experience, others would prefer to buy quality foods from smaller specialist operations in the community such as markets and butcher shops. Dignity and choice are key here again, as these participants would choose to shop this way for the sake of quality, rather than be obligated because of financial restrictions. Financial access to retail food, then, is one important but incomplete component of food accessibility.
Table 9: Summary of ideas about a ‘fantasy’ shopping experience, according to elements of access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Ideas</th>
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| Location, travel             | Walking distance  
                           Close to home: a few blocks or a few minutes to walk or drive  
                           Easy walk in winter; no hills, highways or major traffic  
                           Transportation provided there and back; “a free big car driven by the mayor”; driven by limousines or shuttle bus |
| Store type, size             | Average, medium-sized, reasonably-sized store  
                           Many small stores; produce market; one single store with food and non-food  
                           “A local community grocery store”  
                           Small store without pharmacies, bulk sections  
                           Drive-thru or pre-order online or by phone, with home delivery |
| Price                        | Reasonable, affordable, moderate  
                           A credit card with no limit  
                           $1000 shopping spree |
| Selection, inventory         | Produce that is fresh, organic, local, quality, plentiful, in stock, and/or generous portions  
                           Store brand items, items with good mix between value and quality |
| Atmosphere, appropriateness  | “I feel welcome and the same as everyone else”  
                           Friendly, available, helpful staff; store is easy to navigate  
                           Free parking, good bus access, cart is free to use, free bags  
                           Long sales, items are well-stocked  
                           Atmosphere is warm, cozy, welcoming, inviting, romantic  
                           Butcher shop with customizable cuts and quantities of meat  
                           Clean, wide aisles  
                           Family-friendly |

While alternative retail\(^{38}\) options such as farmers’ markets were suggested to improve accessibility to fresh, healthy, and local food, several issues emerged with respect to their accessibility. First, one interviewee noted that since farmers’ markets rarely supply a complete week’s worth of groceries (including meats, grains, and packaged or processed foods) a visit to a market may represent too much inconvenience.

\(^{38}\) It is difficult to maintain a clear definition of ‘retail’ in this context. Participants think of farmers’ markets and other alternative selling arrangements as retail outlets because this is the environment where exchange and purchase of food takes place. On the other hand, using Ducatel and Blomley’s (1990) definition as discussed in Chapter Four, vendors at these markets are not retail capitalists, as they are often the producers of the commodity and do not derive surplus value from producers in a merchant capitalist’s (‘middle-man’) capacity. I classify them as retailers in this research, however, in order to maintain consistency with my research subjects’ perspectives and to maintain a broad definition of ‘retail’ based on the exchange of money for food products.
to be worth the effort. More importantly, though, low-income focus group participants perceived Kingston’s ‘premier’ downtown farmers’ market to be prohibitively expensive. The cost is so high, in fact, that participants perceive the market to virtually exclude the ‘average’ Kingston resident, instead appealing to high-income or tourist visitors,

our market here is very expensive; there’s organic stuff there but it’s astronomically priced, like their eggs are 4.50 a dozen which is ridiculous. So the only market we have access to in Kingston is kind of like a tourist trap […] like it’s not really for regular people, so, having like a normal market would be kind of nice that was local food or even closer to home… . (C-1, female)

This observation suggests a keen awareness that certain alternative food spaces, rather than being genuinely inclusive along income and class lines, are actually spaces that cater to the affluent and draw attention to class-based inequality in income. These struggles around income, food shopping patterns and negotiations between quantity and quality of food are very much in support of previous research that examines barriers to food access and coping mechanisms among low-income people (e.g., Caraher, Dixon, Lang, & Carr-Hill, 1998; Robinson, Caraher, & Lang, 2000).

Part of the reason that retail food at either grocery stores or alternative sources remains so relatively unaffordable is because low-income people may be trying to cover costs of living through government social support that fails to adjust for rising costs. On one hand, focus group participants perceived that package and portion sizes are shrinking,

Even fruits and vegetables, like, for five [stalks] of celery, you know how they have the one stalk, well, they’ve had them so small now, and they’ve raised the price: 1.69. My kids love celery, I can’t keep it in the house, and at that price, I definitely can’t keep it in the house. (B-3, female)

[…] Food Basics, they got everybody shopping for ten dollar bags of food. And once… you used to get ten [portions] of ‘em, now you only get eight of ‘em. Same with the pork chops, they were nice, now […] they’ve got bone splinters in
them and stuff. It’s still the same price: now that they’ve got you there, ‘cause it’s cheap, now it’s all just went down in quality and stuff like that. (B-6, female)

Yet while sizes and quality shrink, participants also note that social assistance levels are not sufficient to provide monthly necessities, and are not being adjusted for annual inflation seen with food and other essentials. In one discussion, participants noted, for example, that

This is from the average, everyday, ordinary citizen, I’m sorry to say, but you’re getting it from people on welfare, disability, old age security, alright? They don’t have the money to go and buy the groceries that everybody thinks they do! And that includes, pardon the expression, but this fucked up government! (C-5, male)

And the mayor too. (C-4, female)

Okay? And the way the taxes are being raised every year, hmmm. Disability was supposed to get an increase last year of 7.4%. You know what they got? Less then half a percent increase [...] Where’s that half percent? I didn’t get shit. Welfare was supposed to get an increase of 3.9% last year. It didn’t raise a cent. (C-5, male)

Before I was with the man I’m with now, I was on social services; my rent was $374 dollars a month plus lights, and I was getting $575 dollars a month, welfare. Okay? Figure that one out. (C-2, male)

This discussion suggests not only that low-income participants have a keen understanding that social support costs not keeping up with inflation, but that they perceive that various levels of government are aware of the problem and regularly renege on promises of raising support rates. For these participants, retail food access in Kingston’s North End was less of a problem in itself than a symptom of low income.

**Understanding the spatiality of uneven retail food access**

While the previous section emphasized the importance of income as a factor affecting retail food access, the changing urban retail food geography is also a critical
dimension of access, affecting people’s travel burdens, their shopping travel patterns, and even their food choices. The closure of a retail food outlet, for example, may inflict a burden on those who already have the lowest mobility. During the 2006 survey of the Rideau Heights community, participants often testified that even when the closure of the Kingslake IGA would not affect them in particular, certain large segments of the population would face additional burden,

There are a lot of handicapped people in our building that can’t afford the cost of IGA while they are on pensions. By the time they pay someone or take a cab to No Frills it takes a bite out of their grocery money. I feel very sorry for them.

It was very convenient for me to use the Kingslake IGA. I shop there once or twice a month, usually for baby food/formula, diapers, wipes, milk, eggs and meat. It was very cost efficient for me to do so. No convenience store provides me with these needs for the same price. Now in order to get these things I must take a bus, find a babysitter (for my two children) and take a cab home because I have too much to carry. […] I hope that a suitable alternative is available.

In these cases, respondents identified that people with physical disabilities and parents of young children would take on additional financial burdens (i.e., paying to take taxis to grocery shop) as well as an element of inconvenience that did not exist previously due to locational change.

Similarly, low-mobility residents living near Grant’s No Frills had strong reactions about the additional distance to the next nearest retail food outlet. One public meeting attendee noted, for example, that

I bike and I walk, and I’ve got more metal in my ankle than—that would set off—whatever. And I can’t walk that far, and I bike. I live down by the old woolen mill. So what do I do? (April 4, 2009, female)

The importance of distance and proximity, in this case, suggests an important spatial dimension of accessibility to essential services such as food; it imposes a new set of constraints and problems that must be addressed within low-income communities.
Several examples illustrate this: many research participants suggested that they now had to grapple with transportation challenges to mitigate their new retail food geography. Where cost-efficient modes of transportation such as walking may have been an option, retail food closures now meant a narrowing of transportation options, and that public transportation such as taking the bus or individual transportation such as taking taxis become the unfortunate and costly reality.

As an example of the burden of distance, residents with particularly poor access to public transportation may use unconventional travel methods to do their shopping. One interviewee with the City of Kingston noted, for example, that there is a set of apartment complexes in Kingston that has some fixed-income tenants who face a long walk or drive to the nearest grocery store. To cope with the distance, those tenants take a ‘short cut’, walking through a grassy, unkept field where a path has been worn by people walking to the nearest shopping outlets. Another housing complex in central Kingston has good proximity to the Frontenac Mall, a large shopping centre with a low-cost grocery store, however the property is surrounded by chain link fencing. In order to avoid a longer walk, residents have taken to cutting the fencing or even digging and crawling underneath it. Such options may not the most desirable in terms of safety or comfort, but they certainly represent the value in minimizing distance to acquire household essentials, and people’s willingness to improvise unconventional solutions to the challenge of geography.

Scholarly research is still unclear about the overall importance of geographical measures such as proximity and distance to outcomes such as food access and health outcomes. It is important to note, however, that locational factors are only growing as a
research question, and some well-known studies do indeed suggest that physical availability of retail food options are important for disadvantaged populations. Well-known studies such as Wrigley, Warm and Margetts (2003), Morland, Wing and Roux (2002) and Rose and Richards (2007) suggest that retail food store availability and proximity are associated with varying degrees of increase in fruit and vegetable consumption. Within the field of planning, Clifton (2004) discusses the mobility and travel options deployed by low-mobility urban residents, noting the importance of travel strategies such as walking and public transit, while personal automobile travel continues to be the dominant mode of travel for food shopping. While the wealth of literature is too great to review to any degree here, it is important to note that scholars within numerous health and social science disciplines are paying greater attention to the geography of retail food access in cities and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, for their health implications, financial burden or other consequences. Quantitative approaches to studying the effects of distance on concrete outcomes such as fruit and vegetable consumption, however, are only one small piece of the multidimensional access puzzle. As I am emphasizing throughout this chapter, this approach may not fully capture the compounding effects of distance with other, less easily quantifiable, social and cultural factors that affect retail food access.

While the barrier of distance can increase the burden of traveling to standard grocery stores, it can also prevent people from using programs that could be helpful for a household to acquire food. In several focus groups, participants raised the issue of the pick-up locations of two programs, the Partners in Mission Food Bank and the Good Food Box program, as barriers to benefiting from these programs:
Yeah, um, you cannot starve to death in Kingston, there’s so many good people out there, volunteers […] but my problem is, another distance, is I haven’t got a clue why they changed the food bank out there on Hickson. That is way, way away from us. It used to be down on Bagot, and then it’s out there, it’s not an easy street to get to, you have to go way to the end. (A-5, male)

Same thing with the Good Food Box. You can pay ten, fifteen dollars a month, but how’re you gonna go get it? (B-2, female)

While geography can present a barrier to using even low-cost community-based programs, distance creates challenges to accessing food through retail means for low-income residents by changing their daily routines and patterns. One focus group participant in the Near North End suggested that the closure of Grant’s No Frills meant the difference between more frequent and convenient shops for fresh items compared to having to arrange shared rides with friends or family for larger food shopping trips,

The other stores used to be local, now the big box stores are on the fringes. You can take a bus, sure that’s well and good, that’s fine when you’re going in there, but you gotta bring the stuff back, it’s not like you’re walking through a park, so that’s another big challenge. (B-1, male)

Oh yeah. Before, when [No Frills] was down here, we could get anything. I would just go down, drop the boys off in the morning at school and then walk from there to No Frills. Now, it’s like I have to find a ride to get out to No Frills if I need anything. (B-4, male)

In this case, a changing retail food geography imposes a narrower set of shopping options, changing a family’s preferred shopping habits. As well, having to transport food over longer distances (especially by walking) can impose additional problems, including the challenge of carrying a large number of bags (to minimize the number of trips necessary), managing food purchases and children simultaneously, and traveling in harsh

39 The Kingston Good Food Box (http://kingston.cioc.ca/record/KGN2106) is a monthly community-run food program. For a price of five, ten or fifteen dollars, residents can purchase a box of fruits, vegetables or both. There are many neighbourhood locations where good food boxes can be picked up throughout Kingston and the region, with the intention of enhancing the convenience of the program.
weather. In these cases, proximity to retail food may have allowed for more flexibility and choice around the conditions of a food shopping experience, while distance complicates and restricts the available options. As Clifton (2004) notes in her study of travel strategies of those with low mobility,

the level of mobility required to reach these mainstream retailers comes with costs, including money, time, and missed opportunities […] these low-wage families experience circumscribed levels of mobility and tend to be spatially constrained in their everyday lives. (p. 410)

The problem, then, is not one of having no access to food, but rather the additional and disproportionate burdens that travel and distance place on those with already-low mobility, time and income.

**Additional challenges that compound retail food access problems**

The discussion, to this point, has focused on the multidimensionality of retail food access, arguing that factors such as poor physical access and low income, when occurring simultaneously, lead to poor access to retail food. As Table 9 also suggested, food access can be enhanced by other factors that speak to cultural appropriateness, such as an ambience that makes focus group participants feel comfortable, dignified, and entitled to access that space. This insight begins to illustrate the importance and subjectivity of dignity with respect to food procurement spaces and experiences, to be discussed more in Chapter Six. In this final section, I review other sociocultural factors that indirectly but significantly exacerbate financial and locational barriers to retail food access. These factors do not, in themselves, create poor retail food access, yet they are nevertheless important compounding day-to-day challenges that may go unnoticed by the average Kingston resident who has never experienced class injuries and been the target of lay
normative reactions to class (Sayer, 2005) in the same way as Kingston’s low income population. Taken with the new realities of Canadian urban retail food geographies discussed in Chapter Four, they provide insights about the extent that the logic of capital pervades multiple levels of public sector governance, altering the consumption and social reproduction patterns of class-disadvantaged people.

**Social institutions and norms**

Perhaps the most striking compounding challenges to daily life for low-income participants is the fact that they often do not have conventional relationships with institutions and structures that are taken for granted by people not living in poverty. Participants observed that low-income communities are the regular targets of discrimination in the broader areas of housing, banking, employment, automobile ownership, education, and policing institutions. One interviewee suggested, for example, that Canadian social norms favour home ownership rather than renting, so that some neighbourhoods benefit from a positive virtuous cycle of non-poor people buying and improving homes, while a vicious cycle creates ghettos and poor areas where renting is more common, prices are lower and low-income families are continuously attracted to the area for its affordability. The result is segregated neighbourhoods where uneven access to services is to be expected due to income disparity. Moreover, the social norm of personal vehicle ownership is the dominant form of travel in modern Canadian life, yet low-income people are disadvantaged due to the cost of borrowing money to purchase a personal vehicle.

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40 Fischel, (2001, 2009), for example, has written extensively about local land-use zoning planning and regulation disputes. He has paid recent attention to the Tiebout model as it manifests in homeowners’ and homebuyers’ preoccupations with housing decisions. Most notably, he explores considerations such as public school district boundaries in Americans’ decision-making about housing purchases, emphasizing this tendency for growing inter-neighbourhood polarization.
vehicle, maintenance costs, and government programs to keep old, less energy-efficient
cars off the road.

Two-tier banking systems have been recently investigated by Canadian scholars. Banking
institutions locate branches according to the same market principles that guide retailers, leaving a
dearth of banking institutions in low-income areas\textsuperscript{41}. One interviewee
suggested that in place of legitimate financial institutions, low-income people use
pawnshops and payday lending companies as a sort of second-class banking system,
which charges outrageous interest rates. These related phenomena have been studied to a
much greater extent in the United States given the country’s unique racialized and
ghettoized history of poverty (i.e., Goldsmith & Blakely, 1992; Jargowsky, 1997;

In Canada, the evolution of these separate and secondary institutions of the poor
has been noted by key scholars, an interesting example being the spatialization of
financial exclusion. Buckland and Guenther (2005) examine formal and informal
financial service use in Winnipeg’s low-income North End community. They note that
mainstream financial institutions such as major banks can be sparse in inner-city and low-
income communities, leaving residents with few accessible options for saving, investing,
and asset-building. Instead, they often resort to informal fringe banks such as rent-to-own
companies, and pawnshops and informal services from friends and family. Simpson and
Buckland (2009) confirm these tendencies at the national scale, finding evidence in
Canada between 1999 and 2005 that the incidence of credit constraint and financial
exclusion increases as income decreases. Here, measures of financial exclusion—such as

\textsuperscript{41} For further discussion on the topic of ‘red-lining’ practices by banking institutions that
disadvantage low-income and/or racialized communities, see Pacione (2009).
absence of a bank account, absence of a credit card, and use of fringe financial alternatives such as pawnshops and payday loans companies—speaks to the withdrawal of diverse essential commercial services from low-income, class-segregated communities.

Other institutions and social arrangements are the unfortunate domain of low-income communities. This research found that public transportation systems in Kingston are notoriously inconvenient, poorly designed, and are to be avoided if possible by Kingston’s low-income residents. Participants regularly noted that city buses mean very long travel times to other parts of the city; the fares are high for the working poor; buses do not travel where participants need to go, and even if they do, the bus is a difficult means to carry a week’s worth of grocery bags—one participant even suggested that bus drivers refuse patrons carrying more than a few shopping bags.

Employment can also be a matter of class-based discrimination as expressed through the spatialization of class in Kingston. One employment councilor noted, for example, that when counseling members of the Rideau Heights neighbourhood on distributing résumés, he advises that they use a different address that will not associate them with the stigma of the Rideau Heights neighbourhood in the minds of employers. Furthermore, one participant noted that a lack of nearby employment opportunities in Rideau Heights is compounded by barriers that are largely cosmetic and easily remediable,

a lot of those jobs aren’t available to the local people; they don’t have the communication skills, maybe. Maybe they don’t dress well enough; maybe they

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42 This interview is taken from the SSHRC-funded Major Collaborative Research Initiative, “Social dynamics of economic performance: Innovation and creativity in city-regions”, in particular the Kingston-focused research portion, led by Dr. Betsy Donald.
don’t have the grooming skills—I remember I had this client years ago now, and he was a nice guy […] but he didn’t have any teeth! He didn’t have any teeth. And he was a young guy, and I don’t know what had happened […] He was a decent guy, he wasn’t stupid, he was a smart enough guy. And I thought to myself, ‘the best thing a social worker could do for that guy is go and get him fitted with some teeth’, because then people would actually pay attention to him and somebody might give him a job. (Interview no. 30)

These anecdotal experiences suggest that employment discrimination, whether according to a person’s residence or their outward appearance, illustrates an unfortunate class bias within an institution—employment—that is so essential to exiting the cycle of low income.

The importance of education to the social reproduction of class cannot be underestimated. Education is yet another polarizing feature of North Kingston: as I noted in an earlier chapter, the elementary school performance of North End students is comparatively poor. As well, the Kingston Whig Standard recently reported that a new program, Pathways to Education, is coming to Kingston with the objective of reducing secondary school dropout rates among at-risk youth. The program will target youth in the Rideau Heights and the Inner Harbour, which have the highest baseline dropout rate in the city—fifty-two percent (Ball, 2010). The relationship between socioeconomic status, education, and social assistance dependency is not lost on North End residents. Focus group participants made at least one observation about the reproduction of poor educational opportunities that results from dependency on social welfare. Noting the unfairness of the regulations on how social assistance money is spent, two participants observe,

You’re capped if you’re on assistance or any kind of government, and that’s wrong because that’s your children’s future if you’re going for the college fund. That helps. And that’s why people can’t get out of the system and their children’s getting in the system and then their children’s getting in the system, because it’s
an ongoing process because the one person isn’t allowed to save the money for
the college fund. (C-3, female)

It’s almost like getting into a trap and you can’t get out of it. (B-1, male)

Education, then, is an important element of the spatialized reproduction of class in
Kingston, as seen in the role that low educational attainments play in creating
generational poverty.

While being able to afford to fund a child’s post-secondary education is one
challenge that participants readily acknowledge, education often plays an even subtler
role in reproducing social class. Willis’ *Learning to Labor* (1977) is one of the best-
known ethnographic studies of the role of education, school cultures, and other factors in
reproducing class relations. In Willis’ study, for example, he notes the early emergence of
‘counter-school culture’ among ‘lads’ from British working class families, whereby
young boys consciously reject school curriculum and authority. Instead, they internalize
theirs and their working class fathers’ lack of interest in formal education, and in the
process they narrow their employment options to working class (masculine, industrial)
jobs. Working class status is also shaped and defined, for the lads, by resistant behaviours
and attitudes, including territoriality in one’s neighbourhood, quickness to violence,
sexism, and racism. Further reflection and research on the role of education in
reproducing class continues in light of broad economic restructuring of labourforces in
the post-Fordist period (e.g., Dolby, Dimitriadis & Willis, 2004). This research
challenges the ideals of meritocracy and equality of educational opportunity within
educational systems (e.g., Papagiannis, Bikel, & Fuller, 1983) and argues that
implementing market-based concepts (such as the option of school choice) in public
school systems creates social stratification and class-based segregation of students, as
“the market works as a class strategy by creating a mechanism which can be exploited by
the middle class as a strategy of reproduction in their search for relative advantage, social
advancement and mobility” (Ball, 1993, p. 17). Differential educational resources and
outcomes in North Kingston, then, is a little-mentioned but significant component of
social institutions and norms that compound and contextualize poor access to essential
services in class-segregated communities.

Lastly, members of low-income communities face a difficult relationship with
regulatory institutions such as the Children’s Aid Society (CAS), Ontario’s child welfare
and protection agency. According to two interviewees in the social service field, fear of
being reported to CAS is constant in neighbourhoods such as Rideau Heights. One parent
in the Rideau Heights focus group even noted that they fear being reported to CAS
because they cannot afford healthy lunches for their child toward the end of the month
when money is scarce,

Like our daughter goes to school for school lunches and she wants certain things
in her school lunches. What are they gonna think if you’ve only got, you know
what I mean? A sandwich… (C-8, male)

They’ll call the CAS on ya! (C-5, male)

Yeah, then you don’t feel right! (C-9, female)

— but if it’s the first of the month, they get a good lunch. You gotta think, like, if
she’s only got… you know what I mean? (C-8, male)

This additional problem creates an obvious additional source of stress and strain in a
family, as well as an unhealthy relationship between residents and local protective
authorities and agencies. As an additional aside, given the prevalence of rental housing
and apartment complexes in low-income neighbourhoods, it is not surprising that space
constraints such as apartment-size refrigerators can be a barrier to smarter food choices.
At least two participants recognized that with limited refrigerator space, it is impossible to buy larger quantities of healthy food that would save money each month; instead, households may have to buy smaller quantities at a higher per unit cost.

**Social welfare policy and social services**

Experiences with the Ontario social welfare system can range from mildly negative (frustrating, annoying, and insulting) to paralyzing, with policies that create a cycle of dependence that is nearly impossible to break. First, focus group participants uniformly noted that even charities and non-profit organizations can be difficult to access because of excessive administration and bureaucracy, including unreasonable demands of record-keeping, proof of income, and rules for disqualification. To ensure that only the most needy people receive food from the food bank, for example, participants noted that a person receiving government social assistance may receive above the maximum income allowed for eligible users, effectively disqualifying them from food aid. As one food activist described,

> because of the way food banks work, for good reasons, in this system, you have to give a whole lot of very personal information about your circumstances before you can get your food. You have to prove your rent, prove your utilities, prove your income, prove how many people live in your household, because you’re entitled to the box of food that’s gonna last you two days. Now, the reason they collect all that information, some of it is gate keeping, making sure that only the ‘deserving poor’ get access to free food […] And it’s pretty humiliating, I’m not sure what the better system would be. But they certainly don’t make you feel entitled to the food at the food bank. (Interview no. 3)

While there are many valid reasons for such practices—such as limited amounts of food, trying to avoid abuse, or government demands for record keeping—a difficult and contradictory situation may arise where even charitable organizations that are often a last resort for the poor can involve dehumanizing practices that contradict any supposed right
or entitlement to food. Similar administrative and psychological barriers have been problematic for access to numerous non-profit and government social services for the poor (Kissane, 2003; Zedlewski et al., 2003).

While protocol in non-profit organizations may create barriers to access for would-be clients, social service offices and the provincial system of social support present substantial problems for their clients. One key idea that emerged continuously is that people who are meant to serve the poor in some capacity—ranging from front-line social service providers to the city’s mayor—are profoundly apathetic, ignorant or contemptuous of the poor⁴³. Focus group participants noted that front-line workers are well-paid and have little understanding of ‘real life’, including the challenges that come from living with low income. Moreover, local officials such as the mayor are thought to live comfortable lives while they promote political mandates that have little to do with improving well-being in poor neighbourhoods. In one lively discussion, for example, participants created a hypothetical situation that demonstrates the prevalence of class ignorance by public figures (using the mayor in particular),

No, one month, exactly, say ‘come and live month, take my welfare cheque, there you go’. I think everybody would agree on that point, give him a welfare cheque and say ‘live on it for a month’— (C-8, male)

—he doesn’t live in his house; he lives in our house. He comes to our neighbourhood— (C-7, female)

—yeah, go and live in [subsidized] housing, see how that goes— (C-9, female)

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⁴³ These reactions persist in spite of local efforts to sensitize elected public officials and electoral candidates to the challenges of living with low income. Kingston’s Social Issues Networking Group, for example, has prepared documentary material and day-long ‘Poverty Challenges’ (www.thepovertychallenge.org) to raise awareness of poverty among local election candidates (J. Swift, personal communication, July 13, 2010).
—you get $520, you gotta pay $395 for rent, and so you got $125 dollars for the rest of the month. (C-8, male)

You’ve gotta rent three kids because the person you’re switching with has three kids and you rent three kids […] That’s the problem, because they have absolutely no clue as to the problems, what the problem is. (C-7, female)

This theme of public ambivalence will be discussed further in Chapter Six in a discussion of justice and class. For now, however, it is important to note that a lack of understanding or experience from local leaders and service providers only adds to participants’ distrust and alienation from local institutions. Moreover, participants noted that provincial social welfare policies seem designed to encourage the individual to become trapped in their own cycle of poverty and dependence on social assistance, as well as a generational cycle of poverty. Participants noted, for example, policymakers’ misguided initiatives,

I’m breastfeeding, so I get an extra twenty-five dollars a month. But if you’re formula-feeding, you get nothing. If you’re breastfeeding, you just have to eat more, drink more milk, or whatever. (B-2)

And technically, you don’t get anything from assistance for your children, unless it’s the, uh, shelter. It’s now child tax benefit, and they’re not looking into account how much children actually eat. Do they not eat? Do they not have children that eat? (B-3)

Here, participants seem to speak not only to social welfare policies that make little sense, but of policymakers who are profoundly out of touch with the needs and realities of their intended clients. Participants also noted barriers to working, saving money, or investing in important goals such as children’s education or life insurance. Participants noted, for example, that the system of social assistance could be improved by making it where people can save money. Put, like, ten, fifteen dollars away each cheque just for, like, say, economy, or you know, just for a rainy day, or because you saved up $200 and you really need something […] (B-3, female)

Next year, they’re taking $200, next January, $200, because I had life insurance. Now, ‘cause I have value on me, both mine and my daughter’s, that’s value, so
they’re gonna deduct that off my cheque because I could borrow against it. (B-2, female)

Existing challenges to retail food access, in cases such as this, seem only aggravated by—or symptomatic of—a social welfare system that, inherently creates dependence and discourage ‘getting ahead’ by making wise financial decisions for the future. Social welfare policy in Ontario was fundamentally altered with the 1995 election of Mike Harris, Ontario’s former Progressive Conservative Party Premier. The Ontario government ratified the Social Welfare Reform Act, the Ontario Works Act and the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, and created Ontario Works in 1998. Most significantly, the OWA cut social assistance levels by 21.6%, which left Ontario social assistance recipients in greater financial difficulty—often the monthly support payment was not even enough to cover basic monthly expenses for individuals and families (McMullin, Davies & Cassidy, 2002). Since the reforms began in the late 1990s, a steady stream of qualitative and quantitative studies has shown the tremendous difficulty of trying to provide healthy essentials for a household on such meager benefits (Lightman, Mitchell & Herd, 2003; McMullin, Davies & Cassidy, 2002; Vozoris, Davis & Tarasuk, 2002).

Moreover, the humiliating and discouraging administration and treatment of individuals throughout the Ontario Works process is well known. Herd, Mitchell and Lightman (2005), for example, compile feedback from Ontario Works recipients and suggest that the current service delivery model for Ontario Works—retraceable to the Harris social policy reforms—is punitive, embarrassing, unnecessarily bureaucratic, overly mechanized, and formulaic, to a degree that
it is hard to conclude anything other than that the repeated requests for documents, just like all the other bureaucratic requirements, simply provide another barrier to assistance and another opportunity to delay and suspend payments. (ibid., p. 14)

As well, its design is such that it is difficult to receive payments through Ontario Works and there is heightened pressure to leave,

the overall impact is to create a climate of suspicion and surveillance and an associated deterrent effect. The sheer volume of information that is required is overwhelming and seems to go far beyond what is required to determine eligibility. (ibid., p. 12)

The psychological and material importance of current social assistance policy in Ontario cannot be overestimated with respect to low-income households’ ability to maintain food security, as social assistance has hardly been treated as the entitlement it is meant to be. Being poor—even while receiving state social support that is meant to be an entitlement—only further magnifies challenges around food prices and travel costs, virtually ensuring that low-income households in class-segregated communities without good retail food access must absorb a further burden in their efforts to shop for food and manage their daily lives.

**Retailer store policies and corporate behaviour**

A final factor that can compound already-existing food access problems due to low income and geographical barriers is the policies and patterns of major food retailers. One of the biggest and most consistent complaints from focus group participants was that major grocery retailers strategically time their sales to occur precisely when people receiving social welfare supports do not have money for grocery shopping. To illustrate this, participants described this familiar pattern,

Up jumps the prices, they take away all the sales. All the good sales are on when you don’t have any money, always. (B-3, female)
Interviewee: Really. Everybody finds this?

[group] Always, always.

All the sales will go off, and everything that you wanted, you can’t get come cheque-day. All the stores hike the prices on cheque day and they know it. (B-6, female)

Interviewee: How does that feel?

It’s a piss-off. You had a list and you coulda got, and if you had money, you coulda got six boxes, compared to your two when the sales are off. You’re paying 1.99 for ten juice boxes, and when the sale’s off, you’re paying 3.99. (B-6, female)

The fact that retailers end many of their sales just before paycheques and social assistance cheques are issued simply becomes another institutionalized barrier to shopping economically. Moreover, further challenges for economical food shopping include the discontinuation of raincheques (used to guarantee sale prices in the event that a store has no inventory for a sale product), the strategic placement of items around the store to encourage spending, and large displays of sale items that increase the temptation to buy ‘impulse items’ that are not affordable on a limited budget. Participants are very aware of these tactics and, when asked about how retailers could improve their business practices for disadvantaged people, they suggested retailers could

Keep the basics, toilet paper, all that sort of stuff, instead of having to go into all the aisles, keep it on the outside of the aisles. ‘Cause generally a store is usually fruit and vegetables, and then you got your meat, and then your yogurt, and whatever, and on the inside is your toilet paper, your chips, but you generally have to go down where the chips are to get your toilet paper. So put the necessities on the outside more. (A-5, male)

Yeah, but they do that so that you have to go past it so you’ve got the temptation to buy it. (A-1, female)
Such tactics may be used in the hopes of enticing the average middle-income shopper to overspend, however for low-income participants, they represent the even greater necessity to remain vigilant and self-denying throughout the shopping experience.

While it is difficult to locate formal evidence that stores change prices and promotions strategically to take advantage of high, middle, or low-income shoppers, the idea of price elasticity can explain how low-income shoppers are, paradoxically, more flexible and inflexible shoppers. Economic research shows that consumers respond to food pricing according to many factors, including their income, relative product prices, the portion of one’s diet made up of a particular product, the nature of the product, (i.e., functional vs. hedonic) and the occasion (Jones, 1997; McDowell, Allen-Smith & McLean-Meyinsse, 1997; Wakefield & Inman, 2003). Low-income shoppers such as the focus group participants in this research are necessarily more flexible shoppers because they are constrained by income and therefore adopt higher-risk coping strategies such as shopping at multiple stores, buying discount brands, buying sale items, less-healthy items or damaged items. They are less flexible shoppers, however, due to their limited income and the timing of its arrival. According to participants, their financial access is constrained because essential items with higher inelasticity of demand (such as diapers and children’s school lunch items) are not on sale when money is more plentiful. Such realities suggest that retailer policies and corporate behaviour can affect retail food access through the timing of food’s affordability for low-income people. Even when low-income shoppers remain vigilant and aware, the subtle pricing, promotional and locational changes that occur within retail food stores can generate radical changes in people’s food
shopping habits and expenditures. This, in turn, exacerbates the financial and physical barriers to good food access for low-income households.

**Conclusion:** What uneven retail access *is* and is *not*

Unlike a truly dire situation of extreme famine and food insecurity, the closure of a food store in a low-income area—that is, a community such as Kingston’s North End taking on the characteristics of a ‘food desert’—is not likely to, in itself, create massive food shortage, loss of life, or starvation. It does, however, create disadvantage in the forms of financial, geographical and socio-cultural burden. Throughout the primary research phase of this project, the burden of distance and the importance of geography as a determinant of access surfaced many times because it represents greater financial cost, inconvenience, and the narrowing of options and opportunities for so many people within a spatialized community. In the case of low-income spatially-segregated communities such as Rideau Heights, this geographic barrier to retail food access occurs concurrently with the financial barriers caused by low income, and the additional burdens of everyday life for low-income communities that compound the magnitude of poor retail food access, including exclusion from many social norms and institutions, regressive social policy and social support, and food retailers’ policies and corporate decisions. It follows that, as quantitative food desert research acknowledges, simply causing a retail food outlet to materialize in a low-income community may generate positive outcomes, but it will hardly solve the complex access problem that can plague spatially segregated communities, in the sense that residents continue to be excluded from the retail experience that is normalized and taken for granted by those without mobility issues. This is an important insight, because it acknowledges that, on the one hand, low-income
people’s poor access to essential services is compounded by a broader set of exclusionary institutional factors, which cannot be rectified through a single intervention at any one particular scale. On the other hand, however, it establishes that there is a distinct geography of exclusion and poverty in cities, of which the changing capitalized built environment of the urban retail foodscape is part.

Because of the multidimensionality of the retail food access problem, it is impossible to define the access problem through a single component such as geography, income or socio-cultural factors. Moreover, it is unlikely that static, overly technical approaches to mapping or quantifying accessibility can account for the diverse social, economic, geographical, and cultural barriers that exist in people’s lives. The essence of the retail food access problem as a social injustice, as I have discussed it here, is that it exacerbates deep class divides and inequalities by creating an unequal food procurement experience that reflects differential consumption patterns between and within classes. In the following chapters, I attempt to use terms that capture the complexity of this burden to encompass the uneven and regressive distribution of wealth, opportunities, resources, expectations, demands, standards, and norms in class-segregated, low-income communities. This stands in stark contrast to strictly quantitative approaches to the ‘food desert’ problem, which might isolate a single variable or outcome as the subject of inquiry. The political economy approach to retail food access, as I have outlined in this chapter, is better suited to the subject of social justice because it accounts for the intimate ways that sociospatial inequality and exclusion are reproduced in urban space. This insight lays the foundation for the task of Chapter Six, understanding poor retail food
access as a social injustice, using theories of social justice from political economy and other theoretical backgrounds.
CHAPTER SIX – POOR RETAIL FOOD ACCESS
AS A SOCIAL INJUSTICE II: DIGNITY AND CLASS DISADVANTAGE

In the previous chapter, I established that poor retail food access in spatially segregated, low-income communities emerges through a complex relationship between determinants of retail food access such as finances and geography, and the compounding socioeconomic dimensions of marginalization from the institutions that are part of everyday life in the city. These compounding factors create and exacerbate the class divisions and inequalities that pervade the capitalist city, by manipulating and interrupting the landscapes of consumption and social reproduction. Chapter Five also provided insights about how we might understand the ‘food desert’ problem as a social injustice according to the ways that the North Kingston research participants in this study imagine their ideal food spaces and experiences. The former are typically ‘average’ retail food outlets used by the majority of the population, offering full-service grocery offerings in a medium-sized store, based on the corporate and franchise food retail models. These spaces facilitate a fast, clean, comfortable, and convenient food shopping experience. The latter, most importantly, often consists of a food shopping experience that is dignified, in the sense that participants would like to feel welcome in the space, being able to choose and afford their preferred quantity and quality of food. Finances and income are important factors, because conventional grocery transactions are based on financial resources and ability pay, burdening the poor through higher relative costs of food acquisition. Low income complicates the food procurement process in several ways, including relatively higher travel costs, questionable food quality, and comprised diet. These very tangible outcomes are further aggravated by poor geographical access to retail
food outlets. I presented a key argument that the food desert problem represents the unequal and regressive distribution of the costs and burdens of food procurement; the result is an important spatial strategy employed by capital to reproduce class disparity in the city.

In this chapter, I present further interpretation of poor retail food access as social injustice, using the themes of dignity and class disadvantage. First, I argue that the changing retail food geography of cities deprives low-income people of freedom, choice, convenience, and dignity, which for many people are embodied in the act of enjoying a ‘normal’ middle-class shopping experience in the current capitalist system. Second, I argue that the food desert problem constitutes a social injustice through retail food capital’s lack of accountability to community members through systems of information-sharing, decision-making, or taking account of non-economic needs or wishes. This section includes an extensive discussion of how capital is well-served (and the poor are disadvantaged) by widespread contempt for the poor. I have already begun to build these arguments in the previous results chapters; however, it is my intention in this chapter to emphasize dignity as a central normative concept around which a just urban food system can be imagined.

Social justice in the alternative food network literature

Social justice has been an important subject of discussion and debate among scholars in interdisciplinary food studies for a number of years. The topic is growing in importance within the area of alternative food networks (AFNs) and sustainable food systems. The body of AFN literature has grown enormously in the last fifteen years, and
has both influenced and been influenced by important social science ‘turns’ such as the ‘quality turn’ and the ‘cultural turn’ of recent decades (Goodman, 2003; Goodman & Dupuis, 2002) and newer research frameworks such as actor network theory (e.g., Jarosz, 2000; Whatmore & Thorne, 1997). Scholars typically distinguish alternative food networks by their constitution as/of food markets that redistribute value through the network against the logic of bulk commodity production; that reconvene ‘trust’ between food producers and consumers; and that articulate new forms of political association and market governance. (Whatmore, Stassart & Renting, 2003, p. 389)

While the body of literature on this topic is far too expansive to discuss here, scholars interested in AFNs often research alternative systems of food production and distribution, including direct marketing such as farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture, and farm-gate sales (i.e., direct selling). Other programs include good food box programs, cooperative and collective agriculture, organic farming, quality ‘niche’ production, institutional purchasing, food policy councils, and urban agriculture (Allen, 2004; Renting, Marsden & Banks, 2003). Scholars and advocates have often approached these programs under the umbrella of food system relocalization, as a more local food system has been associated (and incorrectly conflated) with food being inherently more sustainable, healthy, and tasty (Born & Purcell, 2006).

Food scholars articulate a number of goals of an alternative food system. These include objectives such as environmental sustainability, food quality and human health, food safety, animal health and welfare, respect for ‘terroir’—the history, origins, quality and provenance of food, increasing the availability of wholesome ‘slow’ food, restoring trust-based and face-to-face relationships, and social justice (e.g., Maye, Hollway & Kneafsey, 2007; Morgan, Marsden & Murdoch, 2006). Allen (2004) notes the diversity
of benefits that are said to be linked with alternative agro-food systems (and by extensive, local food systems),

A clear theme of alternative agrifood movements is the promotion of local food systems […] They are considered to have environmental benefits such as reducing energy use; social benefits such as creating new opportunities for solving problems of hunger and homelessness; and economic benefits such as improving opportunities for employment (Dahlberg, 1994b). Thus they tie together the priorities of the sustainable agriculture and community food security movements. (pp. 67-70)

Scholars have addressed social justice and AFNs from a number of perspectives. Often, social justice has been used synonymously with goals such as agricultural workers’ rights (Gips 1988, cited in Allen, 2004). It has been employed in discussions about increasing democracy and decentralized control one’s food system. Furthermore, it has been used in the growing area of civic engagement and democracy: scholars are looking increasingly to initiatives that break down the producer-consumer divide to re-engage people with the many facets of the food system. As such, scholars evaluate the potential for re-skilling and re-engagement as a means to redistribute input and control over the food system among the citizenry (e.g., Hassanein, 2003; Johnston, Biro & MacKendrick, 2009; Levkoe, 2006). There is some diversity, then, in how the term is defined and applied by food scholars.

Despite the attention that social justice has received within the AFN literature, the subject has not been frequently applied to the specific consumer practices of food acquisition or procurement. AFN advocates and researchers often address consumption-minded questions only implicitly within the broader framework of the food system. They correctly wish to address the profound problems that plague global, large-scale, corporatized agriculture by supplanting this system with more small-scale, family- and
community-oriented practices. In doing so, there can be an implicit assumption that issues around food procurement and consumption will resolve themselves. Anti-poverty approaches to addressing hunger and food insecurity help to address these questions of consumption and access, as this literature grapples with more problems of low income and poverty (Power, 1998). In light of this existing work and outstanding questions of social justice and consumption, for the remainder of this chapter I explore questions about social justice and food procurement more deeply, beginning with important concepts from liberal traditions.

**Injustice as deprivation of choices, dignity and ‘normal’ experiences**

As I discussed in Chapter Two, liberal formulations of justice often begin from the accepted desirability of maximizing individual rights, freedoms, and liberties. Various social justice theories from theorists such as Rawls, Sen, Nussbaum, and Young work—with varying degrees of enthusiasm or caution—from this presumption, arguing that socially just conditions may exist when, for example, all people are free and able to develop and exercise their personal capabilities or can enjoy self-development and self-determination (Sen, 1992; Young, 2000, respectively). Poor retail food access, I have argued, speaks to class inequalities and the sociospatial marginalization of the poor in urban areas rather than material deprivation in the sense of severe food insecurity. It may be helpful, therefore, to examine low-income people’s experiences with their city’s retail food geography in light of liberal theories of justice that would maximize people’s ability to realize greater dignity and exercise preferences. Because the deprivation of dignity is
linked to class disparity, I argue that dignity deserves more scholarly attention through a critical political economy lens.

What constitutes a dignified food procurement experience varies according to individuals and their personal circumstances. As the testimonies of low-income North Kingston research participants suggest, retail food capital (in the sense of major corporate and franchise food retailers) is deeply embedded in many people’s ideas of the ideal food procurement experience. Participants explaining their ideal food systems and food procurement experiences often did not, for example, make great efforts to examine critically the division of labour or money (currency) exchange inherent to the retail sector within the capitalist mode of production. Conventional grocery stores are the dominant food procurement space that most participants referenced while imagining their ideal shopping experience, rather than question the ethics of the retail food economy,

As far as the store ownership is concerned, I don’t think it matters at the end of the day as long as they’ve got the product you need, at the end of the day. It doesn’t matter whether it’s owned by a co-op, a huge chain or a mom n’ pop store. If the store’s got what you want, it doesn’t matter. (B-1, male)

Participants had more vivid ideas about the size and scale of their ideal grocery stores, the inventory and prices, the merchandising and convenience factors embodied in the store’s design, and the modes of transportation most preferred to do one’s grocery shopping:

[...] how would you get there? Well, I would get there in a limo, ‘cause you don’t have to drive, you don’t have to worry about paying for gas, you don’t have to worry about payin’ for nothin’! (B-2, female)

—if I had a limo, I’d send my butler! [laughs] (B-1, male)

It would be medium-sized store, it would be bulk prices without having to buy all the bulk. It’d have a butcher shop in it, you know how butcher prices, you know, saves two dollars a pound. Do you have to buy a package? Well no, you just have butcher prices, like, sixty-nine cents sort of thing. (B-2, female)
Value, service levels, and convenience, rather than larger issues of ownership models, dominate the majority of interests of North End residents, suggesting the importance of aesthetics, comfort, and other features of the shopping experience. It may be premature to expect that alternative food systems, including direct marketing techniques, can fulfill low-income people’s desire for these qualities, when for-profit retail spaces and transactions remain central to their ideal food procurement experiences.

That is not to say, however, that North End residents gave no indication that alternative food spaces or practices are dignity-promoting. Non-capitalist food procurement alternatives were given varying levels of priority by participants in this research project. Participants also showed awareness of the ongoing popular interest in more locally-grown food options, noting that they would like access to

So yeah, lots of local products, and like, what people were saying about how here we’re spoiled in Canada, we really are in Canada, we go to the grocery store all through the year in Canada and there’s strawberries; well I’d rather give up those strawberries in December to have more local stuff, like, it’s probably be less variety but it’d be healthier, and, just, definitely more sustainable ‘cause we’re not trucking it from China and it’s not on a boat and a plane to get to my store. That would be my ideal. (C-1, female)

Beyond this interest in locality and seasonality, perhaps two to three participants in each focus group were very interested in alternatives such as food cooperatives, community gardens, or community-owned food stores as ways that North End residents could have access to healthier, locally-grown, or more culturally appropriate foods.

Aside from this variety of preferences for conventional or alternative retail spaces and inventories, participants were divided over the role of charitable food sources in the food acquisition process. For the most part, participants tended to endorse models of food acquisition that involved earning one’s food rather than receiving it through a charity-
type model, suggesting that dignity is promoted through successfully mitigating financial
costs and conventional purchasing norms. Several participants imagined cooperative or
sharing models, for example, whereby residents could earn a share of a harvest or
inventory by contributing their own labour to the food procurement process. This was an
important element of a non-profit model that some participants envisioned as a better way
to help low-income communities access food. One interview suggested that “maybe
somebody could volunteer to drive; I’d volunteer to drive people [to a grocery store] if I
could get groceries cheaper, you know, like you could work something out, or have
something delivered…” (C-9, female). In another participant’s case, this model offered a
productive use of otherwise-vacant or abandoned industrial lands that exist throughout
the North End:

—yeah, non-profit, where you don’t feel like you’re using something somebody
else could use; your time, you’re putting your time in, you’re helping yourself,
you’re helping somebody else and, you know, you’re also using up the space that
has sat there vacant for God knows how long. It’s like having a co-op garden on
the vacant lot, you know? Basically, that sort of thing too, where you put your
time in and you reap the reward, either through time or, you know, you get back a
basket of tomatoes or whatever. So if you had a co-op where a minimal amount of
money every month or every two weeks or however you wanted to do it, plus you
put it ‘X’ number of hours over that month and then you’re allowed to reap, or
take out… . (C-7, female)

These contributions to group discussions suggest that while residents see the obvious
social acceptability and convenience of the traditional full-service retail chain store
model of food procurement, alternatives could offer many benefits, such as productive
use of neglected lands in the area, personal health, environmental sustainability, and
permitting low-income residents to exchange their labour (rather than scarce financial
resources) for food. There is a distinct importance assigned to the process of working to
earn a payment rather than being a passive recipient. This variety of preferences
(conventional grocery stores, non-market and local food economies, and community-based labour-intensive models) further highlights the subjectivity of dignity with respect to the food procurement process.

Even charitable means of food procurement are addressed with the same diversity by focus group participants. In Chapter Five, I provided several important critiques of charitable food programs, arguing that charitable food security initiatives can be overly bureaucratic and selective about participant eligibility due to limited resources. They therefore fail as a model for genuine ‘entitlement’ to food of hunger-alleviation strategy because they are unable to guarantee of food as a right (Sen, 1981). Moreover, while charitable programs may be executed through a community-based model, they may still embody the embarrassment associated with means testing or eating ‘other people’s leftovers’. Given these concerns, participants regularly made revealing and insightful comments about dignity and charity,

That’s the bad part of [using the food bank], like. You don’t get what you want. The good part is that it’s free. (C-2, female)

It’s the same with the grocery stores…things are on sale, you see all these people going, buying expensive stuff, stocking up, blades of roast, you gotta get other stuff ‘cause you can’t afford to get it. It’s embarrassing no matter what, because you don’t have the money to get it. So especially in [meal programs], like I come to this, a person has to be treated like a person, and if they’re treated right, they’ll go to [meal] places. They won’t go to places they’re embarrassed about. I think we’d rather go hungry than be embarrassed. (A-1, female)

You’ve gotta do what you gotta do when you got a family to feed. (C-5, male)

I think the best would be grocery store, because you have all these choices, and you have the money to buy food, so for me, that’s the best case scenario, but even the grocery store with a little bit of money is better than going to a program. (A-4, female)
According to these conversations, particular food procurement spaces or experiences promote or violate individual dignity depending on individual factors, including how one is treated and how one feels in that situation; using a food bank can be humiliating, or it can become an act of dedication and self-sacrifice for one’s children. Nevertheless, in an era when neoliberal attitudes toward poverty have become normalized in public discourse, it is not surprising that using a charity is not about exercising one’s entitlement to basic human needs like food; rather, it is seen as a signal of an individual’s personal failure to provide for him- or herself, no matter what efforts a charity might take to provide a dignified experience. This point was particularly salient during one interview where a participant recounted,

No, people don’t feel entitled to food. I can’t speak for people, but Gord Hunter, the director of Martha’s Table, tells the story that maybe you’ve heard about. A diabetic man called and he hadn’t eaten in three days, and he was calling all embarrassed to ask, he said ‘I know it’s really last minute and I know it’s Thanksgiving, but it’s been three days, can I come and eat a meal?’ He didn’t feel entitled to use a meal program.

Interview: Oh…

He didn’t feel entitled to the charity meal, let alone to… yeah. That’s just one story, but it’s a true story. (Interview no. 3)

Despite this profound lack of entitlement, these testimonies suggest that various food procurement spaces such as grocery stores, meal programs, or food banks vary tremendously in their embodiment of a dignified or undignified experience, depending on the personal circumstances of the individual.

Among food program administrators and users alike, two important elements of food procurement are choice and the avoidance of embarrassment. Poppendieck (1998, p.
240) has written about the importance of personal choice to a dignified food procurement experience, suggesting that in a choice-based charitable system such as a shopping pantry the available foods are displayed on shelves or tables, and clients are provided with a shopping list indicating the quantity they may select from each category—grains, proteins, fruits and vegetables, desserts, etc. Although the avoidance of waste is one motivation for establishing this system, a more urgent concern is the effort to preserve dignity through the exercise of choice. Shopping is an adult activity; it implies competence and individuality, and it casts the client in an active rather than a passive role.

In an attempt to appreciate the importance of respecting dignity, the freedom of choice, and the diverse preferences of economically marginalized people, we might conclude that a just urban food system would be defined by a variety of ownership models and retail formats (including non-retail alternatives such as community gardens), as each one may offer a food acquisition experience that respects individuals’ capacity to be an active participant in the exercising of their choices and preferences. This interpretation extends liberal-minded social justice goals to the food procurement process.

Unfortunately, the food shopping experience of North End residents since 2006 has increasingly been defined by a restriction of choices and the imposition of disproportionate burdens and inconveniences not borne by other urban residents. One city councilor summarizes this narrowing of choices for the North End,

Well, I think, this may be part of my political philosophy, is people need choice. Like that’s, choice is sort of an element of freedom. And do we have some responsibility as a community to ensure everybody in the community has choice? I think on the food side, certainly in Rideau Heights, that IGA closed and that was it, and on Bagot that No Frills is gonna close, and that is it. And the substitute, in both cases, like for both those stores, the substitute is a great big No Frills and a great big parking lot. (Interview no. 33)

The dignity of North End residents stood to suffer, as they were less able to make choices about which stores to patronize, how many stores to visit, the mode of transportation, and
what foods to purchase. Dowler and Caraher (2003, p. 60) reflect the narrowing of choice as an element of social exclusion, arguing that with respect to United Kingdom food policy,

While people should be free to eat what they want, within reason, many who live on low incomes in practice can exercise very little choice over what food they can buy in their local shops, or consume at school or at work. In practice, they are excluded from one of the dynamic, leading sectors in society.

The lack of dignity associated with the freedom of choice represents, for the authors, a problematic but legitimate basis through which the social exclusion of low-income people occurs.

A more just urban food system would entail a food landscape that reflects the subjectivity of dignity. Through this interpretation of social justice, the food geographies of spatially-segregated communities would embody values of maximal individual choice, dignity, and freedoms, including spaces of food acquisition that best promote individuals’ capacity to make their own choices, engage in their preferred means of acquiring food for themselves and their household, and feel welcomed and entitled to patronize spaces that are culturally acceptable. Based on the preferences expressed by research participants, residents of class-segregated communities might best be served by a food landscape that encompasses several different models, including capitalist retail models such as full-service food stores, alternative retail schemes such as food cooperatives and food markets, non-market alternatives such as community gardens, and charitable food resources. Such a vision would mean a broadening of food choices rather than a narrowing.
Political economic formulations of social injustice: widespread contempt for the poor

In the previous section I suggested that a more just urban food system should entail a heterogeneous built environment that reflects the diverse wishes, desires, and life experiences of economically marginalized people. Unfortunately, there are several structural impediments to the realization of a just urban food system as I have defined it here. These include the embedding of capital in governance systems, which creates favourable conditions for accumulation to the disadvantage of the poor. They also include the inherent ‘tyranny of the majority’ seen in local democratic decision-making and planning systems, as well as widespread contempt for the poor. First, I review the argument that spatialized communities of low income fail to attract and retain for-profit businesses, given the consolidation of retail food capital in Canada; moreover, low-income people are marginalized from both private sector and public decision-making about their retail food landscape by virtue of the ‘urbanization of capital’ (Harvey, 1973, 1985) and deficiencies in the ideal of deliberative democracy. Finally—and contrary to the implicit idea that low-income people can assume a ‘exemplary’ position in society by being the ‘leaders’ of the community food security movement—I argue that low-income communities face disproportionate challenges in creating sustainable non-market food procurement alternatives. As such, they should not be held to a higher standard or expected to lead the change to a more sustainable food system. No one should pursue alternative food initiatives out of desperation when others are able to enjoy the convenience and dignity of the ‘normal’ grocery shopping experience.
The logic of capital—especially that of highly consolidated retail food capital cannot meet the needs of spatialized low-income communities that do not have the required density of income to support the contemporary large-scale model of corporate food retailing in Canada. This insight is at the heart of the food desert problem and the exodus of food retailing from lower-income, inner-city communities in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom (Winne, 2008; Wrigley, Warm & Margretts, 2003). As interviewees suggested in Chapter Four, corporate retailers are adept at identifying new trends in retailing and profitable competitors and—once they constitute a significant threat or promising concept—will seek to absorb or eliminate their competition. This insight demonstrates retail capital’s inherently predatory behaviours in its ability to ‘scale up’ while eliminating small-scale competition while profoundly affecting the physical accessibility of essential commodities such as food. It also illustrates the tension between low-income people’s valuation of capital retail exchanges and spaces associated with middle-class norms (intangible use values), and the inherently disembedded nature of retail capital. This tension is a serious challenge to the hope that territorial justice—the matching of services to the needs and wishes of a spatialized community (Davies, 1968)—would emerge naturally in the case of retail food capital.

The disembeddedness of retail food capital from its immediate urban environment became clear during the 2007 Rideau Heights survey. In this case, student volunteers circulated apartment buildings in Rideau Heights with a survey, as well as a recent newspaper article describing the early plans for the new large-scale Grant’s No Frills. Anecdotally, I was surprised that while this article came from a free newspaper that is circulated throughout the city, few survey respondents were aware that plans for a new
Some tenants even had a clear view of the construction for the No Frills outside their apartment windows, yet they were not aware that a grocery store would be part of that construction. Moreover, the 2006 Rideau Heights survey had received good coverage in local television and print media, however only twenty 2007 survey respondents, or sixteen percent, had heard about the project. These points highlight the difficulty of reaching low-income, high-needs communities through formal media channels, but it also illustrates that private sector developers and other corporate entities have little accountability to nearby interested residents such as Rideau Heights residents. One developer explained that, while they feel that they are responsive to community and media enquiries about the nature of a retail development, in reality there is an extensive legal process of purchasing land, following municipal regulations and receiving permits, securing retailer-tenants and undergoing all the necessary construction. In the ideal situation, this process might take three years, but it can take much longer as well. During this time, engaging the public or filling community needs (outside of the usual locational decision-making based on project customer volumes, profits, etc.) simply are not a requirement (Interview no. 28). Property sales, purchases, and land use planning changes are often of a largely private nature and are inherently exclusionary of the views of the citizens involved, as Fainstein (2006) and Blomley (2004) show in their respective case studies of the Bronx Terminal Market in New York City and Woodward’s department store in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Harvey (1985) understands the protection of private property and corporate interests as one way that government internalizes the logic of capital. He argues that capitalist cities inherently support the processes of accumulation and the capitalist growth
imperative through formalized urban planning and leadership structures, at the expense of marginalized voices promoting alternatives. Harvey (1985, p. 175) suggests that the
capitalist state operates as an ‘instrumentality of power’ to facilitate the accumulation
process in many ways. The urban planning discipline is just one element of the state
apparatus that manages the built environment to facilitate the necessary urban elements
for social reproduction,

the planner’s task is to contribute to the processes of social reproduction and that
in doing so the planner is equipped with powers vis-à-vis the production,
maintenance, and management of the built environment which permit him or her
to intervene in order to stabilize, to create the conditions for “balanced growth”,
to contain civil strife and factional struggles by repression, cooptation, or integration. (ibid., 175)

Urban planning, Harvey suggests, is one state apparatus whose inherent ideology
supports the reproduction of the built environment to facilitate the accumulation process.
At a highly abstract level, this bias can help us to understand why urban planning
processes must appear to be open and decentralized (ibid.), however they ultimately
uphold systems of private property and ownership and marginalize classes of citizens.
Several interviewees reinforced the embeddedness of free market ideology in local and
provincial planning legislation, as a barrier to local officials intervening in the retail food
landscape,

[It’s] interesting that the land-use planning framework that we have in Ontario has
made it very, very clear that municipalities like the city of Kingston cannot dabble in
influencing the free market dynamic of the commercial sector. We can do it
only insofar as something may affect the ‘planned function’ of a commercial area
[...] we’ve been told this in repeated municipal board hearings right across the
province, we can’t say to Home Depot or Lowe’s ‘well, we don’t want you,
because you’re gonna force Home Depot to close, and we don’t want that to
happen’. Or ‘you’re gonna force the Mom and Pop on John Counter to close’. The
Ontario Municipal Board has told us repeatedly ‘that is not your role to worry
about that. That is the dynamic of the free market system, and there will be losers
and winners, so long as at the end of the day, we have a healthy downtown, we
don’t care whether—‘care’—we cannot concern ourselves from a policy perspective about whether or not S&R exists or not, because of something opening up somewhere else’. If the close of S&R and a few others means the downtown suddenly becomes a ghost town, and all kinds of urban blight and nasties, then we can say ‘we don’t want that new development up there happening ’cause you’re gonna affect down here’. (Interview no. 37)

This example suggests that several levels of administration of the local and provincial land use planning system are ideologically-biased toward the functioning of free market dynamics in urban commercial sectors. This leaves little room for citizens such as concerned North End residents to make a case for trying to ‘save’ a particular grocery store, lobby city governments to ‘get them’ a new grocery store or build a persuasive argument about the detriment that one type of retail outlet can cause to another—no matter the consequences to nearby residents or community cohesion. The urbanization of capital, then, is legitimized through multi-level regulatory instruments and provides a structural barrier to the realization of a just urban food system based on multiple co-existing procurement spaces and experiences.

Uneven urban development and the access challenges of the poor can also be understood as profoundly social processes in addition to the economic problem of low income and surplus labour power. Poverty is endemic to the urban form, serving the accumulation process while degrading the poor. Harvey (1973) writes that poverty populations have a dual function. They can be viewed as an industrial reserve army (to use Marx’s) phrase which can either be used as a threat to organized labour in wage disputes or as a surplus labour force to be drawn upon in times of expansion and relinquished in times of contraction. [...] Poverty populations therefore function as stabilizing devices within capitalist economies—stabilizing devices which rest on human suffering and degradation. (p. 272)

Visible poverty in the city (a product of unemployment emerging from the inevitable surplus of labour power) stabilizes and mediates class tensions, as members of the
working class temper their thoughts of collective organization out of fear that they too could easily become poor themselves. In this way, visible poverty acts as leverage for the capitalist. Although Marx placed the employed and unemployed within the same category of the working class (ibid.), the intra-class tension between the two is at the heart of the contempt for the poor that legitimizes punitive social welfare policies and policing measures. This contempt also can explain the marginalization of the poor from political processes that involve their everyday urban experience.

Contempt for the poor manifests itself through the democratic deficiencies in contemporary city politics and planning. People living in poverty face a difficult predicament, as they are disproportionately affected by the closure of a food outlet, yet they have less capacity than economically well-off citizens to organize or recruit market-based and non-market alternatives. Importantly, they may have less capacity to organize as a collective to communicate their feelings or ideas to the general public; they may also have less formal education, organizational capacity or political involvement than other urban residents to protest or develop alternative solutions. Rideau Heights residents expressed their feelings of isolation and helplessness over the announced closure of the Kingslake IGA in late 2006, leaving comments in their surveys such as the following,

Replace it with another grocery store.

The IGA was large and convenient. I wish it wasn’t leaving.

There are a lot of handicapped people in our building that can’t afford the cost of IGA while they are on pensions. By the time they pay someone or take a cab to No Frills it takes a bite out of their grocery money. I feel very sorry for them.

We need a store—going downtown costs $15 to $20 each trip.
I hope that a suitable alternative is available. The Kingslake IGA will be missed. Thank you for asking residents their opinion, you are doing great work to help the north end.

The unfortunate part of these comments, of course, is that survey respondents are asking for things such as a new store that no research team can directly influence. It is not surprising, then, that philosophers such as Young (2000) have taken up the issue of oppressed groups in public deliberation processes. Young writes that even when urban decision-making processes involve formal democratic measures,

> Where there are structural inequalities of wealth and power, formally democratic procedures are likely to reinforce them, because privileged people are able to marginalize the voices and issues of those less privileged. [...] For democracy to promote justice, it must already be just. (p. 34-35)

In the case of the restructuring of North Kingston’s retail food geography, class interests are reproduced in the decision-making processes of the city. Rideau Heights residents, for example, ultimately ‘got their wish’ in the new large-scale Grant’s No Frills in the King’s Crossing retail development, however interviewees in this project suggested that the strength of that location was its proximity to highway 401 and Division Street (an arterial road that facilitates regional traffic), rather than the spending potential or needs of the adjacent Rideau Heights community. That community, it would seem, had relatively little direct or indirect importance in the decision. It should not be surprising when urban planning practices, public consultations, and other urban political processes reinforce the interests of capital and free-market ideology at the expense of the wishes or voices of those most affected by the closures.

Patricia Allen’s work best summarizes the problematic nature of democracy and grassroots movements at the local scale with respect to food system change. Allen and others have argued that food system relocalization is often undertaken as a reaction to a
food system that is perceived to be globalized, privatized, corporatized, and lacking in transparency and genuine concern for human health or sustainability. This ‘defensive localism’ also comes as a reaction to the perceived disempowering and homogenizing effects of this system on communities (Allen, 2004; Dupuis & Goodman, 2005; Winter, 2003). Working at the local scale to create food system change, however, is far from an ideal model of democracy. Just as Young (2000) suggests, a paradox emerges, whereby the local scale can be the most appropriate scale to operationalize participatory democracy (Anderson, 2008), yet is it also the most intimate scale where social cleavages are experienced,

These asymmetrical distributions of power, status, and privilege—seen or unseen—make it clear why a simple form of democracy in which a diversity of voices are included is insufficient to meet democratic ideals of equality in priority setting and decision making. (Allen, 2004, p. 163)

Indeed, in her own experiences Allen has seen that small-scale participatory planning and decision-making processes around food systems can—counter-intuitively—result in a narrowing of viewpoints in favour of uncontroversial or status quo arguments (Allen, 2010). Allen suggests that the flaws of exclusively-local approaches to food system problem solving can alienate marginalized participants and lead them to a multi-scale strategy that they believed was ineffective in the first place:

Working only at the local level is not only insufficient to rectify inequalities, localism may actually be the source of these inequities. In many cases the disenfranchised have turned to the federal government for relief precisely because progressive change was impossible at the local level or because local elites persisted in denying them basic rights. (p. 173)

Local-level attempts to influence community food systems support Young’s (2000) observations about class contempt within deliberative or participatory democracy
exercises. It can derail plans for initiatives and reforms that genuinely engage diverse
groups or reflect a variety of stakeholders’ wishes.

People living with low incomes face further barriers to enjoying dignified food
procurement spaces and experiences due to rampant and institutionalized contempt for
the poor. First, food deserts as a food issue may not incite much sympathy among the
general population when problems of an entirely different scale—mass hunger, famine,
natural disasters, and the like—persist around the globe. A recent article in the Toronto
Star (Spears, 2010) examining a Toronto neighbourhood with poor retail access received
this and many similar on-line comments from anonymous readers,

   Sorry, but I would love to be able to walk 2.3km to a grocery store. I can’t. The
   nearest one is a 20km drive. As for not owning a car? They live on a TTC route.
   WalMart sells bendle buggies. Need I go on? Sorry, but if this is the biggest
   challenge they have, they have nothing to complain [sic] about.

The food desert problem, it seems, can easily be de-politicized as a problem of individual
behaviours (laziness, lack of resourcefulness or gratitude, etc.), or lack of sympathy for
those in poverty in Canada given the scale of poverty, deprivation and injustice in other
parts of the world. Like many social problems, the food desert problem often fails to
ignite conversations about systemic economic inequality but rather individual failings.

   Moreover, feelings of entitlement—to adequate social welfare supports or
determination over one’s food system—may be sparse among low-income people, when
pervasive neoliberal governance structures normalize a ‘lean’ state with selective social
supports. This ideological environment may legitimize the idea that recipients of state or
charitable support should be grateful for whatever support they receive. At several points
during the North Kingston focus groups, for instance, respondents struggled with the urge
to criticize both their new food geography (namely the new large-scale Grant’s No Frills
store) and charitable food programs while not wanting to complain about what they have—no matter how meager or inappropriate. One focus group conversation illustrates the tension between envisioning a better charitable system while not wanting to seem ungrateful,

Kingstonians are incredibly generous, I’ve had people come from [Toronto], saying that T.O. is far worse than Kingston, they think Kingston’s incredible. The problem is that the workers, the taxpayers, they still have the same problems when it comes to food bank, when they donate food. Protein items are very expensive, the reason canned food is given a lot, and same as pastas, rice, these things, they do have a shelf life, so we get a lot of carbohs. The Kingstonians are great, but of course they can’t afford that, canned meat and everything else. So that’s where it’s weak, the food bank is, there’s no disputing that, right? Kingston’s great, but, you know, nobody can afford that, to give it away. (A-5, male)

There are a lot of people that give to these places, and go to the stores for the stuff. I think there should be some way of letting the people who are so generous know what they should be giving us. Have it in the newspapers a couple of weeks of something; let them know what they should be getting, not always be getting the same, the same, the same. And like you say, we’re getting the carbohydrates nailed right to us, and we have to eat it, when you get to the point of the month that you need the food, that’s what you’re gonna eat, it’s what you’ve got. If there was only something, some way for them to find out what would be better than all that stuff. (A-4, female)

Then if we end up telling them that, that’s not them donating it? (A-2, female)

There’s gotta be a way of letting them know. (A-4, female)

They just figure you’re just picking, you’re trying to pick the food that you wanna have. (A-2, female)

Well, but you don’t go out and say ‘okay, I want a big ring of shrimp for this week.’ Not that kind of stuff— (A-4, female)

—I know that, it’s just that you start complaining… (A-2, female)

—I don’t find it complaining (A-4, female)

—they would take offence to it, maybe stop giving. (A-2, female)

—I find that they wouldn’t take offence to it. (A-4, female)
—well, yeah, I’ve got to disagree, you talk about the embarrassment aspect, to use a cliché, beggars can’t be choosers. I have a hard time telling people that, ‘yes, please buy me this’. (A-5, male)

This conversation speaks to larger issues around the proliferation of neoliberal attitudes toward poverty and the poor. There is significant negative media portrayal of the poor as ‘undeserving’ or incompetent (e.g., Bullock, Fraser Wyche & Williams, 2001; Gilens, 1999; Lens, 2002; Power, 2005), which can translate into political disaffection, as the poor often feel very little entitlement to basic social supports, public assistance, or even an entitlement to choice in terms of charitable food programs. In the same way, the ‘beggars can’t be choosers’ mentality permeates focus group participants’ comments about Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program, as they are somewhat reluctant to complain about them as redistribution programs,

Yeah, I can see, [government and taxpayers] have the money so they say ‘well, at least we’re givin’ them something’. That’s pretty much what they’re thinking, ‘at least we’re givin’ ‘em something, that’s better than—’. And I agree with them, you are giving, sure thanks, that’s better than nothing, but still, like, I’m sure everybody on welfare appreciates what they’re being given, but it’s still not enough, you know what I mean? (C-8, male)

It is certainly true that the poor and anti-poverty activists are consistently vocal about Canada’s regressive social policy record in recent decades. These changes reflect the roll-back of a more universal, entitlement-based social safety net and the roll-out of a largely regressive, selective, and difficult-to-access set of social supports. This may help to explain the changing mentality about the roles that the state, non-profit sector, and citizenry in general should play in the redistribution of income to those who are less well-off.
As Sayer (2005) notes, people’s classism manifests itself through some very troubling emotional reactions and attitudes. One interviewee wisely notes that the poor are the target of hatred and repulsion from within and outside their own class, as the employed working class despises the poor even more than the wealthy. Poor people, she notes,

are often uncomfortable to be around, if you’re educated, clean, middle-class person, who has taken a shower in the last week, it’s… people don’t like poor people. Rich people don’t like poor people, they really don’t. And the working class poor, who have dragged themselves, kicking and screaming, out of that, really don’t like poor people. My extended family, most of whom live in trailers, in New Brunswick, and all have jobs, usually doing night shift work at a hospital, crappy jobs, but they’re all this—‘I will never take charity’ people, they hate, hate the poor, and do not consider themselves among them. (Interview no. 3)

Extending this broad contempt for the poor that is common to all classes of citizens, even the poor distrust each other and make great efforts to distance themselves from their less ‘deserving’ neighbours, destroying the hope for class solidarity. One focus group conversation even shows the degree to which people distance themselves from poverty by focusing on worse case scenarios elsewhere. Indeed, the visibility of the dire poverty of the developing world provides an avenue to deny one’s own class status, and it encourages perhaps a false sense of gratitude that ‘it could be worse’:

I’m very idealistic, I look at things in an idealistic way, so I am unable to see this problem [of poverty in Kingston] in a realistic way. And also, welfare, in some other cultures, do not exist. (C-6, female)

Yeah, I agree, I know, that’s why you appreciate what you’re given. (C-8, male)

Yeah, people here are living in blessings, they do not appreciate that in some other countries they don’t have welfare they do not have any kind of equality system where everybody is equal to each other, so I think people here should learn to be more grateful, look at the bright side and— (C-6, female)

Oh yeah, I do, I do appreciate it. (C-8, female)
—rather than criticize, say the situation as horrendous, this is unbearable, etc. I mean I myself, learned a lot, I simplified my life, I cut off things from my life I didn’t need and I felt that I just don’t need them anymore and at the same time I don’t deprive myself of things I like; I buy whatever I like; when I have enough money I pamper myself, I buy perfumes, whatever, so I’m adaptable, adjustable, I grew so much wisdom, inside knowledge, like, I never—it was a very, very enriching experience, this low-income thing. (C-6, female)

Poor people, then, have a complex relationship with each other as a collective. This presents a significant barrier to the hope or expectation that poor people will perform a heroic feat of mobilizing or organizing on behalf of other economically marginalized people in a way that can effectively redress food access problems or spatialized class inequalities in the city. One cannot deny, of course, that people in low-income communities throughout North America alone have created promising programs to increase food security and bring food into their community (examples of these discussed in the following chapter). On the balance, however, their success is all the more remarkable given their relative disadvantage and discrimination compared to upper- and middle-class communities.

Even if these attitudes toward the poor were not a significant hindrance to the poor realizing their ideal food landscape, the chaos and instability that can characterize life with low income may limit what may reasonably be achieved and therefore celebrated as success. One social service worker explained the relativity that must guide how one defines ‘success’ for high-needs groups,

I have remarkable respect for individuals with families, dealing with putting in their time and energy, they come to meetings and they share information. And when I look at a lot of programs and activities and initiatives that exist, it’s because they made it happen, so I think that there is a lot of strength there, and there is a coming together, but it is a struggle, and so things to sometimes balance out and I think they have to be careful that you don’t…it’s that there needs to be…you need to celebrate the strengths and you need to recognize that within any process of trying to make change, you’re going to have movement forward and
backwards and that that shouldn’t be any, you shouldn’t define or determine whether or not you’re successful or not because you’ve reached the end; there’s lots of struggle along the way, and you need to celebrate those as well. And sometimes we concentrate on the outcome, and ‘okay, we weren’t able to keep the grocery store there, so we weren’t successful’, but that’s not the case; community members came together, they saw a huge need, they tried—and I mean in terms of a grocery store, it was done, you know what I mean?—but whether it’s a day care or looking at changing the park or whatever—just the fact that people are coming together and willing to share and are willing to come up with a plan, is a huge step and a huge strength, because each time that happens, that strengthens the community. And that’s really important. (Interview no. 8)

We face a significant dilemma with respect to a just urban food system embodying the ideals of dignity and freedom of choice through diverse, co-existing food spaces and practices: on one hand, an intuitive ‘law of democracy’ suggests that people are able to have the greatest effect at the scale of activity nearest to them, such as the city or neighbourhood. Indeed, this community worker acknowledges throughout the interview that important programs and initiatives that have only emerged as a result of local North End residents efforts. On the other hand, the daily lives of people living with low income can be distinguished by their disarray and deprivation; from this perspective, the measures of success or accomplishments must be flexible to appreciate the fact that people have even taken some steps toward change. From a community development perspective, any collective action to address a problem must be understood as a success; this, however, may not go far enough to solve the food access issues of communities such as the North End. This is not to say that class-segregated communities cannot achieve incredible things, however generally speaking, the chaos of daily life can force a shift in expectations about what can reasonably be accomplished by a disadvantaged community.
Discussion and conclusion: Locating the poor in the transition to a more just urban food system

In this chapter, I have explored two possible interpretations of North Kingston’s 2006 and 2009 retail food store closures as a social injustice. I have drawn heavily from traditionally-liberal concepts of dignity, freedom of choice, and exercising personal preferences. I have attempted to radicalize ‘dignity’ through a class analysis, however, suggesting that a just urban food system begins with the ideals of food procurement practices and spaces that embody dignity irrespective of class cleavages. Preferences and dignity-promoting food procurement experiences, however, are highly subjective and diverse, even within a collective defined by their common class: food shopping experiences in places such as large-scale franchise grocery stores and charitable food programs can either promote or diminish a person’s dignity, depending on their experiences and perspective. In order to accommodate a range of preferences, a just urban food system must offer a variety of ownership and retailing models, including the now-familiar retail franchise grocery store model, but also decentralized alternatives, including smaller retail outlets, farmers’ markets, food cooperatives, food charities, and opportunities for urban agriculture.

The second interpretation of social injustice derives from widespread disadvantage that the poor face in Canadian society, whether through the protection of capital’s interests at many levels of government, local democratic decision-making that prejudices the voice of the majority, or through widespread contempt for the poor. Capital is well-served by the existence of visible poverty in cities: contempt for the poor by all classes of people—including the poor themselves—reinforce neoliberal attitudes of
blame and apathy, deflect attention from the inherent contradictions of capital, and inhibit the formation of class empathy or solidarity. These negative attitudes are also reflective of more systemic bias against the poor, as embodied in theories about the urbanization of capital and the tendency of the deliberative democratic model to reproduce urban class inequalities. Lastly, the very chaotic nature of daily life with low income may prevent high-needs communities from successfully implementing initiatives to realize a new food landscape for residents; success must be defined in more flexible terms. There are, then, significant problems with approaching the just urban food system from a purely liberal theoretical perspective.

What are we to take from this dilemma? How might we use the North Kingston retail food landscape to imagine a new set of class relations in the city? At the beginning of this chapter, I insisted that dignity be used as a central value around which a more just urban food system might be imagined. Given the systemic and practical everyday challenges facing low-income communities, high-needs, low-income communities cannot—and should not—be left to their own devices when facing the issue of declining retail food access. In other words, it is unjust and unrealistic to expect that low-income communities should address their food desert problems by embracing alternative food procurement measures out of necessity that more well-off urban residents can take or leave as they choose. This includes self-sufficiency measures such as urban agriculture as a solution to food insecurity, but also expecting high-needs populations to conform to—and be grateful for—measures such as free yet infrequently-run shuttle bus to do their grocery shopping, while well-off people overwhelming use a personal vehicle at their convenience to shop for food. This issue of how—and where—the poor should eat and
acquire food was a subject of some disagreement by interviewees. Lack of awareness about the complexity of poverty and familiar clichés were evident in some interviewees’ testimonies, including comments such as this,

We get a little cynical about it every once in a while. We’ll put on our shuttle bus, but that bus only goes from point A to point B, and then Point B back to point A. But that doesn’t get you to the liquor store or the beer store […] And the big thing was on Bagot Street, okay, it’s a two-block walk to Food Basics. It’s not like there’s nothing in your neighbourhood. Whereas out on Division Street [in Rideau Heights], they actually took away the core source of food in their neighbourhood. These people [closer to downtown] still have one. Again, you get a little cynical, and it’s kind of like, well yeah, you can take a taxi to the liquor store, the beer store, or Liquor Quicker will bring it your door, but they won’t take a taxi to the grocery store. So it’s… there’s a lot of issues inside the issue. (Interview no. 14)

Two people, however, made the important point that the poor should not be expected to embody the new standard of eating and acquiring food while the majority of well-off urban residents continue to shop at grocery stores:

The best answer would be to make sure that everybody has an adequate income for buying food that is currently available. And then letting them choose other alternatives that you and I get to, for other reasons, not for necessity. If you choose to have a vegetable garden, it’s not because you can’t afford carrots. (Interview no. 3)

I don’t think it’s realistic. I think the early adopters need to be, by and large, value-driven and have, whatever their income, whether they’re poor students, or choose to be poor because of the work they wanna do, or if they’re really wealthy, whoever it is, the early adopters needs to be educated and need to be making value-driven decisions, nor desperation-driven decisions. (Interview no. 5)

This perspective, in a way, echoes the arguments of Guthman (2003, 2008a, 2008b) and others who take issue with privileged groups that encourage disadvantaged people to embrace alternatives to enhance their own food insecurity, with little thought to the subtle dynamics of race and class at play in these relationships. According to some scholars (Allen, 2004; Dowler & Caraher, 2003), such a response only reinforces neoliberal attitudes about poor people’s responsibility for their own condition, rather than
recognizing the underlying class cleavages and structural systems that reproduce inequality.

From this analysis, two distinct visions of a just urban food system emerge: the first is a geography of food consumption that offers people the same opportunities for food procurement practices and spaces that promote dignity, entitlement, and the liberties of personal choice. As I have argued, this model requires a diverse and decentralized food landscape consisting of the contemporary franchise grocery store model, as well as smaller based on retail exchange, as well as opportunities to help with the food production process more directly. This is a liberal-inspired vision, grounded in existing capitalist class relations and accumulation processes. It necessitates that we engage with the short-term politics of food access within current socio-economic structures, including the firm-centred approach taken by Donald (2008) and Blay-Palmer and Donald (2006). A dilemma emerges, however, when we consider the critical analysis of retail food capital that I presented in Chapter Four and the class analysis that I presented in this chapter. We quickly see the problems—and virtual impossibility—of realizing a more just politics of urban food access based on the logic of capital in the long-term. This leads us to the second and more long-term option, a post-capitalist urban food system, which would consist of more accountable, embedded, community-based, and non-profit approaches to urban food retailing. In the chapter that follows, I address the third and final research question driving this project, ‘what types of new institutional arrangements are helping to achieve a just urban food system?’ I attempt to address retail food policy initiatives needed to bring us closer to good food access in class-segregated communities.
as a short-term solution, and promising alternative retail models as the basis of longer-term transition to a postcapitalist politics of urban food consumption.
CHAPTER SEVEN: PLANNING FOR A MORE JUST URBAN FOOD SYSTEM

In the previous chapters, I argued that the poor retail food access occurring in low-income, spatially segregated communities (known as the ‘food desert’ problem) such as North Kingston can be traced to simultaneous processes of the isolation of low-income people into class-segregated neighbourhoods, and the rescaling of retail food capital. Poor physical access to retail food can be a problem in itself for low-income households that elevates the relative costs of food procurement, but it must be understood as only one element or symptom of the broader problems of low income, punitive social welfare systems, and chronic exclusion from social, political, and economic institutions of Canadian society. This additional financial burden of food procurement is one interpretation of poor retail food access as a social injustice. In Chapter Six I explored two additional interpretations: social injustice as the violation of dignity (seen the narrowing of food procurement choices) and widespread systemic prejudice against the poor, seen throughout the North Kingston case from urban governance systems that privilege capital and exchange value over use value, to the marginalization and alienation of low-income people that excludes them from local-level decision-making processes. From these insights, we see how capital both creates and perpetuates class contempt and inequality through the urban geographies of consumption and social reproduction.

I argued that imagining a more just urban food system is difficult due to paradoxical conclusions: on the one hand, low-income research participants involved in this project suggested that modern (capitalist) retail food spaces and practices are important elements of the ideal food procurement experience, along with market-
non-market alternatives. They hold great importance because ‘regular’ food shopping and food stores are processes and institutions used regularly by the middle class, and therefore they represent something to which low-income people aspire. It can also enhance one’s dignity to feel welcome and entitled to shop in a conventional retail food space, because ‘average’ food shopping in a grocery store is positively associated with freedom of choice – spending one’s own money on one’s preferred foods. On the other hand, we have seen through the example of North Kingston that the logic of retail food capital is not conducive to the needs and desires of low-income people or older, inner-city mixed communities. This new geography of consolidated retail food capital disadvantages the spatialized low-income communities whose residents would like so badly to acquire food through this channel with comfort and abundance. Systems of private property and ownership do not internalize the wishes and non-economic needs of the surrounding community, and widespread contempt for the poor in a neoliberal era decreases the likelihood that anyone—even the poor themselves—will mobilize for the issue of poor retail food access.

In light of this dilemma, I address my third and final research question, ‘what types of new institutional arrangements are helping to achieve a just urban food system?’ I attempt to reconcile this tension to envision a more just urban food system that respects and enhances low-income people’s dignity and freedom of choice in the short term while the transition to a post-capitalist food system occurs, presumably, as a society-wide movement over the long term. In particular, I argue that in the transition to a better food system (however defined), activists, scholars or political leaders are guilty to some degree of paying insufficient attention to the question of who should be the drivers of change.
They should avoid expecting marginalized people to be the first in society to change their behaviours and be the drivers of change out of desperation. Such an approach denies the validity of low-income people’s wishes to simply feel entitled to enjoy the same practices and occupy the same spaces as ‘average’ people. At the scale of the city, a new politics of food consumption and urban food spaces, ultimately then, must be driven by a broader shift in middle-class consumption patterns.

Beginning with this premise, this chapter is organized into three sections: In the first section, I acknowledge interview findings that suggest that, in fact, very little can or should be done to address the urban retail food geographies of low-income communities. These testimonies reflect, to a degree, ideological barriers that food planning advocates have encountered in their efforts to legitimize a role for planners in urban food systems. In the second section, I address promising policy and planning initiatives whose objectives are to create a more accessible retail food system in cities that brings food to underserved neighbourhoods. These suggestions are helpful in the short term—in other words, the space and time ‘in between’ our current food system and a post-capitalist food system. In the final section, I review geographers’ and other social scientists’ notions of post-capitalist or anti-capitalist politics of consumption. This body of literature provides frameworks to imagine long-term economic transition of the food system, towards new moral economies based on values that would contest the pervasiveness of advanced capitalist agriculture and food systems. I include descriptions of several alternative models of consumption and exchange that mimic the retail experience to which many low-income people aspire, including retail co-operatives, fresh food markets and food trusts. An important caveat to consider at this point is that, for the sake of maintaining the
focus on urban geographies of consumption, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address the enormous body of literature that deals more profoundly with alleviating poverty or class cleavages in Canada, or bringing about more fundamental change in the global agri-food system. For this chapter, the focus remains on urban retail food geographies.

**Popular ideas about interventions in urban food retail landscapes**

In recent years, food planners and scholars have reported many findings on urban planners’ lack of engagement with food as an element of urban life. In their push to legitimize innovative approaches to food systems planning, scholars such as Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999; 2000) have reported that urban planners often—falsely—assume that they is little that planners can or should do with respect to urban food systems. In the authors’ survey of senior urban planners, common reasons for this perspective include the beliefs that food fits only marginally with the zoning and land use functions of planning departments (‘it’s not our turf’); that food (i.e., agriculture) is a rural issue, not urban; that the food system fits within the domain of the private sector; that planners do not have funding to engage with food issues; and that free market forces are doing a good job managing food (‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’) (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). This slow uptake of food systems issues by the urban planning profession continues to receive scholarly attention, perhaps most recently by Morgan (2009) in his editorial introduction to a special issue of *International Planning Studies* on food systems planning. Here, Morgan suggests that
weaving food into local planning policy is well underway in North America and Europe, so much so that food planning in its broadest sense is arguably one of the most important social movements of the early twenty-first century in the global north (p. 431).

Food planning—and even consciousness about the relationship between food and the built urban environment—according to Morgan, has come a long way since the ‘puzzling omission’ of food from planners’ repertoires. He comments on growing interest in the topic for wide-spanning reasons such as erratic global food prices, environmental change, and shifting global geopolitics of food, in addition to the role of the food environments to human diet and health.

Despite Morgan’s diagnosis of broad overall progress, interviewees during this doctoral research expressed many reasons why there is little that urban actors can do to influence retail food landscapes. One dilemma that emerged among social service workers and anti-poverty advocates is that while intervening in retail food landscapes might help to address the access issue, it does not address the fundamental problem of low income, which is central to an anti-poverty approach to food access. It may be difficult, then, for this contingent to see the value in policy interventions in the food environment when chronic poverty and inequality continue. Another prevalent idea that emerged during the interview portion of the research was that there is virtually no way for a state apparatus to intervene in the business dealings of a private sector industry such as food retail. Several interviewees, when prompted about possible government interventions to rectify the food desert problem, suggested that government intervention was tantamount to state-run socialism,
Well, I’ve already made the point that I think that the food market is your ultimate democracy. So if you, in a way, then, try to direct that market rather than letting the individual consumers make their own choice by either restricting the choice… I’m not sure what this sort of ‘distributive’ system that you’re suggesting does. For example, you say, ‘let’s put a store that’s gonna be more accessible’, well who’s gonna pay for that store? Are you gonna go to the Kingston city council and say ‘you know, you gotta take some taxes and put it into running a City of Kingston food store’. And of course all the City of Kingston employees are all organized, it’s all unionized, so CUPE would, somebody would… so they have a very high cost structure as a store, and of course then the city has to buy or lease some location or something like that, and so you go through this process and then you, I don’t know what you’re suggesting, like whether you’d have a series of these little convenient markets or something around the city or something like that, or perhaps maybe you direct the city to take over the old No Frills site that’s closed now, because… and you put in the city employees into that, they run the grocery store and now you’re open for business and yes, that little lady doesn’t have to—she could walk back to the store. At the margin, you’re sort of taking public revenues in a way, and you’re making decisions about the best way—and you’re sort of saying ‘it’s better for us to do that, than say to redo the sewers’, or ‘it’s better to do that, than to pave the road that needs paving’, or ‘it’s better to do that than offer a swimming pool’. I mean, you know, you’re making these choices. (Interview no. 31)

This type of zero-sum thinking about the delivery and management of the food landscape was not uncommon among interviewees whose areas of expertise are private sector affairs. Moreover, progressive elected councilors, food charity leaders, and planners for the City of Kingston admit that city officials do not see their potential role in food issues; if they are called upon to introduce poverty reduction measures, for instance,

They just say ‘well, it’s not our area of concern’ […] So those are the little things that municipalities have every right to do, and can do. They can, the council can pass all kinds of legislation locally, that could affect the services that are provided to low-income families and certainly there are ways which they could for those who are still owning a home, could be waiting to access any little bit of help, they absolutely have the right to do that. And they always will say ‘no, that’s the provincial government, that’s MPAC, that’s not our area’; absolutely it is. They can do whatever they want. (Interview no. 4)

This perspective suggests that there is a wide gulf between what can be done creatively within municipal jurisdiction and what actually transpires when elected politicians and
bureaucrats fail to think creatively, are reluctant to take on policy problems, or simply become fatigued and complacent.

One issue may be that city officials are comfortable using more conventional policy tools to generate community revitalization efforts while neglecting cutting-edge policy innovation. City officials, for example, mentioned initiatives such as the City of Kingston’s Community Improvement Plan to facilitate the redevelopment of contaminated brownfield lands. They also mentioned regulations that developers must include commercial space in their newly planned residential developments, policies about the development of greenfield and suburban land, improving public transit in low-income areas, dispersal of public housing, ensuring that communities are planned with self-identified cores with facilities for public and commercial uses, and commercial assessments to ensure that a city has an appropriate amount of commercial space for its population (Interview nos. 34, 36, 37, 38). Officials are more tentative, however, in exploring policy ideas beyond these,

Well, one of the things that the municipality could do… and I’m not saying the municipality can’t promote certain businesses in certain areas, we do that all the time. One of the things a municipality could do, is that if we wanted a grocery store in a particular area of the city, let’s say on a particular plot of land, we could say, okay Loblaw’s, IGA, whoever, or we could just put it to the public and say ‘anybody who sets up a grocery store on this site, we won’t charge property taxes for ten years’. […] So I think that’s always an option. But, I mean, that’s when you start to interfere with the free market system, and I think you have to be careful when you do that, because you have to do… are you creating an unfair advantage of one grocery store over another… […]—there would be no encouragement for anybody to set up another grocery store in the area, because they’re competing against somebody whose baseline overhead is cheaper because they don’t have to pay taxes, so the competition is so much tighter, or so much more difficult. And then, you’re gonna have the grocery stores that are closest to that one, saying, ‘hold on a second, I’ve been here fifteen years providing to the community, now all of a sudden you’re going to give this new place a break?’ etc. etc. […] And I’m not saying this is right or wrong, I’m just saying there’s always opposition to whatever you do. (Interview no. 40)
Resistance to the idea of interfering in free market dynamics—along with aversion to political controversy—seem to be important reasons why local officials are cautious about intervening to correct food desert problems.

Finally, while local officials see significant problems with interfering with the free market of retail capital in cities, interviewees from the commercial real estate sector see the free market—and gentrification—as the answer to poor retail food access, instead of policy intervention. One commercial real estate agent I spoke with suggested that

I mean, it’s just like ‘when the love is gone, move on’. If that area’s not doing it anymore and the buildings aren’t attracting tenants, the housing’s low and the crime’s gone up or whatever the scenario may be, slowly but surely things just get recycled and repeated and redeveloped and revamped and that’s how it goes. [...] And before you know it, there’s selling condos in like this, smart business people from downtown are moving into these neighbourhoods that were once very run down and impoverished and full of crime. So it’s really just a process, and you just go along with it, and as it happens, things change. ‘Cause, you know, in every unfortunate situation, there is opportunity. [...] To the right developer, to the right person with the eye, they’ll say ‘look, I can buy that, tear it down, build it back up, and it’ll be better than ever before. And I’ll make money doing it’. And that’s what really drive those developments, they see the potential, it’s all focused around location. It’s all focused downtown. So if you’ve got your location, and you have the right space and you have the right price, the rest are sort of the variables. (Interview no. 25)

Gentrification—defined as “the process by which working class residential neighborhoods are rehabilitated by middle class homebuyers, landlords, and professional developers” (Smith 1982, p. 139)—is thought to be a naturally-occurring process that revitalizes the commercial viability of a neighbourhood through the closing of an existing rent gap. According to this perspective, rather than investing policy money and efforts to influence retail food landscapes, the rent gap will eventually attract developers and property

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44 See Smith’s (1979, 1982, 1987) rent gap thesis as well as for more information on political-economic theories of gentrification.
investors into an area, bringing new residents with the income to make food retail viable in an area. This is a highly contestable idea from a social justice perspective, of course, because it speaks to neither the well-being of current residents nor the issue of urban regeneration projects that concentrate poverty in an area of the city such as Rideau Heights. With these arguments for limited—or no—municipal policy intervention in urban retail food landscapes in mind, I attempt to provide a counterbalance by discussing existing municipal efforts to recruit food retail to underserved neighbourhoods.

**Short-term initiatives to improve retail food access**

Although we can trace retail food access problems back to capital as it embeds itself in the built urban landscape and urban governance, that is not to say that this retail model of exchange holds no promise for underserved communities. In this section I discuss alternative for-profit and non-profit retail models that stand to offer dignified food procurement experiences in underserved communities by offering dignity through choice and monetary exchange, greater accountability and local embeddedness, and lower costs through proximity.

This section of this chapter, therefore, takes a broadly firm-centred approach, in the same way that Donald (2008) considers larger food firms as well as small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in her analysis. Donald argues that in food systems planning and other alternative food systems analysis, the firm has been treated like a ‘black box’ (Taylor & Asheim, 2001, as cited in Donald, 2008). A firm-centred approach, however, offers an
ability to understand better the complex multidimensional and multi-scalar interdependencies between, on the one hand, the internal innovative dynamics of firms and, on the other hand, the broader institutional – and well as social, environmental and cultural – setting within which we all operate. (p. 1252)

Donald’s point about the centrality of capitalist firm dynamics to our contemporary economic reality is particularly salient: alternative food system advocates are often interested in retail/distribution channels for local- or sustainably-grown food such as farmers’ markets and community gardens. They are notably less willing, however, to engage with conventional retail food spaces such as grocery stores or supermarkets, even when they are independently- or locally-owned (Bedore, 2010). I attempt to address these conventional retailing firms here as a short-term reconciliation of the theoretical dilemma emphasized in Chapter Five.

As I have argued, it can be difficult for advocates to define the precise problem of living in a food desert when arguments about justice, fairness, inequality, or inconvenience tend to be dismissed or de-politicized by the public. As two interviewees suggest,

> to claim that we have a right to food access within so many blocks, no politician is gonna know to do with that, you know? That’s such a big philosophical claim, which I think obviously has grounds, but they’re gonna respond more based on, ‘this is a city, what kind of city do we want to live in, and how can we help shape that to make sure there’s food access in all the different neighbourhoods?’ That seems more doable, that seems to have more political clout… .(Interview no. 7)

> I don’t see how you can [talk about the right to food access], and if you want to start talking about that particular matter as a question of right, you’re talking about it country-wide, because it’s the charter that defines rights and freedoms. (Interview no. 34)

Instead, policymakers are embracing the urban food landscape for the varieties of social problems that grocery store—and fresh food access—can help to address. These include economic development (business attraction and new employment), health (combating
obesity and other health problems, especially among visible minority groups), good urban design principles (combating neighbourhood segregation, enhancing public safety and walkability), food system re-localization (new distribution channels), and children’s issues (enhancing the proximity of fresh food to places such as parks and schools, and interrupting landscapes of fast food that promote unhealthy eating and obesity) (e.g., Institute of Medicine, 2009; Public Health Law & Policy, 2009). Documents such as the American Planning Association’s Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning (2007) also situate the need for retail food outlets within its understanding of healthy and well-planned community and regional food systems. These, it presumes, can be solid tools for environmental sustainability, food safety, ethical working conditions, preservation of agricultural land, diversity within the agricultural and retail sectors, and preservation of indigenous food cultures. While these policy approaches to the food desert problem fail to address questions of entitlement or class inequality in a direct way, they at least create better ‘traction’ and support among the public in terms of the highly visible costs of inaction, including burden on the health care system, low community cohesion, declining neighbourhoods, and food system waste and pollution.

Contributions to the academic literature have emerged as policymakers have begun to develop policies to restore urban food landscapes. At a broader scale Wrigley (2002; Wrigley, Warm & Margetts, 2003) originally explored the UK government’s series of policy papers addressing social exclusion at the neighbourhood scale. Findings suggested that poverty in Britain is often spatially concentrated in neighbourhoods with much worse outcomes in terms of health, well-being, unemployment, crime and access to public and private services, compared to more affluent neighbourhoods. The Labour
government took a neighbourhood-driven approach that examined the potential of health and non-health interventions (including food outlets) to combat social exclusion (Wrigley, Warm & Margetts, 2003). This began policy action on the part of Policy Action Teams, pursuant to the 2001 *A National Strategy Action Plan* and other related reports to understand how policy interventions and deliberate urban planning around the retail food environment could function within an urban regeneration policy agenda (ibid.; Wrigley, Guy & Lowe, 2002).

Similarly, Reisig and Hobbiss (2000) explore responses by the City of Leeds to the food desert problem, which had been investigated by various government bodies, including central government-issued Planning Policy Guidance notes, the Low-Income Project Team of the Nutrition Task Force, the Social Exclusion Unit and the *Acheson Report* (ibid.). The authors describe Leeds’ response to its food desert as having lacked “strategic multi-sectoral planning and funding, is characterized by an over-reliance on community development and is taken forward in isolation from the private sector” (p. 148). The problem, they suggest, is that “this approach cannot reach all those affected by food poverty and fails to integrate those groups into mainstream ways of shopping, should they so wish” (ibid.). The authors note that proposals for resolving the food desert problem were frequently directed toward individual- and community-level behaviour. Interviewees rarely suggested changes to existing shopping infrastructure or more macro-level policies to address poverty. They conclude that these understandings suggest that food deserts occupy only a peripheral place on local agents’ agendas, and that “although community involvement is vital to community development, it cannot be left to communities to organize their access to good-quality affordable food, as enjoyed by the
rest of society” (p. 147). Similarly, Pothukuchi (2005) finds that American urban planning departments tend to be more reactive in terms of underserved low-income areas without retail food stores; few departments surveyed in her study had undertaken any incentive or economic development efforts to address the problem, and that most new developments were developer-led. Where service was lacking, planners perceive that designing food retail strategies is not within their domain or realm of influence, and that it is poor market conditions—not planning efforts—that are to blame.

In recent years, however, other efforts have demonstrated greater willingness to engage in cross-sectoral policy efforts than these cases. In the same article, Pothukuchi explores (2005) three successful cases of American cities that successfully attracted food retailers to underserved areas, through a combination of appropriate incentives and public, private and grassroots outreach to potential retailers. The keys to success, the author notes, include “political leadership at the highest levels; strong grassroots advocacy; and skilled public agency participation that responded to the regional grocery industry context, assembled appropriate development and financing tools, and competitively recruited operators” (p. 238). Her examples of Dallas, Chicago, and Rochester provide important illustrations of the complementary ways that actors work together to address a legitimate problem for diverse urban areas.

Many American health and neighbourhood-focused organizations are engaging in similar questions of successful food retail attraction strategies that cities can use to address the food desert problem. New York City’s FRESH (Food Retail Expansion to Support Health) program offers zoning incentives and NYCIDA (New York City Industrial Development Agency) financial incentives to potential and existing grocery
store operators who devote a given amount of square footage to fresh food and meet other criteria (New York City, 2010). The initiative is applauded by Samina Raja of the University of Buffalo as possibly the first municipal food planning initiative of its kind in the country. Unlike most contemporary food zoning efforts in the country, this one regulates to the quality of food inside the food store by requiring a certain amount of square footage be dedicated to fresh fruits and vegetables. (S. Raja, personal communication, May 16, 2009)

FRESH stands to set an important precedent for active local government involvement in addressing retail food access issues through traditional urban planning tools. Similarly, the State of Pennsylvania has seen early indicators of success with its Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative. Since 2004, this public-private effort has taken state-level seed money and invested in the development of sixty-eight supermarkets and fresh food outlets (and related job creation and economic development) in underserved urban and rural areas (Food Trust, 2010).

Moreover, a recent issue of *Planning* (the periodical of the American Planning Association) featured other American cities addressing underserved neighbourhoods. While other articles comment on urban agriculture initiatives in places such as Detroit (Bonfiglio, 2009), Shigley (2009) explores the lack of accessible food retail in places such as San Francisco’s Tenderloin district that face challenges of space and low income. Shigley details initiatives in cities such as Philadelphia, Oakland, and New York City, including strategies that address street vending, clarifying zoning language and definitions, designing initiatives to make use of underused, blighted lands, enhancing community and regional food planning, protections for urban agriculture, zoning to permit small stores, allowing food retailing in areas zoned for residential and
manufacturing use, and integrating the grocery store issues into broader issues about food system sustainability and re-localization.

Other creative public policy initiatives to revitalize urban food landscapes are emerging from efforts by organizations and city-based studies. In 2004, Food Trust\textsuperscript{45} published *Stimulating supermarket development: A new day for Philadelphia.* Collaborators for this report studied poor access in Philadelphia to assemble policy recommendations for neighbourhoods with “unmet demand for food retail” (Food Trust 2004, p. 1), for the stated purposes of protecting the health of children and families by ensuring access to affordable, nutritious food, and creating jobs and contributing to the revitalization of Philadelphia. The ideas promoted by the Food Trust fall into four broad categories, roughly addressing areas of encouraging research, political leadership and effective lobbying; changing land use patterns and zoning regulations; addressing transportation barriers; and exploring incentives and other creative policy tools. Table 10 provides a summary of these and other recommendations, including a publication by Public Health Law & Policy titled *Getting to grocery: Tools for attracting healthy food retail to underserved neighborhoods* (2009) and a community design paper endorsed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (McCann, 2006).

In Canada, rhetoric and advocacy work around food system change has focused far more on embracing alternative food geographies than revitalizing urban foodscapes through conventional grocery store attraction. Policy recommendations have embraced

\textsuperscript{45} Food Trust is an American non-profit organization founded in 1992 with the goal of making health food available for all. Food Trust combines nutrition education research with policy advocacy and programming. Their programs focus on improving food health and accessibility in urban settings, including spaces such as farmers’ markets, supermarkets, schools, and corner stores (Food Trust, 2004).
Table 10: Selected policy ideas for revitalizing urban retail food landscapes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use planning</th>
<th>Transportation planning</th>
<th>Research and governance</th>
<th>Economic planning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assemble land inventory for food retail development</td>
<td>Assure safe, cheap, and convenient transportation for those with poor access</td>
<td>Formally adopt food retailing as planning priority</td>
<td>Identity targeted areas, develop promotional materials for retailers and real estate developers</td>
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<td>Implement smart growth, compact, and mixed-used neighbourhood planning principles</td>
<td>Undertake urban design favourable to pedestrian, bike and transit connections</td>
<td>Work with key city and agency contacts; engage elected officials, planning and other departments, etc.</td>
<td>Develop operations assistance (workforce development, property management support, funds for façade and equipment upkeep, and energy efficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redevelop older social housing projects to change neighbourhood demographics</td>
<td>Ensure high-quality accessible public transit for people with disabilities</td>
<td>Assemble local industry and civic sector leaders to guide policy implementation</td>
<td>Develop support initiatives for diverse small-scale, women- and minority-owned food retail enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update zoning regulations for neighbourhood commercial use, to accommodate retailers’ loading and parking needs</td>
<td>Ensure high-quality public transit; fund infrastructure to improve walkability and bikability in urban areas</td>
<td>Conduct data-driven market assessments to identify unmet demand, community food assessments, and mapping of local food environments</td>
<td>Reduce regulatory barriers for supermarket investment; expedite the development process through ‘fast-tracking’ programs; make economic development programs available to supermarket industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop specific ordinances to manage the balance between groceries and liquor sales in corner stores and smaller groceries [where liquor sales are decentralized]</td>
<td>Support transit programs to connect low-income communities with food charities, social services and retail areas</td>
<td>Conduct research on: relationship between health and food access; testing interventions and natural experiments; market forces</td>
<td>Implement business-enhancement incentives, i.e., public-private partnership between convenience stores and neighbourhood-based non-profit organizations; develop business financing programs for local supermarket development projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reform zoning codes (i.e., form-based codes instead of use-based)</td>
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<td>Develop and facilitate retailers’ use of tax credits</td>
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<td>Update and loosen barriers to promote public markets, outdoor food vendors, etc.</td>
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<td>Negotiate community benefit agreements with new retailers, and workforce development partnerships</td>
<td>Acquire parcels of land and financing for desirable development</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Undertake crime prevention and public safety initiatives to enhance neighbourhood attractiveness for potential retailers/developers</td>
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Sources: Food Trust, 2004; McCann, 2006; Public Health Law & Policy, 2009
the community food security approach to combating hunger and insecurity, which places
greater emphasis on community-driven, non-market solutions such as urban agriculture
while seeking greater self-sufficiency through agriculture and food production systems
(Power, 1998). As a result, there has been less emphasis on the food desert problem
through retail initiatives and more emphasis on creating more self-sufficient locally-based
food systems. The Region of Waterloo Public Health organization’s A healthy community
food system plan for Waterloo Region (2007), for example, notes the organization’s
current progress in five areas: developing a dynamic partnership to implement their
Community Food System Plan; strengthening food-related skills and knowledge among
consumers; working with the planning department to address agricultural policy issues;
increasing the availability of healthy food; and strengthening the local food economy.
These objectives are admirable in that they take a holistic approach to a sustainable
regional food system, however they hardly intersect with the conventional retail food
landscape. Both the actions taken to this point and possible future actions include some
suggestions about identifying retail food opportunities and a support program for new
local food businesses, however the organization’s ideas focus more on alternative retail
outlets and non-market options such as farm-gate sales, mobile markets, farmers’
markets, and community gardens—exactly those initiatives that less than half of Rideau
Heights residents had used in the year preceding the 2007 food desert survey. In the
same light, a food security document published the Manitoba Food Charter Inc. (n.d.)

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46 Of our survey of 121 Rideau Heights residents, thirty-six (29%) respondents had
purchased food from a farmers’ market, four (3%) had acquired food from a community
garden, one (.82%) through a community-supported agriculture scheme, and eighteen
(14%) from a local farm in the previous year.
acknowledges the need to address food access by working with food retailers, however the bulk of the attention goes to promoting urban agriculture and community gardening.

Canada’s largest cities are, however, investing more substantial policy attention to the food desert question. Toronto, Canada’s largest city, has recently unveiled the proposed Toronto Food Strategy through its Board of Health, to address hunger reduction, consumer education, agricultural production and land protection, human health, and other issues. Although the strategy has yet to be passed and implemented at the local government, Toronto stands to be a leader in positively shaping the urban retail food landscape, as Toronto is a highly polarized city with geographically-segregated pockets of poverty that are underserved by food retail (Carey, 2005; Martin Prosperity Institute, 2010). As well, Vancouver is involved in funding various programs to enhance food access in underserved communities: Vancouver Coastal Health operates its Foodstore, a low-cost retail operation that sells nutritional single-serving foods (including ‘blended’ fruit and vegetable snacks such as smoothies for those with poor dental health). This intervention is intended to fill to the gap between meal programs and regular grocery stores, and customers spend an average for $4.50 a visit on food (Vancouver Coastal Health, 2010).

For many reasons, Canada’s larger and smaller cities have not engaged with the urban food desert problem to the extent that American cities and organizations have\(^\text{47}\). For instance, even large Canadian cities do not share American cities’ histories of racial

\(^{47}\) The reasons for socio-economic diversity and differing reactions to the food desert issue between Canadian and American cities are far too complex to address here. They will, however, be the subject of my upcoming post-doctoral research project, *Food desert responses: Policy innovation and transfer from American to Canadian cities*. This project will involve a comparative analysis of the political, cultural, constitutional and legislative similarities and dissimilarities between the cities in the two countries.
tension, segregation, and inequality; as a result, the problems of ‘white flight’ and inner city decay are less pronounced in Canada. The ethnic diversity of Canada’s largest cities—three of which attract almost 70% of the country’s new immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2009c)—may explain the persistence of small-scale, independently-owned ethnic food stores in these places compared to others. One interviewee, a property developer, comments about Kingston’s situation in this regard,

these Asian groceries are interesting spaces and places, and they have lots of plants growing out in front, you can stop by and get fresh fruit or fresh flowers or whatever. And we don’t have them in Kingston. And I’d always love to bring one, but I don’t know… I’ve never been able to find anybody that—‘cause you can’t just have, like, a Canadian opening an Asian grocery, they gotta be Asian, and have a little flair and a feel and a… and so, we just haven’t been fortunate enough to land them […] I once petitioned a company called, if you’ve been in Toronto at all, it’s called, it’s actually a more higher end retailer, but it’s called The Kitchen Table. And these guys, like, shine their apples, and when you see this presentation […] well, when you see their presentation you go ‘wow!’; now they’re probably overcharging too, it’s probably a gazillion dollars for the apple, but it’s got a ‘wow’ factor. And when I knocked on this door and I said ‘you know, you’re all over Toronto, and you’re a real sharp operator, I can just tell, and I’ll even give you a real break on the rent, I just want you to come to Kingston, because I think you’re something that we’re missing’. And his response was ‘I’m successful in what I do, where I’m doing it, and why exactly would I drive two and a half hours, even if the rent was for nothing?’ So you understand that from a business perspective, he’s focused on his business. (Interview no. 28)

From this perspective, Kingston suffers from a combination of factors, including its distance from major urban centres and its lack of substantial long-standing immigrant populations and attractiveness to new immigrants. These factors help to explain Kingston’s relatively mundane small-scale retail food economy, compared to other North American cities. As well, the United States may have stronger traditions of civic associational activity as well as endowed funding for research and activism on social problems, leading to greater policy research on the food desert problem. Finally, the urban food landscapes in the United States may benefit from a retail food industry that is
more decentralized and less consolidated than in Canada, owing to entrepreneurial cultures, different legislative frameworks or some other factor. Nevertheless, is it most important to note that overall there is ample North American policy research, recommendations and case study material emerging on the question of how municipal managers and grassroots organizations can address the food desert problem using available planning and legislative policy tools. This is important work, given that a just and dignified urban food landscape is one that offers a variety of food procurement options and spaces.

**Longer-term transition to post-capitalist food system**

As I have suggested, there are significant policy efforts being devoted to the question of attracting and retaining viable retail food options in underserved communities, particularly from American urban research. While successful initiatives can provide short-term benefits such as improved health, economic development, neighbourhood vitality and less burden of food procurement on the poor, what are the long-term implications of this capital-intensive strategy? I argued in Chapter Four that food deserts have arisen precisely because of the predatory nature and changing geographies of scaled-up retail capital. How sustainable is a corporatized for-profit solution that we know a) is not socially embedded in, or accountable to, the communities where it resides; b) is not guaranteed to stay in communities despite the use values that residents derive from it; and c) stands to be absorbed or eliminated by other retail firms if it shows too much promise or success?
In the long-term, retail food capital is not a sustainable solution to the access problems. When left to operate freely, it perpetuates class inequality in the food procurement process and urban governance. For the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I explore non-capitalist food procurement alternatives that offer a new social or moral economy of food access while attempting to replicate the choice and dignity offered by a traditional retail exchange environment. The need for non-capitalist food procurement opportunities was mentioned several times throughout the interview process, by interviewees who are interested in small-scale retail, non-profit food programs or new agricultural politics that re-establishes the consumer as producer,

So I think people are reacting to the dehumanization of supermarket shopping; that’s why people who can afford to, want to go to the farmers’ market, where not everybody is necessarily a farmer, and you can buy the Wolfe Island banana there. So I think there’s an appeal there. This inherent tendency of capitalism to concentrate and concentrate runs up against people’s desire to have a more humane kind of experience. Now, not everybody has that desire, a lot of people, it’s the only thing they know, and they like supermarkets, you hear about the people at the coffee breaks, and they’re heavily into consumerism, heavily into TV… but I think there are lots of people find it extremely satisfying and find it pleasant to go to supermarkets because it’s all they’ve ever known, it’s reassuring, and the marketing… these companies hire very smart people to do their marketing, and they hire psychologists and they hire behavioural people and we’re constantly being manipulated by them. So our desire to be more autonomous consumers in a more diversified economy runs slap-dash up against the forces of monopoly capitalism that are trying to force us or persuade us to go to shopping. (Interview no. 1)

It’s all tied up with the people who push the 100-mile diet kind of thing and the slow food movement, and we have to get back to living off the land that we are situated on in some way, and it’s easier to… easier to imagine, construct the communities which are ecologically closed, you know, you don’t produce waste for the rest of the world, it’s easier to establish that within your own community, people have to get used to dealing with waste and doing without things that generate endless waste and energy waste, so… in this way, if people had a connection to the countryside around, maybe something could be worked out. (Interview no. 10)
These ideals of food production and distribution at smaller, more ‘humane’ and labour-intensive scales seem to speak to the importance of place and scale to the health of the food system and human dignity. These interviewees’ ideas about a more just and dignified food system also speak to the theme of long-term, radical food system transformation, given that they are necessarily speaking about institutional arrangements that disrupt the capitalist wage labour system, complex systems of division of labour, and that oppose the corporatization of the food economy. Throughout this project, I have avoided the idea that low-income people should be the drivers of change toward a new food system that embraces these qualities. Because low-income people aspire to middle class consumption norms, advocates should endeavor to change the values of the majority rather than expect the poor to adopt non-capitalist consumption patterns out of desperation. For this reason, it is important to explore alternative retail models whose popularization can form the basis of a post-capitalist politics of retail food procurement— for the general population, not simply targeted efforts toward the poor.

Geographers such as Gibson-Graham (2006) and Leyshon, Lee and Williams (2003) have contributed to our understanding of non-capitalist economies. Like the anti-globalization and anti-capitalist protests that surged in the 1990s, Leyson et al. argue that alternative economic spaces are necessarily flexible, unstable, and chaotic. They embody alternative institutions that entail new sets of social relations, modes of economic exchange, rescaled community-based economies and strategies of cooperative aid, and financial investing that stand in opposition to capitalist logic. In this volume, Crewe, Gregson, and Brooks (2003) explore alternative retail spaces. While the authors concentrate on retail spaces of creative industries such as ‘retro’ retailers and traders who
sell previously-used goods (and therefore is of questionable empirical relevance to food),
important conceptual insights emerge from their discussion. They suggest, for example,
that these alternative retailers, shops and market places are

Deeply unstable and are constantly under threat from encroachment by more
‘mainstream’ concerns through ongoing commercial processes of property
(re)valorization and gentrification, and through cultural processes of
(re)commodification and shifting consumption imperatives. (p. 77)

Alternative retro retailing entails a high degree of tacit knowledge, foresight about trends,
local and distant business networks, personal interaction, and labour, much like
independent food retail entrepreneurs who enjoy the business for this scale because it
necessitates human creativity and innovation (Interview nos. 15, 16 and 24).
Nevertheless, already-consolidated retail capital poses the same challenge to small-scale
retailers in both sectors—expropriation, absorption, chain encroachment, and imitation.
Despite the challenges to the retro retail industry, the authors complicate the idea of self-
employed work as “fragmented, risky and precarious” (p. 100) because of the sociality,
trust, and friendship alliances that it entails. In a way, this study reminds us that retail
takes many forms, including self-employed petit bourgeois retailers that operate against
the logic of capitalist expansion and toward subsistence and self-fulfillment.

Gibson-Graham (2006) deconstructs the language politics that naturalize and
normalize capitalism, suggesting that

In its current hegemonic articulation as neoliberal global capitalism,
capitalocentric discourse has now colonized the entire economic landscape and its
universalizing claims seem to have been realised. A distinctive social imaginary—a
heady mix of freedom, individual wealth, unfettered consumption, and well-being
trickled down to all—convenes a series of myths that constitute the (illusory)
fullness and positivity of “capitalist” society, masking the social antagonisms on
which this presence is posited. (p. 55)
To decentre and dislocate capitalism from the plane of economic possibilities—and to develop a new language of economic diversity—Gibson-Graham considers diverse understandings of constructions such as ‘enterprises’ ‘transactions’ and ‘labour’. She suggests that the manner of accumulation and appropriation of surplus and the nature of labour within non-capitalist and alternative capitalist arrangements are what distinguish them from their capitalist counterparts. The author shows that the vast majority of ‘work’ in a national economy that is considered ‘capitalist’ is, in fact, alternative or non-capitalist in nature, including unpaid or non-monetized work.

Gibson-Graham suggest several terms that could build a fuller taxonomy of diverse economies. ‘Intentional economies’ that could provide a conceptual basis for alternative retail food arrangements could also form the basis of a more just urban food system over the long-term. These are “projects that treat economy as a political and ethical space of decision” (p. 101). As well, the ‘community economy’ provides a possible basis for “placing the issues of necessity, surplus, consumption, and commons, in the foreground of ethical deliberation and decision” (p. 101, emphasis in original).

Through her discussion of Mondragón, the collective and cooperative economic system in the Basque region of Spain, the author explores how issues such as the distribution of surplus, division of labour, and even retail expansion within the cooperative economy are managed in a democratic, decentralized governance system among worker-owners. Indeed, the Mondragón Cooperative Coordination (MCC) is showing tremendous expansion and economic success while remaining committed to principles such as ‘people over capital’, sovereignty of labour, self-management, universality, open membership, education, and social transformation. Ongoing dispute and struggle within
the MCC are signs of its evolution and maturation, not the inevitable failure of cooperative models, as social theorists have predicted (ibid., p. 106-111). There continues to be, then, exciting theoretical and case-based discussion around non-capitalist or alternative capitalist forms of enterprise upon which to basis the long-term transition to a more just urban food system.

It is also worth reflecting briefly on three possible retail forms that provide the freedom of choice of a just and dignified retail transaction while constituting a new, non-capitalist geography of food procurement. Cooperatives have a long tradition in Canada, especially in regions such as Atlantic Canada and the prairie region. Consumer cooperatives sell retail goods such as food in a variety of formats and scales, varying in “size and sophistication from small buying clubs, in which a few families pool grocery orders and buy from wholesale outlets, to large multi-national stores” (Canadian Co-operative Association, 2007) always with the goal of distributing surplus earnings among members. At the larger end of the scale, Co-op Atlantic has a membership of 128 cooperatives in Atlantic Canada and Québec. It operates many retail banners that provide commodities such as food and agricultural implements to its members, who can undertake roles in the governance of the cooperative (Co-op Atlantic, 2010). One example at a much smaller scale is a retail food cooperative called Karma Co-op, which is located in Toronto, Ontario. Karma Co-op offers working and non-working memberships, in order to offer members a discount on their food purchases in exchange for their labour (Karma Co-op, 2010). Closer to Kingston, smaller food cooperatives such as the Eastern Ontario Local Food Co-op are in the start-up process. Because cooperatives are member-owned and operated, they stand to offer greater flexibility in the
food ordering and pick-up process, and are able to embed themselves in communities according to members’ needs and wishes. They may also be appreciated by low-income communities, who, as we saw in Chapter Six, value the opportunity to earn food through exchange or purchase, including contributing their labour if or when money is inevitably tight.

Other retail formats such as fresh food markets show potential to offer a greater (though still insufficient\(^{48}\)) food selection for consumers outside of conventional grocery store models. A 2009 summary of farmers’ markets in Canada suggests that there are 508 farmers’ markets across ten provinces, and that 79% of market vendors are primary producers. While farmers’ markets can be highly capitalistic depending on how their vendors treat economic surplus and organize labour in their respective enterprise, they can also blur the conventional distinctions between capitalist, labourer, and retailer. Kingston is an indication of the growing popularity and civic interest in farmers’ markets, as the city’s inventory of farmers’ markets has expanded in recent years from one (the ‘premier’ Kingston market located in the key downtown entertainment, tourism and shopping area) to four—with three newer markets expanding to Kingston’s north, west, and east ends. While the governance of conventional farmers’ markets is managed by the host site (i.e., landlords), a vendors’ association, and the local government (as a regulator), this is not to say that activists and advocates could not stretch the traditional governance and suppliers of food markets,

\(^{48}\) In 2009, for example, 37% of vendors in identified farmers’ markets in Canada indicated that they sold vegetables and 23% sold fruit, however the portion of vendors selling other household essential food groups such as meat, eggs, and dairy was substantially smaller, at just 9%, 2% and 2% respectively (Farmers’ Markets Canada, 2009).
if you have a large yard and you want to, maybe you can grow food to sell it, or have a small greenhouse that grows specialty herbs, or have a mushroom-growing thing, going on, or have… there’s all sorts of projects in other cities, green roof projects, it’s amazing what some cities have gotten up to, in terms of urban gardening. And it can create employment, it can create educational opportunities, a lot of these things run as social enterprises that hire, often, students or at-risk youth, people from marginal communities in a city, to work and then sell the produce or sell the compost or run workshops. There’s ways of having it be a really vibrant, multifaceted project, and none of that really falls within the purview of community garden as it’s understood, which is why we’re really pushing urban agriculture. (Interview no. 3)

According to this interviewee, that there are many ways that urban agriculture can fit within a non-capitalist model. In this example, a casual food grower (such as a backyard gardening enthusiast) could earn a small surplus (for their own subsistence rather than for reinvestment as capital) through social economy-type projects that contribute to poverty alleviation, environmental stewardship, and economic and social development.

Lastly, food trusts are an emerging idea in the United Kingdom that is shifting food acquisition toward community-based enterprise and local sustainability agendas. The Development Trusts Association (n.d.), which has parallel associations in Wales and Scotland, defines development trusts as

Community enterprises working to create wealth in communities and keep it there. They trade on a ‘not-for-personal-profit’ basis, re-investing surplus back into their community and effecting social, economic and environmental, or ‘triple bottom line’, outcomes.

The Association also notes that development trusts are community-owned and led, aimed at cultivating enterprises that also develop community assets and bring about positive social change (ibid.). Food is an area of growing interest for UK-based development trusts: The Development Trusts Association has recently launched an online survey to determine possible roles for trusts in a more sustainable, ‘third sector’ food economy, and examples of food-related initiatives are growing. The Headingley Development Trust
(located in an inner suburban area of Leeds, England) has launched several food initiatives, including the Headingley Community Orchard. Through this program, members can pay a nominal fee and assist with orchard maintenance and receive a share of fruit production in the orchard (Headingley Development Trust Community Orchard, n.d.). This Trust also runs a community farmers’ market that sells a variety of foods produced from local farms and producers, and is organized weekly by volunteers. Headingley has also taken the community-supported agriculture concept and applied it to livestock through its Pig and Fowl Co-op, selling competitively-priced organic meat to its Trust members (Headingley Development Trust Pig and Fowl Co-op, n.d.). Similarly, the East Kilbride Development Trust (located in Scotland) is developing plans for a food initiative, which would be run pursuant to principles such as local democracy, social inclusion, community education, heritage, environmental stewardship, and health. The Trust is currently exploring possible targets such as supporting local producers, increasing the presence of local food in nearby shops, and incorporating local food into schools through student education, schools meals, and cultivation on school lands. The group is also considering options such as land allotments for food production, recipe exchanges, community-supported agriculture, vegetable box purchasing schemes, farmers’ markets, cooking groups and co-operative food and beverage-making (for beer, wine, and cider, for example) (East Kilbride Development Trust Food Initiative, n.d.). Development Trusts, then, may be another promising route to creating sustainable, non-capitalist, community-led retail food options that has yet to enter the policy arena in North America.
Clearly, there is substantial work to be done to enact the slow transition to a post-capitalist urban food system. As I have discussed throughout this project, a just urban food system has an important temporal as well as geographic dimension: while a scaled-up capitalist food economy persists, low-income people should not be deprived of a food procurement experience that they deemed to be dignified—whether dignity comes in the form of urban agriculture and self-sufficiency or a retail exchange at a conventional large-scale grocery store. The examples of consumer cooperatives, food markets and development trusts that I have briefly examined here can perform the important functions of providing a retail food exchange, but in ways that defy the logic of capitalism. In this sense, they may provide a solution to the theoretical dilemma that I outlined in Chapter Six, as well as practical examples of spaces of exchange in a post-capitalist urban food landscape.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to answer my final research question, ‘what type of new institutional arrangements are needed to achieve a just urban food system?’ This is not as easy question to answer, given that the burden of food procurement in food deserts is only a symptom of systemic economic and social exclusion of the poor in Canada and other capitalist economies. Indeed, it is tempting to dismiss the idea of justice at the level of the urban food system given the need for broader discussions about economic justice and poverty alleviation across the globe. Nevertheless, if we wish to embrace the idea that the urban food landscape can work against class-based inequality, it is necessary to think at the level of planning a more equitable food environment. I
developed my argument in three sections: first, I suggested that local leaders in diverse sectors in cities such as Kingston feel that there are few reasons, or resources, for cities to engage in deliberate planning of their retail food landscape. These explanations coincide with the work of prominent planners and other scholars who have explored food systems planning as a ‘stranger’ to the planning world. Second—and in spite of these critiques—I explored promising policy and programming interventions occurring mostly in the United States to address the lack of retail food outlets in low-income and inner-city neighbourhoods. These policy ideas have yet to be embraced as enthusiastically in Canada, however they are important tools for the goal of short-term food access solutions that provide retail opportunities in underserved neighbourhoods. Planning initiatives are happening in the broad areas of land use planning, transportation planning, research and governance, and economic planning. In the final section of the chapter, I explored ideas about a post-capitalist urban food system. Geographers such as Leyshon, Lee, and Williams have explored alternative economic spaces, as well as Gibson-Graham in her exploration of community economies and post-capitalist politics. I also offered brief descriptions of three possible food procurement arrangements—consumer cooperatives, food markets, and development trusts—that could facilitate the transition to a post-capitalist urban food geography. In Chapter Eight, I summarize the results of this doctoral project and offer final thoughts about the urban politics of class and food access as a continuing social justice issue.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This dissertation contributes to the geographical literature on food deserts through a normative, qualitative, and social justice-focused study of class-segregated communities with poor retail food access. Food deserts have received substantial treatment in the academic literature in recent years as scholars and the public have become aware of cities, primarily in the United Kingdom and North America, with neighbourhoods with poor or declining retail food access. Prior research, however, has usually fallen within two areas: (a) quantitative studies that examine the impact of single variables (such as the opening of a new grocery store) on health behaviours (such as individuals’ fruit and vegetable consumption), or (b) policy-oriented research on retail expansion, land use planning, transportation, or other aspects that are well-suited to fields such as urban planning and commerce. In response to the lack of social justice-focused scholarly research on food deserts, I have attempted to understand North Kingston’s changing retail food geography between 2006 and 2009 using a critical political economy theoretical framework. In this brief conclusion, I restate my goals for this dissertation, as well as the key arguments I have developed.

I had two primary goals for this research project. The first was to use the food desert problem to understand the subtle ways that capital embeds itself and shapes the built environment to facilitate and support the dynamics of capitalist accumulation and reproduce class relations. This includes the question of how capital manipulates and shapes the everyday geographies of peoples’ movements throughout the city in the food procurement process. The second goal was to analyze the food desert problem through a
social justice lens, incorporating normative ideas about a more just urban food system. To achieve these research goals, I developed my research agenda around three key research questions:

(1) How are the processes of globalized retail food capital creating uneven retail food access for class-segregated communities?

(2) What principle(s) of justice are most helpful to understand this case study as a social injustice?

(3) What types of new institutional arrangements are helping to achieve a just urban food system?

In other words, why is this happening? Why is this a social injustice? What is being done about it?

**Contributions and conclusions**

I have advanced several arguments that add to the ongoing research and debates around the food desert problem. For example, using the critical political economy approach, I provided an extensive historical account of the evolution of Kingston’s North End as a community that is prone to retail food access problems. I did this through an analysis of the rescaling of retail food capital over time, but also of the embeddedness of capital in urban politics and land-use decision making that concentrates housing for the poor, maintaining and enhancing the necessary conditions for capitalist accumulation—that is, class and class disparity.

I also analyzed the ways that capital shapes ‘everyday geographies’ and movements in and around the city. Throughout the dissertation, I argued that because the
food desert problem is a symptom or outcome of the processes of capitalist accumulation, capital is also necessarily reshaping peoples’ consumption and social reproduction patterns. Food shopping is a necessary and regular activity in Western capitalist nations, such that when capital remakes the urban built form (the urban retail food geography), it is inherently shifting and redistributing the costs and burdens of food procurement. These costs are felt disproportionately by low-income people in class-segregated communities. These costs are also compounded by a variety of other structural forces that marginalize and discriminate against the poor. The injustice of the food desert problem does not derive from extreme material deprivation (such as hunger or famine); rather, it derives from the maintenance or worsening of class disparity and class contempt.

To develop this insight, I proposed three interpretations of the food desert problem as a social injustice. The first was the inequitable and regressive distribution of the costs and burdens of food procurement onto those with the fewest resources to absorb them. Second, I argued that the food desert problem represents, in many ways, the persistent contempt for the poor, both inter- and intra-class. Retail food capital is not accountable to the wishes, needs, or use values of nearby low-income communities (except through market mechanisms); little information or feedback about the changing local foodscape is required to or likely to reach the poor, even though it affects this population so clearly. The disembeddedness of capital is legitimized through urban planning, which internalizes the logic of capital for the purpose of facilitating social reproduction. As well, because of popular contempt for the poor, they are also likely to be marginalized in local-level decision-making practices, which internalize the ‘tyranny of the majority’ at the expense of those without power. This problem is only made worse by
intra-class contempt, wherein the poor regularly distrust other community members and try to disassociate from people like themselves. This makes mobilization—in the sense of collective political organization—especially unlikely, although not impossible.

My third interpretation of the food desert problem as a social injustice involved the notion of dignity. I argued that declining retail food access stands to violate low-income people’s dignity because it means a narrowing of available choices and ability to exercise personal preferences. While these concepts are traditionally liberal-minded, I attempted to radicalize them by arguing that declining dignity can be traced to class disadvantage and class disparity and therefore it deserves further critical scholarly analysis. I used dignity as a central normative concept in defining a just urban food system as a food geography that offers many diverse and co-existing food market- and non-market based food procurement spaces and experiences, to account for the heterogeneous preferences among the North Kingston population. I also concluded that alternative food system advocates and researchers often lack sensitivity toward class disparity and class issues when suggesting who should drive the transition to a more sustainable global food system. Instead of encouraging food security and food access solutions whereby underserved communities embrace non-market, community-led, labour-intensive solutions, activists should remember that many low-income people simply aspire to a middle-class shopping experience at a ‘normal’ grocery store. It follows, then, that a more appropriate use of resources might include changing the food procurement habits and preferences of the middle class. In Chapter Seven I described several promising conventional (for-profit) and alternative, non-capitalist retail food
models that may promote peoples’ dignity through a retail food procurement experience while providing the basis of gradual change to a post-capitalist urban food system.

**Limitations and future research**

Although emphasized throughout this dissertation, several limitations of this research should be briefly revisited. This research has addressed the ambitious project of urban social justice questions through a very intimate scale—the ‘everyday geographies’ of the urban retail food landscape. I have consistently struggled with the urge to address structural problems of class, poverty, and social justice on a much broader scale, especially as it became increasingly clear that poor retail food access in class-segregated communities is a symptom of much broader, entrenched inequalities. It is tempting, for example, to speak of dignity in terms of the abolition of class systems or poverty rather than as the short-term satisfaction of peoples’ needs and desires in the food procurement experience. It has felt, at times, equally unsatisfactory to focus solely on the urban retail foodscape to identify promising alternative retail models and policy ideas rather than the need for (a) structural change, and (b) profound economic and social policy change at multiple scales of governance. I have even attempted to isolate the retail element of the food system from other functions such as production, which is helpful for analytical purposes, yet of questionable relevance in the ‘real world’. While this may be a limitation of this research, it may also be its greatest asset, because this more radical, normative focus on the geography of urban food retailing and retail capital fills a void in the geography literature.
At the same time, in presenting my definition of a just urban food system, I have attempted to carefully straddle two theoretical traditions—liberal and critical political economy—but with questionable effectiveness. Through my normative focus on dignity and its centrality to a just urban food system, I have created perhaps an irreconcilable tension: on the one hand, I emphasize that in the transition to a more sustainable food system, low-income people should never be expected to change their food procurement habits out of desperation while the middle class continues to make value-based choices (that often do not incorporate sustainable alternative food systems). I endorse, therefore, a retail food geography that includes capitalist firms and other co-existing food procurement options. On the other hand, I conclude that the behaviour and imperatives of retail food capital are the very reason that food deserts exist, thereby establishing a difficult tension that requires further study and theorization. Moreover, by presenting this dilemma, I may have tempered my own attempt to develop the necessary conditions for more profound, progressive change to a post-capitalist food procurement system. My Chapter Seven discussion of promising policies and initiatives is helpful for understanding retail change, but it is only one first step toward imagining social justice through deeper structural change.

With these limitations in mind, several questions present opportunities for further research. As I discuss in earlier chapters, there is growing debate and even dissatisfaction with the ‘food desert’ concept for understanding poor retail food access (e.g., Desjardins, 2008; McEntee, 2008, 2009; Shaw, 2006). Future research should seek to understand the variety of contexts in which poor retail food access can arise (in rural areas, large cities, and small towns, for example), and what unconventional measures might be used to
understand the changing retail food landscape of a community. An even more interesting and theoretically promising question is how, historically, the conditions that favour poor retail food access came to exist. My case study of Kingston, Ontario, Canada is only one example of a certain economic and social context; studies of the spatialization of class, urban planning histories and retail food industry change in other countries or localities could complement the analysis that I have presented here.

Another area of growing scholarly interest, particularly in the United Kingdom, is the promotion of health and other policy-oriented priorities as the basis for government food policy. An unexplored area, however, is the potential for the focus on policy priorities to aid in transitioning food into the realm of collective consumption. In his writing on collective consumption, Castells (1978) observes that some areas of consumption—such as health, housing, and education—are subject to market failure, as they are often not a profitable endeavor for capitalist enterprises. As such, the state is required to deliver these essential services, often—in the case of North America—through municipal governments. Conversely, Jessop (2002) shows that with the decline of the Keynesian (Fordist) welfare state, the state has retreated from the provision of services such as education, housing, and health care in favour of new privatized or semi-privatized forms of provision and rescaled governance. Governments ranging in scales from the national to the urban are giving increasingly policy attention to food issues such as nutrition, health, obesity, domestic agricultural economies, sustainability issues, diet-related disease, and institutional procurement (e.g., Morgan, 2008, 2009; Morgan & Sonnino, 2008, 2010). Could this new policy attention to food form the basis of food procurement that falls more closely within the realm of collective consumption? In the
absence of popular empathy for the social justice arguments I have presented, how acute do tangible public policy problems have to become before the state undertakes serious intervention in retail food planning and provision? Could moving food procurement into the realm of collective consumption at the urban level be a mobilizing force in the decentering of capitalism and the building of a greater public consciousness of ‘economic diversity’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006)?

There is a definite lack of geographical scholarship that explores the concept of dignity as I have attempted to do here. While I have conceptualized dignity as short-term (exercising of choice and preferences) and long-term (abolition of class-based inequality), dignity is a very fluid idea, subject to redefinition over time. Similarly, what promotes or violates a person’s dignity, or the basis through which humans derive dignity (for example, dignity through peoples’ unique relationship with a religious deity or inalienable human rights inherent to all people) is constantly changing across time and space (Jacobson, Oliver & Koch, 2009). I see, therefore, an incredible opportunity for geographers to explore the place-based diversity of how people understand and experience dignity. Geographers could also attempt to empirically theorize and test the effects of place, scale, and geography on dignity. Lastly, geographers could approach the question of dignity and identity. Because I have struggled to navigate between collective and individual identities and subjectivities in this research, geographers could study other urban geographies of everyday life to understand this relationship between individual subjectivities within broader categories of human difference such as class.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to continue the social justice project that I have begun here, through the analysis of how capital creates social injustice (however defined)
by reshaping the intimate and everyday geographies of human experience. I have attempted to frame the food procurement process as a necessary one for household consumption and social reproduction. What other processes have yet to be analyzed from this perspective? Besides the food desert problem, what other consequences are emerging from capital’s reshaping of urban landscapes and peoples’ movements throughout the city? And perhaps most importantly, what other spatial strategies is capital innovating to create and perpetuate the spatialized class divides and class disparities that serve its own dynamics of accumulation?
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Appendix A - 2006 Rideau Heights survey

01: How often do you currently shop for large grocery purchases at the Kingslake I.G.A.?

☐ Regularly – At least twice per month ☐ Sometimes – Once every other month or longer
☐ Monthly – At least once per month ☐ Never

02: If you shop at the Kingslake I.G.A., what items do you purchase? (Do not answer this question if you have answered ‘never’ to the above question)

☐ Meat ☐ Vegetables ☐ Fruit ☐ Bread & Pastries
☐ Pastas & Cereals ☐ Canned Goods ☐ Baby Food & Other Infant needs
☐ Cleaning supplies ☐ Dairy Products ☐ Snack Foods and Beverages
☐ School Lunch Supplies ☐ Paper & Hygiene Supplies - feminine needs, paper towels, etc.
☐ Delicatessen products – fresh meat, cheese, prepared foods, etc. ☐ Other __________________

03: How often do you shop for day to day grocery or convenience items?

☐ Regularly (at least twice a week) ☐ Often (once or twice a week)
☐ Infrequently (once a month or less)

04: Have you bought fresh fruit or vegetables in the last week? ☐ Yes ☐ No

05: If you bought fresh fruit or vegetables in the last week where did you buy it?

☐ I.G.A. ☐ Other Major Grocery ☐ Variety Store
☐ Good Food Box ☐ Other (please specify) __________________

06: How many people do you shop for, including yourself?

______ Adults _______ Children

07: What is your approximate grocery budget per month?

☐ $150 (or less) ☐ 150 to 200 ☐ 200 to 300 ☐ 300 or more
08: How much of this budget do you spend in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Store Type</th>
<th>100%</th>
<th>75%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>25%</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grocery stores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience stores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast food restaurants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

09: Are there circumstances that prevent you from using major grocery stores? If there are, what are they?

- [ ] Convenience
- [ ] Transportation
- [ ] Cost
- [ ] Child Care
- [ ] Other: ____________

10: If you do major grocery shopping at another store, which one do you visit?

- [ ] Loblaws
- [ ] No Frills
- [ ] Loebs
- [ ] Food Basics
- [ ] A&P
- [ ] Other: ____________

11: If you currently buy groceries and other items from the Kingslake IIGA, where will you do this shopping when the store closes in December?

- [ ] Loblaws
- [ ] No Frills
- [ ] Loebs
- [ ] Food Basics
- [ ] A&P
- [ ] Don’t Know
- [ ] Other: ____________

12: How do you currently travel to and from the grocery store when you are making large purchases?

- [ ] Walk
- [ ] Drive
- [ ] Get a ride (friends or family)
- [ ] Ride the city bus
- [ ] Take a Taxi
- [ ] Other: ____________

13: Do you use your first choice in grocery stores, or are there things that prevent you from accessing your choice of grocery store?

- [ ] I use the store that I most prefer to use
- [ ] I am unable to use the store that I prefer to use because of the following reasons (Check all that apply):
  - [ ] Too far away
  - [ ] No bus service
  - [ ] Cannot get a ride
  - [ ] Child Care Issues
  - [ ] Cost of Transportation (cabs, etc.)
  - [ ] Other: ____________
14: If there was a free service to get you from a pick-up point in Rideau Heights to another major grocery store and then back to the pick-up point once or twice a month, would you use that service?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Depends on Store -

If there was a small fee ($1.00 each way for a total of 2.00 per round trip) would you use the service?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Depends on Store

Please provide us with any information, comments or suggestions that could help us find a way to adjust to the closing of the Kingslake I.G.A. and replace any needed services by working together. - Your Comments (Feel free to write on the reverse side if you run out of room):

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B - 2007 Rideau Heights survey

Think about the last time you bought a large amount of food at a grocery store (say, a week’s worth of groceries). Which grocery store was it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Store Type</th>
<th>Store Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Frills</td>
<td>Bagot Street</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Frills</td>
<td>Bath Road</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costco</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loblaw</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quatrophici’s</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loeb</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGA</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Basics</td>
<td>downtown</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Basics</td>
<td>Bath Road</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Basics</td>
<td>Princess Street</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce Town</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walmart</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Chopper</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How did you travel to this grocery store?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Travel</th>
<th>Going to the store</th>
<th>Returning home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household vehicle</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ride from someone else</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Think about the grocery store that you visit most often to buy groceries. What are three (3) most important reasons you shop there? 1=most important, 2=second most important, 3=third most important

_____ It’s close by my home or work
_____ It’s got the cheapest prices
_____ It’s clean
_____ It’s accessible for seniors or people who have disabilities
_____ The food is good quality
_____ It’s got great service, nice workers
_____ It’s locally owned or has locally-produced food
_____ It sells other items, like clothing and housewares

Do you normally have access to a vehicle to travel for grocery shopping?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Have you purchased fresh fruits and vegetables in the last two weeks?

Yes ☐ No ☐
After the IGA closed, did you ever use the free bus service that offered to take people to a Food Basics grocery store?

Yes  
No

Queen’s University and the John Howard Society conducted a survey about the closure of the Kingslake IGA grocery store in December 2006. Did you hear about the results of this survey?

Yes  
No

IF YES  →  How did you hear about it?

☐ A newspaper, like the Kingston Whig-Standard or Kingston This Week
☐ Television, like CKWS news
☐ Radio, like CBC Radio One or Queen’s University Radio
☐ I attended the press conference on Weller Avenue
☐ Word of mouth

In the last 12 months, has anyone in your household bought or received food from any of the following?

☐ A farmer’s market?  
☐ Eggs, meat, honey, etc.  
☐ Fruits or vegetables  
☐ Flowers, crafts, etc.

IF YES  →  What did you buy?

☐ Your own garden?
☐ A community garden?  (In a community garden, a person usually pays for a small plot of soil where they can grow their own vegetables.)

IF YES  →  Which community garden?  ________________________________

☐ Community-supported agriculture?  (This is a program where a person or family pays a share, usually between $200 and $500 in the spring, and receives weekly fresh produce from a local farmer for an entire growing season.)

IF YES  →  Do you recall the farm or program name?  ____________________

☐ A local farm?  (Some people like to go directly to a farm to buy fresh produce or pick fruits like apples or strawberries when they’re in season.)

IF YES  →  Do you recall what farm(s)?  ________________________________
If you tend not to use the different things listed in the last question, why not? (check all that apply)

☐ Too expensive
☐ Transportation/too far to travel
☐ I don’t know how to contact any of these programs, farms, etc.
☐ I don’t feel welcome at places like this
☐ I don’t have time
☐ Other: _____________________________________________

In the last year, have you ever found that your monthly household income couldn’t quite pay for food to last the whole month? Yes No

IF YES → What did you do? (Check all that apply)

_____ Went to a friend, a family member or a neighbour for help
_____ Used money from other things to pay for food
_____ Took out a short-term cash loan to buy groceries
_____ Somebody ate less so that someone else could have more
_____ Everybody in the house ate less
_____ We ate what was left in the house, but we didn’t eat as healthy or as much as we usually would
_____ Used an emergency food service like a food bank
_____ Other: _______________________________

Studies consistently show that each year, more Canadians are using things like school meal programs, food banks and low-cost food programs at local churches and community centres to meet their dietary needs. These programs are often low-cost, convenient and allow people to socialize while getting enough to eat. In the last 12 months, has anyone in your household bought or received food from any of the following?

☐ A school meal program?
☐ A church meal program?
☐ A food bank?
☐ A good food box or good vegetable box program? (These box programs usually help a person save money by providing a monthly box of groceries at a low cost, such as $15.)
☐ A Christmas hamper programs like the Salvation Army?
☐ A minimal-cost restaurant like Martha’s Table?
☐ A free meal program like the Salvation Army’s Bread of Life Supper Club?
Appendix C - Interview schedule

**Introductory information**

Name of interviewee:

Job title:

Name of organization:

Location of organization:

If your group has members, users, or target populations, please describe:

Organization’s mission:

Describe activities of the organization:

If the organization’s range of activities is very broad, please describe those that relate to food // poverty // access to services:

**Social justice**

When you think about a concept like ‘social justice’, what does it mean to you?

When I mention social justice in the city in particular, what would a ‘just city’ look like?

Think for a moment about social justice and our food system. What would a socially just food system entail?

**Food deserts, poor retail food access**

The term ‘food desert’ has become popular for describing neighbourhoods and communities that do not have good access to fresh, good quality food, and that experience poverty and deprivation as well. For example, a ‘food desert’ might be a neighbourhood with a low rate of car ownership, and whose nearest full-service grocery store is over one kilometer away.

Is retail food access a problem in Kingston?

Is retail food access a problem is Kingston for you in particular? Why or why not?

Are certain areas of Kingston prone to poor retail food access, or are some vulnerable to becoming ‘food deserts’? Could you describe these areas?

Could you describe, in general terms, the retail food ‘landscape’ in Kingston, paying attention to:
To your knowledge, has this picture of retail food access in Kingston changed over time? Can you describe the changes?

What factors do you think can explain changing retail food access in cities?

Solutions, actors

Who should do what in ensuring that all citizens have adequate access to retail food stores? Can you specifically address the following actors, discussing whether they can or should play a role in ensuring satisfactory access to quality retail food options in cities, and what that role might include:

- Citizens of Kingston
- Civil society, non-profit organizations and charities
- Private sector businesses
- City of Kingston municipal government
- Ontario provincial government
- Federal government

Food system alternatives

Here is a list of ways that people acquire food here in Kingston. Can you tell me which of these programs or businesses play an important role in a just urban food system, and which do not? Do they address:
- Short-term or long-term problems?
- The needs of individuals and families? Communities? The food system in general?

- Emergency food services like food banks and church meal programs
- Small, independent retail food businesses
- Community gardens, rooftop gardens, urban agriculture—opportunities for people to grow their own food collectively or individually
- Farmers’ markets
- Large franchise businesses and retail developments
• ‘Buy local’ campaigns that encourage shoppers to buy a greater portion of their food from local sources

[Questions only for City of Kingston elected officials, planners, policymakers and economic developers]

From your perspective, how would you characterize the City of Kingston’s current approach to issues like poor retail food access and poor access to other services? Does an example come to mind the overall approach?

Have you seen the city’s approach change over time? To what do you attribute any changes in approach over time?

To your knowledge, what sorts of planning and policy tools are used by the City of Kingston and KEDCO to affect the urban food system? Are certain policy and planning tools overutilized or underutilized?

Additional comments

Do you have any other comments about the things we’ve discussed?

Can you suggest any other people that I should interview for this project?
Appendix D – Letter of information for qualitative interviews

The just urban food system: Exploring the geographies of social justice and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario

Dear prospective participant,

This research project is for a Ph.D. thesis. The title of this thesis is “The just urban food system: Exploring the geographies of social justice, and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario”. As a prospective participant, I am requesting your participation in a one-on-one interview.

For this project, your confidentiality is strictly guaranteed. Any identifying information will be omitted from my research. Interviews should take between sixty and ninety minutes to complete. I will take notes during the interview, and I will tape our interview using a digital voice recorder, in order to transcribe it. You can refuse to answer any question that you makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time, you can discontinue with the interview, and I will erase your digital voice recording, and give you any written notes for disposal.

I am the only person who will access to your personal contact information, identity, etc. While I may directly quote what you say in this interview, I will always use a pseudonym, to avoid identifying you or any other participant.

As a research participant, you may be at risk of emotional harm because of the sensitive nature of some topics. Again, you do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you can end your participation anytime.

This project will generate several benefits. As an academic study, I hope to contribute new research on issues about social justice and communities with poor retail food access. In Kingston, I hope to take these research results and create a report that will be circulated to local government, social service organizations and other advocacy groups, in hopes of creating local change. As well, as a participant, you may gain a new awareness about the connections between social justice, citizenship and access to food.

The results of this research may be used in my final Ph.D. thesis and academic publications, and may be shared through presentations at academic conferences and/or public meetings. It may also lead to local policy reports or spin-off projects in the future.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Melanie Bedore at (613) 548-7481 or bedorem@hotmail.com. The Department of Geography Research Ethics Board person is Dr. Beverley Mullings. She can be contacted by telephone at (613) 533-6000 extension 78829 or by e-mail at mullings@queensu.ca. The Chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at Queen’s University can be reached at (613) 533-6000, extension 74579.
Appendix E – Letter of consent for qualitative interviews

The just urban food system:
Exploring the geographies of social justice and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario

LETTER OF CONSENT – INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

This form reflects my understanding of the basis of my participation in an interview for the doctoral thesis project of Melanie Bedore, Ph.D. candidate, entitled “The just urban food system: Exploring the geographies of social justice, and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario”. This form commits her to conduct the interview and treat the information I provide in an ethical manner.

I have read the letter of information for this doctoral thesis project and have had all my questions and concerns answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I will be participating in this project titled “The just urban food system: Exploring the geographies of social justice, and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario”, with the purpose of evaluating poor retail food access as an issue of social justice in cities.

I have been informed that my involvement consists of a semi-structured qualitative interview with the researcher. I am aware that I am being interviewed in my capacity as a ______(fill in appropriate title)_______ . My understanding is that the interview will last between sixty and ninety minutes.

My participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw or refuse to answer any questions. I can stop the interview at any time and the information I have provided will be destroyed. I understand that my identity will be kept strictly confidential, in that no identifying characteristics, names, etc. will appear in the interview results, rough drafts or the final Ph.D. thesis.

I understand that the researcher will take written notes during my interview, and record our interview with an audio recording device. I have been informed that all written and audio material will be kept secure in the researcher’s personal computer or in a locked filing cabinet, for up to several years following the completion of her Ph.D. degree. After that time, the material will be erased, deleted or destroyed by shredding, as appropriate.

I understand that the emotional risks of participation in this study may involve discomfort, embarrassment and/or stress.

I understand that the final draft of the Ph.D. thesis will be read by the researcher’s doctoral supervisor, her doctoral committee, or possibly other Queen’s University faculty members, family members, etc. I also understand that the information provided for this research project will be used for other academic purposes, such as publishing articles in academic journals and making presentations at scholarly conferences. This material may also be used in the Kingston community, in public meetings or reports made available to the public, local government, service organizations, or other members of the community.
If I have any questions, I can contact Melanie Bedore at (613) 548-7481 or 4mndb@queensu.ca. Her doctoral supervisor, Dr. Betsy Donald, can be reached at (613) 533-6040 or betsy.donald@queensu.ca. The Department of Geography Research Ethics Board person is Dr. Beverley Mullings. She can be contacted by telephone at (613) 533-6000 extension 78829 or by e-mail at mullings@queensu.ca. The Chair of the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, can be reached at (613) 533-6000 ext. 74579.

Name of participant (please print): _______________________________________

Signature: _______________________________________

Date: _______________________________________

I give permission for the researcher to record our interview using an audio recording device. _______________________________________

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Appendix F – Focus group recruitment poster

QUEEN’S UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

ARE YOU THE PERSON IN YOUR HOUSE WHO SHOPS FOR FOOD?
ARE YOU THE PERSON WHO PREPARES MOST OF THE MEALS?
DO YOU HAVE TROUBLE GETTING TO A GROCERY STORE WHEN YOU NEED TO?

We are looking for volunteers for a study called “The just urban food system: Exploring the geographies of social justice and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario”.

We are looking for people who had any of the following happen at least once in the last year:

- Not having enough food to eat because of lack of money
- Worrying that there won’t be enough to eat because of lack of money
- Not eating the quality or variety of foods that you would like, because of a lack of money

In this focus group, you will be asked to talk with a small group of six to twelve other people. Everyone in the group will talk about how they shop for food, and how cities can make food more easy to access for everyone.

Your participation in this focus group will be completely confidential. Participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to. This one-time focus group may last up to two hours.

Volunteers will be paid $30 for their participation. Snacks will be provided. Free childcare will also be available.

DATE: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2009
TIME: 2:00 – 4:00
LOCATION: ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY OF KINGSTON
85A STEPHEN STREET

To register, call Melanie at (613) 548-7481
or e-mail 4mndb@queensu.ca
Appendix G – Focus group questions

Ice breaker:
Introduce yourself; tell the group your favourite food, plus a food that you hate

Part 1: Food insecurity and accessibility

1. What are your main challenges around food and shopping? (Possible prompts: quality, getting enough, getting to a store, etc.?)

2. In your opinion, what makes food accessible?

3. Please tell me about shopping for food when you don’t have a lot of money. Does it feel different? Is the experience different from when you do have enough money?

4. Is there something different about buying food at a store, versus getting it from a charity like a food bank or a meal program? How is it different?

5. If you could get food for your household any way you wanted, how would you get it? (Possible prompts: buying it, growing it, trading/bartering for it, food stamps, free government program, accessing a charity?) Why would you choose this way of getting food for your household?

Part 2: Rights, entitlement, justice, a new food system

7. If you were to design a food system for Kingston that would help disadvantaged people get the food they needed, what would it look like?

8. In your opinion, who would do the best job of making food available to disadvantaged people?

9. Suppose you had one minute to talk to the Mayor of Kingston about what the City of Kingston should do to improve the accessibility of food and other essential services in Kingston like banks, post offices and pharmacies. What would you say?

10. Is there some way that grocery stores and retail food stores could do a better job of making food accessible to people? What should they change to be more accessible?

11. Please take a minute to imagine the best possible shopping experience you could have for getting food for your household. Please use the paper, pens and pencils provided to make notes about this shopping experience. If you like, you can make a list or draw pictures, or both. Be creative!
Please write about any or all of the following things, remembering that you can make this shopping experience into anything you want:

How do you travel to it?
How far do you travel?
How large or small is the store?
What is the food like – food selection, quality, price?
How often do you go there?
What does it look like, on the inside or the outside?
Who else is there? Do you interact with them?
Who owns the store? Who controls the store?
How do you feel while you are there?

Choose one or two answers from what you have written and tell your group about it. Why is this important to you?
Appendix H – Letter of information for focus groups

The just urban food system:
Exploring the geographies of social justice and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario

LETTER OF INFORMATION – FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

This project is being run by a student at Queen’s University Department of Geography. The title is “The just urban food system: Exploring the geographies of social justice, and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario”. I am holding focus groups with people who live in Kingston who have been food insecure at least one time in the last year.

For this project, your confidentiality is strictly guaranteed. I will not share anything about you that could let someone know who are. I am the only person who will access to this information. While I may directly quote what you say in this focus group, I will always use a different name, to avoid identifying you or any other participant.

Focus groups should take up to two hours to complete. You do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. You can stop anytime just by saying that you want to stop. I will take notes during the focus group, and I will record the peoples’ voices using an electronic recorder, so that review the talk later. I may also have a helper taking notes. The helper will not know anything about you, and they will not share anything that you say.

You will be paid $30 for being a part of the focus group. As well, these focus groups have a free lunch or dinner, and free childcare will be at the meeting.

You may be at risk of emotional harm because some things we will talk about are sensitive. For example, talking about being hungry or not having enough for food may be embarrassing or stressful for some people. Again, you do not have to answer any questions that you don’t want to. You can stop and leave the focus group anytime. You will still receive the $20, even if you choose to leave before the focus group has finished. You can still eat the meal, even if you choose not to participate.

Some good things may come from this project. This project will offer new research on social justice and places with poor retail food access. In Kingston, I hope to take these results and create a report that will be given to local government, social service organizations and other groups, in hopes of making local change. As well, you may learn new things about how difficult it is for other people to get good, affordable food, and you may hear new ideas about how to change this problem.

The results of this research may be used in my final Ph.D. thesis. I may publish these results in academic journals, and I may share the results at meetings and conferences. Again, I will protect your identity at all times.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Melanie Bedore at (613) 548-7481 or bedorem@hotmail.com. The Department of Geography Research Ethics Board person is Dr.
Beverley Mullings. She can be contacted by telephone at (613) 533-6000 extension 78829 or by e-mail at mullings@queensu.ca. The Chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at Queen’s University can be reached at (613) 533-6000, extension 74579.
Appendix I – Letter of consent for focus groups

The just urban food system:
Exploring the geographies of social justice and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario

LETTER OF CONSENT – FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

This form reflects my understanding of my participation in a focus group for the doctoral thesis project of Melanie Bedore, Ph.D. candidate, entitled “The just urban food system: Exploring the geographies of social justice, and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario”. This form means that she must hold the focus group and treat the information I give in an ethical way.

I have read the letter of information for this Ph.D. project doctoral thesis project. All my questions and concerns have been answered, and I am satisfied with the answers. I understand that I will be participating in this project titled “The just urban food system: Exploring the geographies of social justice, and retail food access in Kingston, Ontario”. This project will look at places where people cannot get to grocery stores easily, and how to create social justice in cities.

I have been told that my involvement means being a member of a focus group, which will have the researcher and a small group to six to twelve people. I am aware that I am participating as (a) the person in my house who shops for most of the food and prepares most of the meals, and (b) as having experienced food insecurity in my household at least once in the last year. I understand that we may talk for up to two hours.

I am participating voluntarily and I have the right to leave or refuse to answer any questions. I can leave at any time and the information I have given will be taken out of the records of the focus group. I understand that my identity will be kept strictly confidential, in that no names, addresses or any other personal information will be put into any part of this project.

I understand that I will be paid thirty dollars ($30) for being involved in this focus group. I will be paid even if I choose to leave the focus group before it is done. I can still eat the free meal even if I choose not to participate.

I understand that the researcher will take notes on paper while the group is talking, and that there may be a helper there taking notes as well. She will use an electronic recording machine to record what everyone says. I understand that all the things that are written on paper or said out loud and recorded will be kept secure. The information will be saved on the researcher’s personal computer or in a locked filing cabinet. This information may be kept for up to several years after the Ph.D. is done. After that time, the records will be erased, deleted or shredded.

I understand that the emotional risks of being in the focus group may involve embarrassment, stress or feeling uncomfortable.
I understand that many people will read the final draft of the Ph.D. project, including people at Queen’s University like her supervisor, other professors and family members. I also understand that the information from the focus groups will go into articles in academic journals and presentations at scholarly conferences. This material may also be used in Kingston, in public meetings or reports for people who live here, city council or local organizations.

If I have any questions, I can contact Melanie Bedore at (613) 548-7481 or 4mndb@queensu.ca. Her doctoral supervisor, Dr. Betsy Donald, can be reached at (613) 533-6040 or betsy.donald@queensu.ca. The Department of Geography Research Ethics Board person is Dr. Beverley Mullings. She can be contacted by telephone at (613) 533-6000 extension 78829 or by e-mail at mullings@queensu.ca. The Chair of the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, can be reached at (613) 533-6000 ext. 74579.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

I give permission for the researcher to record the focus group using an audio recording device.
Appendix J - Seniors’ focus group (reminiscing exercise) questions

Can you tell me about any of these:

- Memories about food shopping with you and your family?
- Memories about how your parents did food shopping?
- Memories about your grandparents or great-grandparents, how they got food for their home?
- How did you or your parents get food for the household?
- How long was the trip?
- Did you know any store owners?
- Do you remember the store employees?
- Did you meet your neighbours there, did you talk to people?
- Do you remember what the food prices like were, or what kinds of food you got?
- Did you ever work in a food store?
- Did your family ever have trouble getting food into your house?
- If you ever had trouble affording food for your house, what did you do?
- If you grew up around Kingston, do you have memories about the working class neighbourhoods like Kingscourt, Rideau Heights or other parts of North Kingston?
November 15, 2008

Melanie Bedore
PhD Candidate
Department of Geography
Queen’s University

GREB Ref # GGE0-089-08
Title: “The Just Urban Food System: Exploring the Geographies of Social Justice and Retail Food Access in Kingston”

Dear Ms. Bedore:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB) has given expedited approval to your proposal entitled “The Just Urban Food System: Exploring the Geographies of Social Justice and Retail Food Access in Kingston”. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been approved for one year. At the end of each year, GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this approval period (details available at webpage: www.queensu.ca/yvr/greb/addforms.html?Adverse). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that any adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be approved by the GREB. Examples of required approvals are changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures that affect human subjects. These changes must be sent to Linda Frid at the Office of Research Services or FRID@QUEENSU.CA prior to implementation. Ms. Frid will seek the approval of the GREB Chair and/or the reviewer(s) who originally assessed your application.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours truly,

[Signature]

GREB Chair

For: Pamela Murphy
Assistant Professor and Member
General Research Ethics Board

Co-Chairs of Unit REB: B. Mullings and G. Lovell
Faculty Supervisor: Deicy J. Donald
Unit REB Admin: Joan Knox
Appendix L - Coding key for interview and focus group participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview category</th>
<th>Interview number</th>
<th>Profession/qualification</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food and/or poverty activists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Local anti-poverty activist, author</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anti-poverty activist</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non-profit worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Executive director, non-profit organization</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Local food activist</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Public health worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Local farmer, activist</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Social service/community development worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Social service/community development worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Anti-poverty activist</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailers, food business owners</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Former franchise owner</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Convenience store co-owner</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Convenience store owner</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Independent food store owner</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Independent food store owner</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Independent food store co-owner</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Independent food store owner</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Independent food store owner</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Direct-to-public wholesale franchisee</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Independent food store owner</td>
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<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Independent food store owner</td>
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<tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Retail food franchisee</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Retail food franchisee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Independent food store owner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial real estate brokers, developers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Commercial real estate broker</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Commercial real estate broker</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Property manager, commercial real estate development firm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Property management and development firm owner</td>
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<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Private real estate development firm owner</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Lawyer, commercial property owner and developer</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Commerce educator</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Commerce educator</td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Elected city councilor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Elected city councilor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Elected city councilor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Urban planner</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>City bureaucrat</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Economic development officer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Elected city councilor</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Elected city councilor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Former City of Kingston planner</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Lifelong North Kingston resident</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Code for focus group participants:

Focus group A: Inner Harbour, first focus group
Focus group B: Inner Harbour, second focus group
Focus group C: Rideau Heights
Focus group: Seniors’ reminiscing exercise

Participants are assigned numbers according to their seating order. In the text, they are cited in the following way:

A-6, female
C-10, male
B-2, female