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Amy L Danielsons, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture (Master of).

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Edible Urbanism: Fostering Growth and Community Engagement Through Food

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Edible Urbanism

fostering growth and community engagement through food

by
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Covington, Kentucky lacks active, community-focused spaces. Other cities' experiences suggest that food activities have the inherent potential to attract, integrate, and engage people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and embody the unique culture of a particular community. This thesis proposes a regenerative food district with two broad aims. The first is to renew the significance of food in peoples' everyday lives through a six-part structure that will encourage people to re-engage with the growth, preparation, consumption, celebration, education, and recycling of food. Secondly, the project aims to strengthen the Pike and Madison commercial core by infilling existing surface lots with a concentration of diverse food spaces in order to stimulate urban mixing and community engagement.

The proposed district will give food a central role in the creation of community and identity by encouraging people to notice and participate in food activities on a daily basis and for a multiplicity of purposes. In doing this, the design will foster a social atmosphere, activating the surrounding streets to create a dynamic exchange of different people and activities as well as encourage a connection amongst the city's compact, yet diverse neighborhoods. As a network of community oriented, food-centric spaces, the proposed food district will increase Covington's desirability as a place to live and work; cultivating a stronger sense of community, diversity, and regional identity.
To my family, for their creativity and continual advice. To Tim, for supporting me and always showing me the easier way. To John Hancock, Udo Greinacher, and Nnamdi Elleh whose guidance and enthusiasm kept this project alive. And to all my friends who have patiently listened to me think aloud.
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My interest in community food spaces began soon after I moved to Cincinnati in 2009. While spending a semester of my undergraduate time living and studying in Over-the-Rhine, I became immersed in the complexities of urban engagement and the impact of public food markets in Cincinnati. One of the first challenges I encountered was the scarcity and availability of fresh, wholesome food within the city. Krogers, the only grocery store downtown, had an insufficient selection and lacked the fresh food necessary to support a healthy, nutritious lifestyle. Often the shelves contained items that had already expired or were noticeably rotten, presenting food-safety concerns along with uncertainty and frustration towards corporate food chains. Without a car, I was limited in my ability to reach a more diverse and nutritional food source. It was an unsettling realization that my sustenance was dependent on the limited infrastructure of the local bus system, the sole form of public transportation in the city at that time.

As I became more familiar with the area, I discovered Findlay Market, an establishment comprised of local food merchants. Findlay Market quickly replaced Krogers in terms of the relative freshness of its produce, its convenient location, and its ability to embrace and even celebrate the social and cultural diversity within the city. Despite the obvious improvements, however, the local market was not without its disadvantages. The largest challenge was the increased food prices in comparison to Krogers, or any other commercial grocery store, making it difficult to purchase everything I needed on a student’s
budget. Although the increase in the price range was not incredibly substantial, the difference still required a conscious restraint when choosing which foods to purchase, buying only staple items and hardly ever splurging. The market was also significantly affected by seasonal changes, completely closing the outdoor section and severely limiting the availability and variety of fresh produce.

Food and their respective food-spaces inform the way we live, the manner in which we interact with other people, and ultimately, how vibrant and interrelated our urban districts can become. My various experiences with city-dwelling and local food vendors have made a lasting impression, prompting me to rethink how influential the presence of vibrant food-spaces are for the longevity and health of cities and their inhabitants.
BACKGROUND

In the past, food had spurred meaningful engagement between people. This was not limited to within the household but was also a defining characteristic of community life. These daily, food-based engagements led to the development of a specific culture and identity within cities, helping to create a vibrant city life and contributing to a higher number of interactions amongst people in the community.

Now, however, with the emergence of the fast food industry and the subsequent ease of food accessibility and general availability, engagement between people, from food, has noticeably changed. Food is no longer a central factor within family and community life. It has been reduced from a culturally defining element into a simple commodity centered around fast-paced and artificial experiences. The lack of meaningful engagement and interaction amongst people as a result of societies’ evolving relationship with food has diluted communities’ sense of culture and identity.

Food is an essential part of our lives that we often take for granted. It has been said that people care about what affects them personally, and nothing impacts people more intimately than the food they consume. How then have we allowed something so essential to our very selves be understood in such a limited and superficial manner, relegating it to a mere commodity? In their anthology Food as Communication, Communication as Food, co-authors Carlnita P. Greene and Lynn M. Walters identify the “potentially transparent nature of food as one of those everyday, ordinary elements that form the very backbone of our existence.”

“All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn’t hurt.”


Consumed daily, food signifies individual and community identities, permeates the media, and unconsciously informs social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of contemporary society. Yet, it is this same ubiquitous nature of food which makes it so utterly commonplace, such that people hardly take notice and rarely comprehend its significance.

Our culture’s ambivalence toward food and the declining value for the role of cooking as a central activity within people’s daily lives is undermining society’s cultural values and intensifying people’s disconnection to the natural world and to each other. Research shows that while Americans are obsessed with the idea of cooking, we are actually cooking less, buying more pre-made meals, and eating out more often. The thirty minutes spent watching The Food Network or browsing pictures of food on Pinterest is often more time than the average person spends cooking for themselves each day. The oddity that the world is rarely apprehended through the senses has created major societal implications manifested in people’s lack of direct, physical engagement with one another as well the privation of community spaces. Consequently, most people participate only superficially in the production, consumption, and celebration of food.

French anthropologist Roland Barthes argues, “food stands for more than itself, it reveals the identity, vitality, and resilience of a culture, city, and people.” Through food, a community is elevated to become a socially engaging conversation between people and their environment. Regardless of its location, food acts as a tool for urban engagement, enhancing the interrelation of people, place, and food. As such, food spaces should be invigorating, people-centered spaces where social divisions do not impose spatial barriers, diversity thrives, and local cultures are embraced and celebrated. Yet, too often urban districts fall short of this idealistic urban mixing and social diversification.

Specifically, this thesis examines how a related network of food places in Covington, Kentucky can restore the cultural significance of food and be a contributing factor in the revitalization of city life. In the United States, Kentucky ranks number two out of ten states that consume the highest quantity of fast food yearly and has the country’s second highest obesity rate. On average, Kentuckians spend 56 cents of every restaurant dollar on fast food, and this includes any restaurant without table service, not just chain restaurants with drive-thrus.

In Covington, the dominant presence of fast food is quickly apparent upon entering the city. Chain restaurants and gas station convenience stores are a relatively common occurrence along West Fourth Street. As the primary route from interstate 71/75 into the city, the concentration of fast food stores in addition to frequency of parking lots depicts a very unassuming urban composition ripe for a food-based revitalization.

In contrast to the prevalence of fast food, the city is also known for its German heritage and subsequent food culture. The historic neighborhood of Mainstrasse was, at one time, centered around a food market. Although the market is now gone, the street has maintained its central role in the neighborhood. During certain times of the year, the streets are transformed into a pedestrian boulevard where annual festivals are held and a strong artistic culture currently thrives.


The flavor of the neighborhood is best described by its food: an eclectic mix of German-style pubs, small pizzerias, high-end diners, casual eateries, and local coffee shops which sometimes entertain with live music and late night jazz. Complex aromas of spicy sausages, popcorn, and deep fried German sauerkraut balls infuse the air. During summer festivals, people wander through a mirage of food stalls and local craft booths, swing a beat by the bandstands, and romance under the warm glow of lights strung from tent to tent.
CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY THROUGH FOOD

The familiar polemical quote, “you are what you eat” unapologetically links peoples’ food consumption choices to their identities. Food helps to define who we are according to what we choose to eat as well as what we refrain from consuming. In his book, The Physiology of Taste, published in 1825, distinguished food connoisseur Jean Brillat-Savarin boldly states, “Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are.” In this regard, people have a direct, visceral connection to food as it often reveals one’s character. For example, the common culinary attribute “soul food” or “comfort food” immediately conjures dishes specific to a certain culture, usually of southern origins. This situational consequence is a result of an individual’s inclination to alter their behavior, and thus the identity they wish to portray, as a response to the particular place or the people they are with. For example, the average person tends to exhibit a very different persona when eating at home versus on a first date, and often has very different dining habits in New Orleans versus in Manhattan.

In addition to food as an indicator of personal identity rooted in a particular culture, it is also a means to classify people by creating groups according to particular food preferences. According to rhetoric scholar Kenneth Burke, one can only persuade a particular person or audience so far as he is able to align his identity with another’s. In the same way, food groups reflect interpersonal
identities based on the types of food an individual consumes. Labels such as “meat-eater” or “vegetarian” clearly define and group individuals according to their shared food preferences. As a result, people tend to feel a common bond with those who claim similar eating habits and consumption views.

CASE STUDY 1 | The Slow Food Movement and Kinfolk Magazine

The Slow Food Movement was founded in 1986 by journalist Carlo Petrini in opposition to the opening of a McDonald’s in Italy. He saw the arrival of the American mega-chain as a move that rejected the culture’s rich culinary history and advocated the fast-paced, homogenized lifestyle of fast food. Instead, the members of Slow Food project a very different identity that is founded on the mantra of “good, clean, and fair.” Their mission acknowledges that everyone has the right to pleasure and as such, people must protect the heritage, culture, and tradition of food that makes pleasure possible. Those engaged with Slow Food live out this mission daily through the thoughtful purchasing, preparation, and consumption of food.

When purchasing food, supporters make an effort to buy locally grown, organic foods that reflect the diversity of their particular community. They visit farmer’s markets to support the local economy while establishing a personal relationship with the vendor and re-establishing their connection to the land. They personally know who grew the food they are consuming as well as where and how it was cultivated.

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Slow Food advocates strive to prepare meals traditionally, even though this often takes more time, because foods that are ready-made without much effort or conscious thought often degrade one’s relationship to food and negate the social manner in which they believe food should be consumed. “Members believe that these meals should be prepared with thought, knowledge, and expertise while keeping the goals of pleasure and taste at the center of the process.” Therefore, a considerable amount of emphasis is placed on taking the time to eat meals together, often around a table. Gary Alan Fine, author of *Kitchen: The Culture of Restaurant Work*, goes so far to describe how people are “…entangled in their meals. The connection between identity and consumption gives food a central role in the creation of community, and people use their diets to convey images of public identity.”

Arguably, consumption remains the most fundamental of these three actions within the Slow Food Movement. During meals, the act of eating takes on a performative aspect celebrating the pleasure of food while eating as a ‘family’. That is, dining should be slow and enjoyable with plenty of conversation and a social atmosphere.

While the ideals of the Slow Food Movement are espoused by many around the world, the Canadian magazine, *Kinfolk*, embodies the “Go Slow” lifestyle particularly well. Produced quarterly, the magazine consists of large, sensory-rich images with short columns depicting nostalgic scenes such as gathering around a campfire, sailing along the coast, or brewing coffee inside a rustic-looking local shop. Similar to the Slow Food Movement, it strives to create a new social identity focused around living a balanced, intentional lifestyle by taking the time to enjoy and celebrate every moment. Similarly, *Kinfolk* doesn’t shy away from eschewing the fast-paced lifestyle of the commercial food industry. One of its magazine tag lines boldly warns its readers, “Trust us, you don’t want to stop at Cracker Barrel or Burger King. Use our road trip recipes to get yourself sorted before setting out.” Further into each issue, there are tips for baking and cooking, information regarding community workshops and retreats, and stories from small-business shop owners.

While the Slow Food Movement and *Kinfolk* Magazine encourage noble principles such as living according to a slower, more wholesome lifestyle, many people accuse their supporters of being wealthy, hipster-idealis and decry the movement as being economically unfeasible. One of the criticisms of Slow Food is the concept of “local.” While the movement encourages people to purchase food from their surrounding region, there is not a standard definition for how many miles away from a particular place can legitimately be called “local.” Left to one’s own best judgment, many people have radically different notions of what defines local. On one end, some would consider it to include only food grown within a few miles radius of the town or city where they live, while others would claim that local includes anything grown within their country.

Furthermore, by encouraging people to purchase organically, the Slow Food Movement is appealing to a certain economic class who can afford this kind of produce and unintentionally excluding the economically disadvantaged from participating in the same healthy lifestyle. Additionally, those who have less

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Ibid. 75.


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money often work more than one job and are sometimes a single individual responsible for a growing family with little access to nutritious food options and lacking the time to prepare a wholesome meal. While the intentions of the Slow Food Movement are virtuous, they only apply to a certain demographic and do not attempt to reach out to those who are possibly the most in need of the lifestyle they advocate. Finally, because Slow Food rejects the current economic patterns of global food production, the movement’s growth is limited by the rate that commercial industries will also embrace their ideals. Unfortunately, the dominant patterns of production are focused on capitalistic ideals such as competition, high-volume standardized production, low-costs, and convenience. In terms of a global transformation, it seems the Slow Food Movement is fighting a long, uphill battle.

While the proposed Covington Food District will strive to incorporate aspects of the Slow Food Movement by emphasizing the centrality of food and creating environments that encourage participation and engender a social atmosphere, it will also work to confront the aforementioned concerns of equity. The design will encourage healthy lifestyles by working with the adjacent Kenton County Adult Education Center as well as the local public library in order to offer a spectrum of pro bono seminars such as hands-on food education classes, healthy eating seminars, and special diet culinary classes, among others, that will be accessible and appealing to people from all economic levels.

Additionally, these programs will grow and prepare their food from the urban agricultural plots on the lots to the west of the Pike and Madison intersection. A portion of the produce will be sold in the farmers’ market in order to maintain a local presence within the community. A percentage of the prepared goods from the training classes will be sold directly to various local restaurants as well as donated to food pantries in Covington.
food conveys culture

Our participation in food culture, both consciously and unconsciously, forms our individual identities. How people engage with food reveals certain aspects about them and nothing is more prevalent or influential than how the media portrays food culture today. Most food-media privilege consumption over community and create superficial drama and entertainment rather than direct, meaningful relationships with food. Taking a closer look at this interplay between food and the media one can understand how this new food culture has transformed how people interact with food on a daily basis and created a paradoxical relationship with food. It is puzzling that most people spend more time watching or reading about food than they actually spend preparing and eating it themselves.

Food is everywhere in contemporary culture. It is glamorized in movies such as Ratatouille and Julie and Julia, dramatized in reality TV cooking shows such as Chopped or Iron Chef, blogged about and pinned on websites such as Allrecipes and Pinterest, and romanticized in cooking-lifestyle magazines such as Martha Stewart Living or Bon Appetit.

The media’s foregrounding of food as a celebrity commodity often overshadows the everyday reality of food as ordinary people experience it. Although food media does offer aspirational values and enable class mobility, it emphasizes imagery and entertainment over meaningful relationships and community
ethics. This new ideology of food from the media has become a powerful tool “affirming certain social class norms in terms of what constitutes ‘style’ and ‘good taste.’”03 As author Laura Lindenfeld points out in her essay on food in films, “Food TV is not about eating. It is about watching food and being entertained by the personality.”04

CASE STUDY 2 | The Food Network: Featuring Chopped

Popular TV shows such as Chopped appeal to the consumer’s infatuation with entertainment through the venue of food. While most people would consider the Food Network to be a channel which caters to food enthusiasts, it actually uses food as another way to create the same superficial, conflict-driven drama that is characteristic of other reality TV shows. In the TV series, Chopped, for example, the contestants represent a diverse range of personality types which often clash with one another, erupting in amusing and, at times, theatrical personal episodes. In other words, these are not the kinds of people you might live next door to or see at the grocery store.

While on the show, the chefs compete against one another and the clock to craft tasteful dishes using bizarre combinations of food that are revealed to them only seconds before each challenge begins. Again, most people are not surprised at what they see when they open their refrigerator at home, but that’s just the

04 Ibid. 5.
point, people love to watch reality TV shows like Chopped because it gives them a colorful picture of food, quite different from their day-to-day cooking encounters. It allows people to dream, to get caught up in their imagination, and experience something "exotic" without ever having to leave the sofa. The problem with these types of shows is the lifestyle they promote and how they portray peoples' relationship with food, as one of conflict rather than conviviality, tension rather than sustenance, and performance rather than pleasure.

Food, as portrayed by the consumer-oriented media, is preoccupied with profitability and convenience, and has shifted how people perceive food and form relationships around it. Contemporary cooking shows seem to be all about cooking and food preparation, participants in shows like Iron Chef are constantly racing the clock, encouraging competition over collaboration, and producing sensuously plated arrangements with provocative photographs of their food. People rarely encounter food in this way. In fact, food production is actually downplayed during these shows as the camera rarely reveals the process by which food enters the seemingly endless off-camera "pantries" and shows only quick snippets of the food being prepared. In truth, most audiences would quickly become bored without the fast pace of the show or watching a particular chef cook his or her meal from start to finish. Rather, these reality TV shows use food to build an exaggerated narrative between the contestants, highlighting their interactions and personalities instead of food production and enjoyment. It's not really about food, it's about the people and the drama that unfolds between them.
Food is inherently experienced through the senses, something that is often lost or can never be experienced fully through the media as these venues primarily cater to one’s sense of sight. Yet, in person, any particular place is experienced through all of the senses, creating the richest and most poignant experiences. Often, a specific coffee shop can be recalled by the distinct aroma of roasted coffee beans. Likewise, watching autumn leaves gently falling in a park is equally breathtaking and memorable. It is these very sensorial experiences, rooted in tradition, that reflect the existing community’s daily livelihood and build community through ritual and memory. According to Boym Defne Karaosmanoglu, “A city is a place where cultural memory of various kinds is contested and the impulses of nostalgia and heritage are fully expressed.”

Therefore, if food-centric districts were to become integral parts of urban areas, communities might begin to rise above their differences, embracing multiculturalism while still recognizing and celebrating their individuality. Through this diversified intervention, a new urban sector attracting a variety of existing and desired cultural groups might arise, represented through their particular food cultures. It is through their cuisines that even distant cultures first came to be known and appreciated by members of the general public. So, by infusing quality, culinary variety, and nostalgia into urban life, food can...
become a vehicle through which community values and traditions are formed and celebrated through peoples’ everyday experiences. It is by bringing people to notice and participate in the various cuisines and food cultures that are present within a particular city that the very flavor of the city itself is accentuated.

CASE STUDY 3 | The Cookbook Memoirs

By analyzing the food culture of a particular city, it becomes evident how food constructs a community’s sense of self and allows them to imagine themselves within an ideal society. In the late 2000’s, a community in Istanbul assembled an anthology of recipes with personal anecdotes to create a cookbook memoir. The cookbook served the community as a cultural lens, highlighting layers of history, regional identity, and ritual. Through sensorial memories and practical everyday advice, the recipes simultaneously reconstructed parts of old Istanbul and projected the spirit of the young generation through its narrative-based recipes. In this way, they illustrated the complex nature of cultures that simultaneously exhibit qualities of distinctiveness and commonality with the same community throughout time.

Consider in cooking a soup how numerous ingredients are combined to create a meal that is a new creation yet retains the distinct characteristics of the original ingredients. In this manner, the combining of the individual ingredients is a flexible and sometimes serendipitous process. One ingredient does not necessarily need to be added at a precise time and sometimes the cook may experiment by trying a new ingredient. Furthermore, this process of cooking is forgiving, as the recipe can be easily modified if too much or too little of a particular ingredient is added. Likewise, the individual food types that exist within society must form a symbiotic relationship with one another, dissolving cultural boundaries while still recognizing and celebrating these unique identities. As Cramer expressed in her culinary anthology, food has the potential to act as this “liminal substance, spilling across diverse kinds of boundaries and shaping our society.”

Just as in cooking, where a common vessel is used to assemble the various ingredients, the inherently public, social spaces of architecture can become the container for the intangible discourse of social and cultural values manifested through food. Yet, even if all the ingredients are collected within this common vessel, they will retain their individual identities unless a catalyst, such as a mixing device, is introduced. It is people that act as this catalyst and, wherever food is present, can overcome immense social and cultural barriers. In this way, a mixture of distinct identities can be brought together within a single urban container, unified, but still distinct, as in a delicious minestrone soup.
As a common unifying element, food creates opportunities to cultivate relationships and transcend social barriers. In the book, Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives, architect and food critic Carolyn Steel discusses the social power of food, examining how food-places in London have influenced urban development from the perspective of creating relationships between people, food, and architecture.  

Specifically, Steel describes the marketplace as the quintessential food-place which inherently embodies these social and cultural principles. In her analysis of the traditional marketplace Steel staunchly advocates local, open-space developments that encourage diversity and urban engagement. According to Steel, successful markets are the soul of the city, “heterotopias” that embrace and cultivate vibrant, healthy urban centers. By their very nature, traditional markets naturally beget a dichotomy of actions crafted from regularity and habit as well as chaotic pandemonium, all factors which build successful cities. Steel notes that the extremities so intrinsic to the traditional marketplace are precisely the elements that globalized, industrial megastores have selectively removed, contributing to the “death of public space.” These contemporary food-places are essentially non-places, the opposite of the market, since they fail to treat food as a powerful cultural tool with the ability to generate culture, habit, and spontaneity. Rather, they objectify food, stripping it of any civic or social role in society and
disengage people from their local city, culture, and one another. The critical examination of food-places is more than a simple argument about what we eat and where we eat it. Rather, it is a battle over society, illustrating how food and architecture shape civilization itself. Steel declares, “public life is the social glue of cities, public space its physical expression. Without them, urban society is fatally weakened.”

01 THE ARCHETYPE OF SOCIAL DESIGN

The Greek Agora has long been the archetype of successful community-oriented design. In Greek culture, civic multi-use buildings created the foundation of the city, the setting of daily life. The Agora, the secular center of the Greek city, was more than a simple arrangement of market stalls; its presence reflected the community spirit of the society. The Agora served as a social and political setting for citizens where all sorts of people and activities came together in one location. Their arrangement was simple and often symmetrical, comprised of a major and minor covered colonnade which faced outward into a central, uncovered area. A food market was typically housed within the larger of the two linear structures and a myriad of other informal activities took place within the open common ground.

The communal nature of the Agora, its strong street presence and the fluidity between the central grounds and the surrounding buildings positioned the structures to become a container for the vibrant, spontaneous mixing of different people and ideas. Additionally, the partially enclosed public gathering space, by providing shade, attracted and retained people without isolating them from the surrounding city. Essentially, the Agora was a city within a city; a microcosm of the greater urban context.

02 THE BUILDING SCALE

The economic and cultural influences from Findlay Market, a thriving food market in Cincinnati, Ohio provide a case study for the design of the Covington Food District. Findlay Market, Cincinnati’s oldest and only surviving municipal marketplace has historically played a significant role in the development of the city. Built in 1852, the presence of the local market has sustained public engagement by offering cultural events, promoting local business, providing job opportunities, and ultimately providing meaningful connections between people, food, and their urban environment.

Today, the rectangular market is a food destination in Over-the-Rhine. Located between Race and Elm Street, the market's low building profile and relatively generous street set-back create a modest presence within the neighborhood. The skeletal structure of glass and thin iron supports is light and airy, inviting and visible within the neighborhood. This emphasis on visibility allows each of the market’s four façades to become a lively exchange between the main market building and the surrounding buildings that serve as an extension of the market core. Additionally, Findlay’s simple, glassy structure acts as a neutral backdrop, reflecting the beauty of the surrounding late 19th century Italianate buildings.


05 Ibid. 146.


Findlay has many supplemental programs that strive to make a positive economic contribution and reach out to the surrounding community. As the market grew and especially after its renovation during the early 2000’s, programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), have made large strides towards making fresh produce and healthy food choices more affordable for the economically disadvantaged in Over-the-Rhine. Programs such as these made it possible to use EBT cards, WIC coupons, and food stamps to purchase food from the farmer’s market, offer nutrition education programs, and incentivize people to shop at the market by matching the dollar amount they spend on their EBT cards with tokens for various market merchandise.

Despite Findlay’s rich history of community engagement, the market today primarily attracts white, relatively affluent consumers. The market’s peak days are the weekends and the vendors are less active during the weekdays. Although the market’s location is within the community’s area of lowest annual income, averaging $5,000–$15,000 per year, residents within the immediate neighborhoods do not seem to participate nor benefit much from the market’s presence. Rather, in recent years, Findlay has become an island of highly crafted local foods that are unrepresentative of its immediate community as well as economically excluding in terms of the relatively high cost for the many specialty food items.

The proposed food district will include a farmer’s market similar to Findlay Market in Cincinnati, however, the market in Covington will be smaller and completely open air. Covington has repeatedly expressed the need for a permanent location for their farmer’s market and, as Steel noted, the market is one of the primary ways to engage people with food on a daily basis, encouraging diversity and urban engagement. As a result, the market will be one of the cornerstones of the proposed food district. The farmer’s market will incorporate design elements similar to Findlay Market, including visibility, simplicity of form, and a sense of inclusivity through supplemental programs and community events. The market will be located adjacent from the existing public library on the north side of 6th Street and will convert a small portion of the library’s parking into a series of outdoor gardens with the market structure in the center. The market’s presence at this location will activate the street front and create a variety of regular, outdoor activities that will link the market with the remainder of the food district and enliven the proposed public square at Scott Boulevard and 6th Street.

The market will be adjacent to the small format grocery store and its events will coordinate with and reinforce the store’s daily functions. Furthermore, as an open air structure, the market will serve as a multifunctional space with the capacity to be easily and quickly converted into another event space such as a stage for a local food festival, concert, or wedding. On days when there is not a market function or set-up for an event, the open-air pavilions can become a lunchtime destination or covered plaza for other informal gatherings.
Inca Public Market, Inca
Charmaine Lay and Carles Muro

The demolition of the old public market in Inca provided the opportunity to create a new community-oriented space within the heart of the city's downtown district.10 Built within the heart of Inca, the market acts as a continuation of the pedestrian-centered city. Charmaine Lay and Carles Muro, the architects of the new market, activated the surrounding community by creating an itinerant building form that dramatically unfolds to engage the passerby and invite him not only into, but also onto the market itself. The flat zigzag contours of the roof slowly step upward from the ground, creating an outdoor promenade that culminates with a breathtaking view of the city below. Inside the market, this dynamic roof line creates moments of grandeur and openness contrasted by quieter, more private spaces.11

By unfolding upward from the ground, the market creates an extension of the street. The final "arm" of the market roof-promenade pushes out from the rest of the building, providing an open plaza that faces the street. This gesture is similar to the Greek Agora, creating a semi-enclosed public space that creates a dialog between the market structure and the surrounding buildings.

St. James Plaza
Aspect Studios

The multiple levels of the interior courtyard at St. James Plaza in Melbourne, Australia, create a series of small pockets for informal gatherings, lunch picnics, and places for quiet reflection within the hubbub of a bustling urban sector. The plaza, bordered by a series of larger retail complexes and a busy street, maintains a serene atmosphere through its layered design. The plaza consists of two primary levels which are divided by a series of interlocking green spaces that provide a feeling of shelter from the bustle of the surrounding city. This interstitial green zone is delineated into several small seating areas that push into the greenery at varying depths, creating a variety of quieter niches.

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The alternating levels and interspersed greenery effectively reduce the large scale of the multi-story retail centers adjacent to the plaza. Fast-paced pedestrian movement is still allowed along the perimeter of the plaza but the eccentric nature of the seating visually interrupts this zone by creating a jagged edge that extends into the public thoroughfare at varying lengths and reduces the speed within the plaza.41

03 THE COMMUNITY SCALE

Parc de la Villette, Paris, France
Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman

In 1982, architects Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman collaborated on the winning design in a Parisian competition for the revitalization of a 135-acre site, previously occupied by a slaughterhouse, into an "urban park of the 21st century."13 The proposal challenged the 19th-century conception of a park as a natural condition "exclusive and irrelevant to the city and city life." Rather, the design treated the urban park as an integral element within the city, redefining it as a composition of spaces which are partially landscape and partially man-made structures. This garden-in-the-city was intended to be a hub of activity, shows, and experimentation, yet simultaneously a center for relaxation and well-being of both body and mind.14

In rejecting the notion of a park as a pastoral entity, Tschumi and Eisenman proposed an urban landscape based on a three-part structure consisting of points, lines, and surfaces. These three systems were considered as a whole, rather than independently, and superimposed to create the final layout of the park so that each system might affect the other through a network of arbitrary and indeterminate distortions and programmatic clashes.

Points

Tschumi divided the site into a regularized grid consisting of 26 intervals spaced at 393 x 393 feet (120 x 120 meters). The system of points was based on the geometric dimensions of a 35-foot (10.80 meters) cube.15 At each of these points, an abstract structure, or folie, manifests one of the many programmatic elements within the park, such as an open air cultural center, a gymnasium, kiosks, cafes, picnicking spots, and many other culturally engaging activities. Furthermore, these structures are not finite as each is flexible, capable of being transformed for a variety of uses over time.16

Lines

Circulation

A series of lines were then superimposed onto the system, aligned with the orthogonal grid, which formed the primary walkways through the park. The strong linearity of the park was disrupted by an organic thread of curved walkways, intersecting the orthogonal network at a series of points. This concept of cutting and reforming recalls Guattari and Deleuze’s ‘rhizome’ theory, where
the system’s ability to reconnect to any line, even though it may become shattered or broken, signifies the strength of its organic nature. 17 The system of walkways within the Parc de la Villette are circuitous and seemingly random, cutting in and out of the folies and constantly connecting to nearby walkways, yet they never quite lose their underlying structural system.

**Surfaces**

Landscape + Geometry

Tschumi and Eisenman’s shift away from a landscape-oriented park is underscored by the interrelated system of natural and man-made surfaces. “The landscape elements, formerly the most important aspects of any urban park, have become the infill between the built structures that organize the project spatially and functionally.” 18 Yet, out of the 135 acres within the site, 85 were dedicated to green space, sustaining the primal notion of landscape within a park while maintaining the design’s theories of arbitrary juxtaposition, disunity, and equivocacy since the system’s fragments of meaning are simultaneously destabilized and largely left open to individual interpretation. 19

While the Parc de la Villette remains an innovative integration of urban and pastoral programs, its abstract nature leads to a design that lacks connections to its surrounding context and history. Although the vibrant red color of the folies are representative of the slaughter house which formerly occupied the site, the structure of the design is mostly based on geometric forms that have few indications of the history of the surrounding site and city.

Furthermore, the park is often criticized for being designed without consideration for the human scale. Due to the large open expanses of unprogrammed green space, the park can sometimes become an overwhelming landscape in which a visitor is only able to reorient themselves when they come across one of the folies. In this sense, the park acts as a “perverse reiteration of urban life where the human is caught in the relentlessly overwhelming milieu that removes humanistic sensibility to accommodate for larger numbers of people.” 20 Despite these criticisms, the Parc facilitated the development of a social atmosphere within the city where nature and culture meet to create an encompassing urban experience and successfully integrate the scales of building, community, and city.

In a similar way, the design for the proposed food district in Covington will integrate the community by activating and unifying the surrounding streets and neighborhoods through an abstraction of the city’s grid. A network of lines and surfaces, representing key parts of the city grid in miniature, will overlay the six sites of the food district. The abstracted grid will be continuous across the entire district, subtly indicating the interconnectedness of the neighborhoods and acting as a way finding tool between the sites.
Successful social design must superimpose the building, neighborhood, and community scale as a comprehensive design process in order to shift societal values to recognize food as an important means of expression and conveyance of identities. As such, the integration of food’s social theories into architectural practice can create new insights into how food is much more than a city’s daily nourishment and inherently embodies the city’s defining social and cultural attributes.

A community-oriented network of food districts would be an ideal implementation of the development aspirations illustrated by Vision 2015, a non-for-profit urban planning and architectural development organization created by the city of Covington, Kentucky, as a means to restructure their downtown community and attract people to the city. Specifically, the proposed design would coincide with the city’s desire to expand dining, arts, and entertainment venues while increasing the community’s civic engagement.

Furthermore, the design will create opportunities for recreation and community engagement while providing for people’s basic, everyday needs. As a series of multi-use spaces, the design will be rooted in the social and cultural aspects of shared food-spaces as an economic catalyst and social mixer, re-engaging people from Covington’s diverse inner-city neighborhoods within the food spectrum. It will also revitalize the underutilized parking lots and brownfields as well as bring needed urban density to Covington.
The design will support livable, walkable communities and reconnect people to the downtown urban context by building off the existing strengths of the community, complementing two of the Vision’s six focus areas: Competitive Economy, Educational Excellence, Livable Communities, Urban Renaissance, Regional Stewardship, and Effective Governance. Specifically, the food district will capitalize on the city’s historic heritage, existing architecture, and intimate neighborhood experience, helping to restore the city’s desirability as a place to live and work and to reposition Northern Kentucky into a place of urban prominence.32

THE HISTORY OF COVINGTON

One of the most important aspects of a vibrant city is its level of interconnectedness. Without multiple points of crossing, connecting, overlapping, and intersecting, a city’s resources and people will remain isolated from each other. The multiplicity of Covington’s different street grids and the arbitrary manner in which they transition from one to another creates an intricate framework of interconnections. 

This concept of connection began with the city’s first plat of 1815, a regularized grid of five by six streets, aligned with the primary streets of its sister-city, Cincinnati. Later city growth was mostly acquired from private plats of land which were developed independently of one another, thus creating unplanned street intersections.33 The most distinctive element within the original 1815 plat was a public square that extended east-west from Greenup Street to Scott Boulevard and north-south from 3rd to 6th Streets. Similar to the development of 6th Street in the Mainstrasse district, the streets that bisected the public square were widened to encourage economic development with a pedestrian focus. These streets created four small green pockets within which community members could congregate and engage with one another. However, the square’s notion of “public” did not correspond to its development, as it was never wholly reserved for public buildings or parkland.34

In 1825 the Bank of America purchased 580 acres west and south of the 1815 plat, pushing the town’s extents to the current location of Highway 71-75 and 9th Street. This new development was laid out at a slightly different angle compared to the original 1815 grid and encompassed most of the flat basin from the Ohio and Licking rivers, bordered by a hillier region to the west.35 The city continued to grow to the west and south, expanding its economic and commercial prowess. By the 1840’s, the public square from the 1815 plat had developed into the center of the local government and commercial activity had been pushed further south by a few blocks, extending down Madison Avenue and concluding at the intersection of Pike and Madison. 

Although the 1815 public square would continue to function as the primary center of government and an influential meeting place within the city, the completion of the Covington and Lexington Railroad line in 1854 would forever alter the square’s role as a commercial and cultural catalyst.36 The railroad’s depot was one block west of Madison Street at the intersection of Washington and Pike Streets and became one of the primary gateways of the city. Pike Street, later known as the Dixie Highway and State Route 25, intersected with Madison Avenue and extended from the railroad gateway.37

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34 Ibid. 27.
35 Ibid. 11.
36 Ibid. 31.
37 Ibid. 33.
Pike Street was and continues to serve as one of the city’s primary and most culturally significant thoroughfares, connecting Covington to nearby cities such as Lexington and Louisville, and drawing a constant stream of new people and ideas. This extension of commercial activity caused the intersection of Pike and Madison to become a natural site for commercial development and spurred the following explosion of food-related activities between 1840 and 1842.28

PUBLIC SQUARE BUSINESSES, 1840-1842

1. Brewery, Scott and 2nd
2. Sparrow and Ruff Candle Factory, Greenup and 2nd
3. Northern Bank of Kentucky, Scott and 3rd
4. McNickle Rolling Mill, Front and Greenup
5. Covington Cotton Factory, Front and Scott
6. Covington Hotel, Greenup and Public Square
7. Two physicians at the square
8. Market house with four grocers
9. Tobacco store, Scott and 4th
10. Three attorneys at the square
11. Three dry goods stores at the square
12. Furniture manufacturer at the market house
13. Apothecary at the square

As the city continued to expand, the area surrounding the intersection of Main and 6th Street became the primary destination for many German immigrants. Later known as Mainstrasse (not until the late 1980’s), this region within the West Side quickly escalated to become a commercial center characterized by its German heritage. Sixth Street was laid out with extra width, allowing the city to develop its first public food market in the center of the street with single-direction traffic on either side. The market opened in 1861 and lasted until 1906, providing a diverse number of food and commercial amenities to the city and prompting the area’s continual development as a culturally vibrant region with a constant influx of new people and businesses. In 1882, the city directory boasted a long list of mixed food functions. The list (below) highlights the many opportunities, at that time, to purchase food within Mainstrasse alone.29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROCERIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>426 Bakewell Main and 6th</td>
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<td>Philadelphia and 7th Bakewell and 4th</td>
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<tr>
<td>604 Main Bakewell and 5th</td>
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<tr>
<td>625 Main 616 Bakewell</td>
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<td>422 Main Bakewell and 7th</td>
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<tr>
<td>432 Main 965 Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>714 Main Philadelphia and Riddle (now 9th)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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29 Ibid. 13.
30 Ibid. 14.
THE DECLINE

The 1920s and 30s signified the peak of commercial activity and culture in Covington; business livelihoods were fed by the constant ebb and flow of people and ideas, fresh with the spirit of entrepreneurship. A sightseer casually perusing Madison Avenue during the mid 1920s would pass by an impressive variety of cosmopolitan venues, creating an insatiable attraction to the downtown region. Historian Tom Dunham reiterates this sentiment when he expressed, “There could be little wonder why the downtown of the 1920s hummed with activity and swarmed with people.” By the early 1930s, the city's federal census reported its highest population yet with approximately 65,000 people thriving in Covington.

Yet this pattern of the 1930s growth and prosperity would not last. The economic decline hit Covington hard, as it did in many cities around the United States, and even after a slight economic pick-up succeeding WW 2, the local economy continued to falter. By the 1960s the population leveled out to approximately 43,000 people, 22,000 less than the 1930s high. In addition to the decline in population, there was a drastic lack of industrial needs after the 1940s war boom and Covington's manufacturing sector suffered accordingly.

Gradually, the economic prosperity along Madison and Pike declined and has never recovered to what it was during the 1920s and '30s. Since that era, many of the comprehensive city plans have been constantly undermined by the unorderly growth of the city, the plans' ignorance towards the historic nature of the community, and the lack of communication and coordination between the various pocket neighborhoods. In order to understand these past plans' shortcomings and implement their successful elements into the design for a food-centric district, three of the city's previous redevelopment plans will be analysed.

THREE REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

In response to the patterns of economic stagnation, in the 1960s the city began to implement a number of redevelopment initiatives attempting to stimulate the local economy, attract people to the area once again, and regain the growth and prosperity that defined Covington at the turn of the 20th century.

1 | Mainstrasse Village Redevelopment

Officially dedicated in 1979, the German Village of Mainstrasse was reborn as a cultural mecca in Covington. The city chose to capitalize on the neighborhood's rich immigrant ancestry by celebrating its culture and preserving the historic character of the community. Many of the houses and businesses, which fell into disrepair during the post-war economic depression, were transformed into art, food, and cultural attractions through a multiplicity of small-scale food and entertainment venues. The redevelopment of the neighborhood was largely successful as an urban mixer and cultural destination as a result of the preservation of its strong German heritage as well as the density of the revitalized district. The entire affected area only encompassed about four blocks, yet the

12 Ibid. 98.
13 Ibid. 103.
14 Ibid. 115-116.
15 Ibid. 115-116.
number and variety of new businesses created a tourist destination as well as a focal point for the locals by recognizing and celebrating the existing cultural strengths of the community.

2 | Old Towne Plaza Redevelopment

In 1977, city officials turned their attention to the struggling Pike Street, once the commercial center of the city. The intent was to create an "outdoor mall," promoting pedestrian movement by prohibiting cars. They invested much money into the redevelopment of the historic storefronts along Pike Street, hoping to attract new businesses and foster a pedestrian-friendly shopping boulevard. While the development was well-intended, it failed to attract a consistent flow of people, and business faltered.16

Many of the business owners blamed the lack of vehicular access for the district’s economic challenges, claiming that many potential customers passed them by or did not see the area. However, the local government was slow to respond, prolonging the area's struggles. They finally re-opened Pike Street to vehicular traffic in 1993 after 16 long years of continued economic decline.

As the businesses along Pike Street floundered as a result of the Old Towne Plaza revitalization attempts, the remaining commercial establishments degenerated into seedy local joints such as liquor stores and dive bars. Finally, after the Pike Street and Madison Avenue intersection was returned to a vehicular juncture, the 500-block of Madison Avenue began to come to life again, expressed in the storefront improvements and the increased quality and diversity of new businesses.17

In 1990, the Korean Riverside Restaurant was one of the first locally-owned businesses in the district, followed by a Mad Cup Coffee in 2004 and a number of other food venues that sought to create externally focused, wholesome community spaces.18 Today, a number of themed districts, such as the bridal district along Madison Avenue, are crafting a unique character within different sectors of the district. A food-themed district near Madison Avenue would add yet another layer of complexity and diversity and facilitate the resurgence of the overall downtown area.

3 | The Riverfront Redevelopment

Following the initial 1815 plat, an affluent residential neighborhood began to take root along the riverfront. Even today this neighborhood represents the city’s oldest and finest mixture of architectural styles including examples of Federal, Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, and Greek Revival style mansions.19 In 1968, just before the Mainstrasse redevelopment, city officials began formulating another endeavor to enliven the riverfront area surrounding this historic district. However, the plans for an extensive retail, office, and entertainment complex with ample parking was completely thwarted by the local residents who were appalled by the government’s willingness to trade the historic character of the downtown residential district for a generic business and entertainment arena.20

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17 Ibid 114.
18 Ibid 124-125.
19 Ibid 17-18.
20 Ibid 115.
The plans for riverfront redevelopment were picked up again during the mid-1970’s, this time confining the redevelopment to the area west of the Roebling Suspension Bridge as a more respectful approach to the historic nature of the district. By 1990, after a drawn-out series of revisions, a comprehensive riverfront development was awaiting construction. The final plans included an office tower and retail complex, a 250 room hotel, a seven acre riverfront park, and a series of restaurants and entertainment centers interspersed within the complex.21

In many ways the development successfully commercialized the riverfront, an achievement Covington had been trying to attain since the city’s inception. However, the project largely failed to address the historic character of the city, a defining element of the successful Mainstrasse district. Rather, the development as a whole seemed to turn its back on the past, constructing vast complexes with hardly any connection to their surrounding context, leaving little opportunity to assimilate with and strengthen the economic and cultural assets of the adjacent commercial district along Madison Avenue. Thus, the riverfront became a non-space while people were working during the day and again in the evening. Furthermore, the development was out of scale with the two-to-three story historic brick structures which characterize the streets of Covington. The development consisted of two contrasting building types: low, sprawling commercial complexes with equally large surface parking and modern-looking high rises. Even the generously sized riverfront park, providing the city with much desired public parkland, remains underdeveloped even today, leaving a vast green space without any formal venues for walking or running paths, seating, or small community spaces for picnics and casual gatherings. With nothing to attract non-working people or incentivize new business development, the riverfront will continue to be an underutilized.

Conceptually, any multi-use design is a response to the urban fabric in which it is located. Thus, the interwoven nature of a city becomes an influential force, creating a harmonizing relationship between a building’s activities and its surroundings. In this way, the complementary nature of building and city is critical; their success is demonstrated by how they reinforce each other and collectively support everyday life.

Today, this interconnected nature of the street grids that contributed to the mixture of commercial and residential uses within a single zoning ordinance is well established in Covington. The unplanned plat acquisitions contributed, perhaps serendipitously, to the preservation of the city and its variety of pocket neighborhoods, even through subsequent economic challenges, by forming a natural web of interconnected, diverse regions. Unique compared with other cities, this network of residential areas grew into tiny but distinct neighborhoods. These small communities threaded themselves together through a complex web of short streets which often crisscrossed through each other and transected the various non-pedestrian thoroughfares such as railroad lines and highways to effectively connect these pocket neighborhoods from a multiplicity of vantage points. These tributary avenues flowed directly into the primary commercial districts, naturally connecting the neighborhoods into the more formal commercial districts of the city. The following diagrams illustrate how even the
rail line contributed to the city’s interconnected nature rather than infringing upon the primary network of streets. The existing street system was integrated into the new rail line by overlapping the two systems and allowing both vehicular and pedestrian traffic to continue in accordance with the rail road.

The proposed food district design will adapt key features from this urban history, neighborhood diversity, and distinctive connectivity. Similar to the analogy of minestrone soup discussed earlier, the design will draw out the best flavors of the various districts in Covington, assembling and highlighting them throughout the proposed food district. Specifically, the spontaneous connectivity of the street network will be incorporated into the food district by adjusting the contours of the buildings to correspond with key streets in the city. These angles will align with and reinforce the current city grid that will be abstracted and overlaid in miniature across the entire food district, connecting the six sites. Finally, there will be several areas within the proposed district that will correspond to the city’s various pocket-neighborhoods. The food and events within each zone will evoke that neighborhood’s particular food legacy.

Past Forward to Local? Let’s Be Real

In his raw and direct critique of the Locavore movement, previous Vancouver City Councillor and experienced journalist Peter Ladner critically considers the implications of the intersection of food and city planning from a business perspective. Without disparaging the beneficial influences of the movement for local and sustainable food practices, Ladner expounds upon the weaknesses and general naivety of idealistic methods previously advocated by theorists Mark Holland, Janine de la Salle, and Carolyn Steel. In the book, *The Urban Food Revolution: Changing the Way We Feed Cities*, Ladner explains how reducing food mileage should not be the primary concern of the Locavore movement since studies have shown that food miles account for only 4-20% of the total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. He also expresses skepticism over claims for locally produced food and their alleged environmentally sustainable implications by considering the complete life-cycle assessment of food products and large-scale production of certain foods. Arizona conservation activist Gary Nabham underscores Ladner’s skeptical review of the local food movement when he comments,

> "If a farm near Tucson, Arizona [produces food locally], but is irrigated by fossil-groundwater set down during the Pleistocene pumped by fossil fuel set down in Iran during the Pennsylvanian era, what is to be gained by promoting its food?“

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03 Ibid. 18.
04 Ibid. 17.
If local food does not result in energy reduction or contribute to sustainable practices, is generally more expensive and therefore uncompetitive with the high output of industrialized farms, and does not offer the convenience of non-seasonal global foods, then how is it possible to effectively integrate local food in an urban context, and why bother? As an experienced city planner and advocate of community engagement, Ladner portrays a modified view on the implications of contemporary food practices and explains with new clarity how the emphasis on local food can benefit urban planning policy and architectural design. Ladner admits that it is not the environmental, economic, or health-related reasons for which local food should be considered. Rather, it is the civic and social implications of integrating local practices into our cities and buildings that makes the most difference, and perhaps more of a difference than any of the previous motives. It is through the subtle changes in our daily lifestyles that new, more sustainable habits are cultivated and the potential for urban agriculture begins to be realized. Based on these conclusions, Ladner suggests that the incorporation of local and sustainable urban food practices realistically contributes to the regions’ food supply, increases peoples’ enthusiasm and knowledge for food, educates the public, improves health, and provides new jobs through which the community might continue to flourish.\(^5\)

Building from these arguments, the compilation entitled *The Nation’s Diet* analytically compares the economic implications of the globalized food-processer in Europe and the United States from 1980-1990. By taking an anthropological approach to food in urban environments, contributing authors Caplan, Keane, Willett, and Williams are able to illustrate that food choice is much more than a subjective decision made by consumers, but is socially and culturally constructed through the combined influence of four factors: gender, age, class, and ethnicity.\(^6\) Together, these four variables reveal a “significant knowledge of the unconscious attitudes of a society” in that food habits are central to peoples’ identities, ultimately illustrating that food choice is constrained by the range of product availability, bodily-aesthetics, mobility, income, and religious or ethical considerations, among other influences.\(^7\)

By collectively analyzing the social and cultural implications of food through gender, age, class, and ethnicity, *The Nation’s Diet* attempts to understand contemporary urban culture, patterns of meaning in urban infrastructure, and the relationship between economic and political processes influenced by food, ultimately answering the question, “why do people eat what they do?”\(^8\)

A related methodology was followed for this thesis, in preparation for designing the food district. A series of seven categories were established using 2010 Covington census data in order to map the commercial-residential structure, age diversity, average educational attainment, median income, racial diversity, cost of living, and urban density.\(^9\) Together they portray the social, economic, and cultural identity of the city that will serve as a foundation for the proposed food district.
The only two grocery stores in northern Covington. They are each 1 mile south from the intersection of Pike and Madison, three times further than the average pedestrian is willing to traverse.
These demographic classifications were then superimposed upon a series of six food groups identified throughout Covington using data from Urban Spoon, the City of Covington, and my own time spent within the community. The following series of diagrams illustrate the location and frequency of the six food groups which were categorized as American Food, Cafés, Sandwiches, International/Ethnic, Specialty/Niche, Drinks and Desserts, and Food Production Centers. Together, these diagrams serve as the foundation for the program, illustrating how food habits are linked to peoples’ identities.

The underlying structure of the proposed food district is grounded in six quintessential aspects of food engagement: food growth, preparation, consumption, education, celebration, and recycling. The program will build upon the information taken from the demographic and food-type data, catering to the more popular food groups that already exist within Covington as well as implementing some of the under-represented food themes into the city.

The six site interventions strive to be a comprehensive design solution, relevant and inclusive to each of the various demographic groups represented within Covington. The intent of the program is 1) to make physical connections as well as social references to the surrounding urban context, 2) encourage community-centered spaces by allowing pedestrians to inhabit the streets while still facilitating vehicular traffic, 3) provide more engaging public amenities rooted in people’s relationship with food, and 4) to allow a more community centered, diversified urban sector to arise from formerly vacant lots.

10 DESIGN SOLUTION

As a comprehensive masterplan, the proposed food district will extend in a quarter-mile radius from the Pike and Madison intersection, the symbolic epicenter of the project. The western four sites will have an urban agricultural focus whereas the two sites east of the Pike-Madison intersection will focus on the commercial aspects of food engagement. Yet, these distinctions are not absolute. Although each of the redeveloped areas will emphasize one type of food activity more than another, each site will include a mixture of the various types of food engagement.

The intent is “to design a social condenser, through horizontal congestion.” This concept, as described by architect Rem Koolhaas for his entry in the Parc de la Villette competition, proposed “a layering upon vacant terrain to encourage [the] dynamic coexistence of activities and to generate through their interference, unprecedented events.” This design concept of horizontal congestion is appropriate for a smaller city the size of Covington with approximately 40,000 residents. Yet, regardless of size there are many complex and unpredictable forces that shape the city daily and as such, the lifespan and effectiveness of most urban interventions is dependent on their ability to adapt to the ever-changing urban flux.

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In order to create such a flexible and adaptable network, the methodology for re-engaging communities through food related functions utilizes four stratagems as the vehicles for urban intervention. First, the design is a link, transecting boundaries and connecting neighborhoods by creating a network of new and existing food places. Second, it will mix complementary food attractions throughout the urban core by creating a series of densely programmed mixed-use food districts, attracting diverse users. Third, the design will activate underutilized and vacant spaces within the community by infilling underutilized surface lots throughout the city. Fourth and finally, the design will act as a social and cultural thread; its interrelated food amenities stitching together a continuous urban patchwork.

Adapted from the three-part structure of Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette, the proposed food district in Covington will be a horizontal dispersal of different food-related activities. In particular, six vacant or underutilized lots within a quarter mile radius surrounding the Pike and Madison intersection will be redeveloped into community spaces of varying sizes and densities. These six sites, developed into a comprehensive, interrelated food district, represent an assemblage of diverse activities, each encouraging people to take part in one of the six quintessential aspects of food engagement: food growth, preparation, consumption, education, celebration, and recycling, illustrated in the food wheel on the right.
The proposed food district will be unlike many previous urban interventions in that the program will be distributed throughout Covington rather than concentrated within a single block. This dispersed method is intended to ensure the continued interconnectedness of the city as a whole rather than concentrating all the catalyst of change within a single location and potentially diminishing the cultural and commercial significance of the nearby city blocks. The food district will encompass four of Covington’s neighborhoods: 1) The Licking Riverside Neighborhood, 2) The Central Business District, 3) Matter Gottes, and 4) Eastside, and will border four more: 1) Mainstrasse, 2) Westside, 3) Seminary Square, and 4) Helentown. The extensive nature of the proposed food district will allow it to thread through the various neighborhoods in Covington, activating each community’s unique food culture while creating a continuous link throughout the city.
Furthermore, the proposed food district will facilitate Covington’s initiative for urban beautification and the continued dispersal of productive green space throughout the city. As the food district develops, smaller pockets of corner parks, gardens, landscaping, and other spontaneous community-oriented green initiatives will link the six sites together and promote a continuous corridor of sustainable growth and community-focused spaces, illustrated in the diagram to the left. Eventually this green network will extend beyond the borders of the proposed food district and become integrated into the surrounding neighborhoods. The nature of these green spaces might adapt to the unique nuances of the existing food districts and accentuate the micro-cultures of each particular neighborhood, creating a comprehensive, yet distinct food-community district.
The northernmost site west of the Pike-Madison intersection is located along the Covington and Ohio rail line, within a highly industrialized sector of the community. As such, this site intervention will have a split commercial-industrial focus with a commercial street front along Pike Street followed by a series of recycling centers further south. Recycling food for alternative uses will encourage environmental stewardship and these principles will be reinforced through an on-site educational recycling center, a food donation/collection repository, a bottling facility, and a warehouse for the collection and distribution of food by-products such as spent grain from local breweries to be used for animal feed.

In order to engage Pike Street, a small brewery with a street-facing tap room will continue the commercial street front and engage consumers in the production, education, and consumption of beer through brewery tours and evening tasting events paired with recipes from chefs of local restaurants.

Two blocks south of the previous site, a thin strip of vacant land will highlight the performative nature of food through an open-air pavilion for educational seminars and food symposia, along with a temporary exhibit space for traveling food-related projects, planting demonstrations, various exterior cooking and eating areas, and a variety of recreational activities including a playground and a multipurpose sports field. This site will strive to increase people’s consciousness towards the potential for urban food production through celebration and hands-on involvement.

The final site west of the Pike and Madison intersection will engage the passerby through the growth and celebration of food. The site intervention will include a variety of themed gardens, both commercial and private, a children’s discovery garden, an edible arboretum, and an all-season greenhouse with an area reserved for hydroponic seedlings. Accompanying these various facilities will be a variety of tool and garden storage sheds as well as a handful of compost and recycling hubs. While the site will primarily focus on bringing the agrarian aspects of food back into the city on a manageable scale, the activities will partner with the nearby schools, introducing children to the process of food growth through a hands-on, interactive approach at a young age. Furthermore, most of the planting arrangements will be temporal and easily reconfigured with the capacity to quickly respond to the evolving needs of the growing spaces over time. In order to properly maintain the urban agricultural elements throughout the food district, a caretaker’s dwelling will occupy part of this site.
**EASTERN SITES**

The two lots at the intersection of 6th Street and Scott Boulevard will be the focal point of all six sites. They will serve as the location for future festivals as well as private events, integrating food production, consumption, and education through the design of a dense, mixed-use development. These first two lots will include a 7,000 sf small-format grocery store, an 1,200 sf covered pavilion for Covington’s farmer’s market, a bakery, a brew pub, and wine bar, and an 2,500 sf upscale restaurant. While most of the program will focus on integrating people with food activities, a variety of residential units as well as non-food businesses will be interspersed throughout the site to accommodate entertainment, shopping, and other daily needs as a means to augment the density, safety, and diversity of uses within this district.

On the upper levels, a 10,000 sf culinary school with a 2,000 sf rooftop garden program will partner with the Kenton County Adult Education Center and Cincinnati State’s Midwest Culinary Institute in order to provide students with a commercial flex space geared toward food research in addition to a series of food preparation labs where students can gain experience in a variety of cooking styles while building basic professional skills. Upon graduation from the program, participants will be assigned a year-long internship with a participating food facility within the greater Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky region.

This internship program is modeled from Jon Bon Jovi’s Soul Food Kitchen in New Jersey, which is dedicated to eliminating hunger through a culinary internship grounded in building meaningful relationships between the consumers and the restaurant workers and, in doing so, celebrating community. In addition to the adult culinary program, a children’s garden and food museum will provide an educative environment where children can engage in hands-on activities to learn about different traditions regarding food growth, preparation, and consumption.

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In addition to the adult culinary program, a children’s garden and food museum will provide an educative environment where children can engage in hands-on activities to learn about different traditions regarding food growth, preparation, and consumption.
GROUND LEVEL PROGRAM

EASTERN SITE
1. small format grocery store  7,000 sf
2. outdoor farmer’s market  1,200 sf
3. coffeeshop  2,000 sf
4. walk-thru sushi bar  400 sf
5. walk-thru deli / cafe  400 sf
6. bakery / wedding catering  1,200 sf
7. French bistro  2,400 sf

WESTERN SITE
1. bus stop  300 sf
2. brew pub  2,000 sf
3. cycle shop  800 sf
4. fitness club  900 sf
5. taco + tequila bar  1,000 sf
6. wine bar  800 sf

UPPER LEVEL PROGRAM

EASTERN SITE
1. culinary school  10,000 sf
2. “market kitchen” + eatery  5,000 sf
3. office space  12,000 sf
4. residential units  14,500 sf

URBAN AGRICULTURE
1. outdoor event plaza  5,000 sf
2. farmer’s market plaza  5,700 sf
3. rooftop culinary garden  2,000 sf

SITE MATERIALS
1. etched city grid
2. event plaza
3. district streets
4. special walkways
5. water feature
6. interior plazas
7. reflecting pools
8. bicycle racks
Each of the six districts is connected by the city’s existing street system. This network of lines is a diagrammatic representation of how Covington’s street system has evolved over the lifespan of the city, capitalizing on the diverse array of intersections between the various city plans. This organic intermingling of streets led to the natural development of small pockets of commercial and residential zones within the city, creating a diverse urban tapestry for the development of a new food district. As a whole, the proposed design will be a microcosm of the greater urban context as an appropriate, contextual development within the city. To achieve this, the six districts will be transected by the grid of existing vehicular and pedestrian boulevards in order to sustain the dynamic exchange of different people and activities as well as encourage fluidity and the cross-pollination of different people and activities. Specifically, the current city grid that will be abstracted and overlaid over the entire food district, connecting the six sites and reinforcing the interconnectedness of Covington’s neighborhoods.
Within this proposed network, a series of plazas will create opportunities for mixing and community engagement using food as the vehicle for social and cultural interaction. As an interconnected series of community-oriented, multi-use spaces, the proposed development will create opportunities for recreation while providing for the community’s basic, everyday needs. The organization of the plazas will be dynamic, subdivided according to the lines created by the abstracted city grid, and will create a “pinball” effect where multiple food attractions are visible with several paths from which the pedestrian must choose to reach their destination. In this way, people will constantly cross paths, encouraging spontaneous mixing and spontaneous conversations to occur, thus enlivening the social atmosphere and encouraging a diversity of people and activities throughout the food district.
Collectively, all of the six sites foster public engagement as they strive to become self-sustaining catalysts for the economic and cultural revitalization of Covington through a food-focused agenda. The proposed district employs an architectural inquiry of how urban design can reflect the emerging culture while also encouraging people to become co-producers, rather than consumers, by engaging people in food production and supply processes. Each site is designed to appeal to peoples’ current modes of interaction within a public setting while simultaneously crafting a renewed appreciation for the social potential of a food-centric community. Furthermore, the proposed food district explores the implications for food-based interventions as facilitators for transforming underutilized urban spaces. Ultimately, the project proposes how other cities might be revitalized through similar food production projects by linking reactivated urban environments with their agrarian counterparts. Reinvesting in the brownfields and underutilized surface parking will restore the city’s heritage and celebrate the unique character of each neighborhood. Thus, the community can capitalize on Covington’s desirability as a place to live and work, repositioning the city into a center of urban prominence as a social and cultural destination.
11 WORKS CITED


Mikoleit, Anne and Moritz Parchhauer. 100 Lessons for Understanding the City. Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011.


