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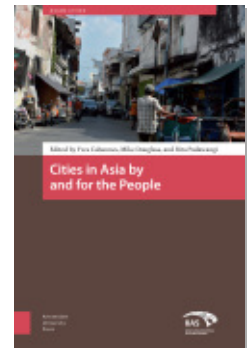
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## 8 Activating Alternatives in Public Market Trade

The Resilience of Urban Fresh Food Provisioning in Baguio, the Philippines

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### Abstract

Throughout the Global South, governments have responded to rapid urban growth by embracing visions of ‘modernity’ that favour constructing large-scale infrastructure projects (e.g., supermarkets) while discouraging or even destroying what they view as the remnants of ‘traditional’ entrepreneurial trade (e.g., public marketplaces). Such policies disrupt long-standing livelihoods and provisioning networks on which urbanites have depended for decades. This chapter engages this issue by using the retail vegetable trade in the Baguio City Public Market (BCPM) in the northern Philippines, to argue that marketers innovatively combine public ‘advocacy’ and under-the-radar ‘everyday’ politics to sustain the diversity of their urban livelihood options despite the development challenges they face. To protest the Baguio government’s 1995 privatization of the public market, marketers launched civil lawsuits and appeals that continue to thwart municipal action today. Given delays in court decisions, marketers simultaneously operationalize social capital networks and everyday politics of ‘gray spacing’ to achieve short-term gains that secure their enterprises (e.g., expanding displays into market aisles). That BCPM officials allow merchants to pay rent for such market guideline infractions highlights governments’ complicity in formalizing informal and illegal practices as urban organizing logics when it is to their advantage. Although Baguio’s supermarket sector is expanding, public marketers have developed a complementary rather than singularly competitive relationship with supermarket venues. I argue that BCPM retailers’ advocacy materializes how civic engagement

can be effectively negotiated when competing ideologies clash over livelihood rights, and how to structure the quality of urban life for and by its residents.

**Keywords:** the Philippines, public markets, vegetable commodity flows, everyday politics, urbanization

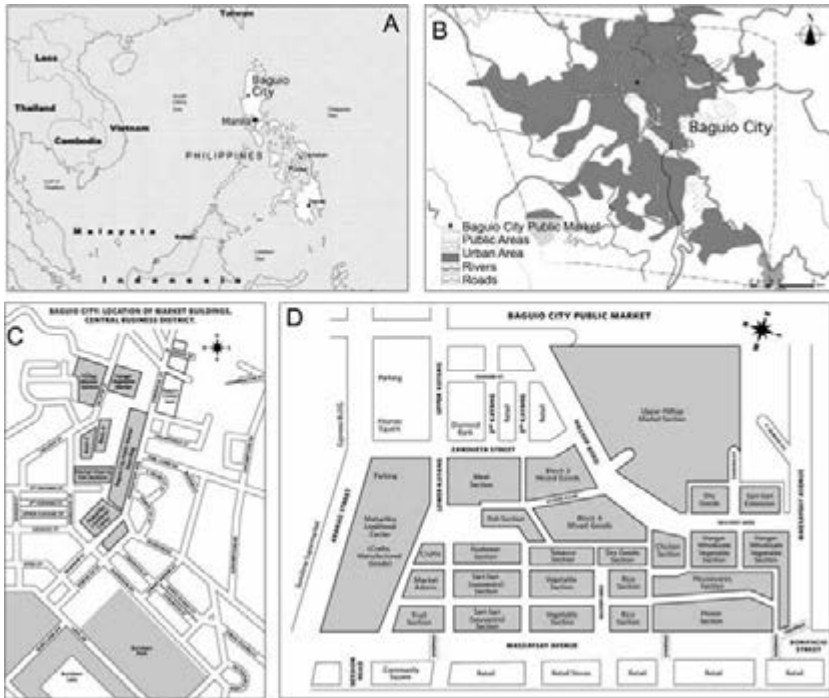
## 1 Introduction

Building upon their historic roles as household financial managers and the country's foremost public market traders, Filipino women continue to be the main fresh produce retailers and wholesalers in the country—the work sector in which women tend to predominate throughout Southeast Asia (Chant 1996; Lloyd-Evans 2008). In Baguio, the Philippines, for example, 58-year-old Evelyn de Leon,<sup>1</sup> who has two years of college education, has been operating her public market vegetable business for twelve years after inheriting the lease of the store from her parents. Evelyn sells fresh local upland Baguio vegetables (e.g., broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, cabbage, green beans, and potatoes) in the Vegetable Section of the Baguio City Public Market (BCPM). Since 1995, when the Baguio government announced its plan to redevelop or 'modernize' the public market, Evelyn and other small-scale marketers have felt uncertain about the future viability of their businesses—an insecurity augmented by the recent proliferation of newly constructed supermarkets. In response to both of these developments, Evelyn has diversified her business by offering specially sourced products that appeal to a rising middle class looking to experiment with different cooking ingredients and to city residents' general concerns about food safety. Evelyn's new products include bean sprouts, ginger, sweet peas, basil, shiitake mushrooms, and tofu—the latter product made by her sister and delivered fresh to the store each morning. As Evelyn explains, 'Currently, only two Baguio public market retailers in my section sell this specific mix of vegetables which are combined for particular Filipino dishes. By always topping up my display with fresh produce, customers can see I ensure the high quality of my goods' (interviews by author, 13 May 2014, 5 February 2015) (see Figure 2).

Urban public marketplaces that host dynamic businesses such as that of Evelyn de Leon are bustling constellations of economic, social, and political

1 All personal names of people are pseudonyms.

**Figure 8.1** Maps of (a) the Philippines, (b) Baguio City, (c) Central Business District and (d) Baguio City Public Market



Source: Ariel Shepherd (a, b), author (c, d)

life. Throughout the Global South, however, the explosive growth of cities has prompted local and national governments to embrace visions of ‘modernity’ and development that favour the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects (e.g., shopping malls) while discouraging or even destroying what governments view as the ‘traditional’ remnants of entrepreneurial trade, such as public marketplaces, ad hoc stalls, and street vending (Douglass, Ho, and Ooi 2008, 17; see also Cohen 2004; Dannhaeuser 1997; Matjeowsky 2000 and 2008; Perera and Tang 2013). Such market modernization projects limit the livelihood opportunities available to small-to-medium size businesses and the consumption options accessible to city residents. As a result, one might expect the demise of the so-called ‘traditional’ fresh food provisioning networks and their replacement by those linked to more capital-intensive operations. Yet, my ongoing research on the redevelopment of the Baguio City Public Market in the northern Philippines suggests otherwise.

Long-standing provisioning sites such as the Baguio City Public Market are, in fact, thriving. Here, fresh produce marketers working in retail and

**Figure 8.2** A Baguio City Public Market retailer selling upland Baguio vegetables



Source: author

wholesale businesses (e.g., fruits and vegetables) refashion practices to meet the demands of peri-urban farmers, on the one hand, and the changing consumption needs of urbanites, on the other. Tracing the channels through which merchants such as Evelyn navigate the shifting dynamics of their trade highlights the finely tuned trading-scape marketers activate to challenge the government's framing of their enterprises as 'pre-modern' and 'inefficient' (Milgram 2011, 262; see also Clark 1994; Seligmann 2004; Solomon 2006).

This chapter engages these issues by analyzing the mainstream channels and edgy side roads through which Baguio's public market retail vegetable sellers—of both upland and lowland products—sustain their provisioning livelihoods despite the city government's policies that have repeatedly threatened their businesses' viability. I argue that within a contested context that privileges the 'city beautiful' (Brown 2006, 3), vegetable retailers innovatively use 'everyday politics' (e.g., negotiating individual rental agreements, offering bribes, and expanding store premises into market aisles) (Kerkvliet 2009, 227) to maintain the commodity chains and personalized networks they have used for decades to supply city residents with fresh produce. Vegetable retailers, for example, create new interstitial economic spaces within old ones by consigning produce to mobile vendors. They diversify

their enterprises by sleuthing out unique products, and they expand their social capital by fostering individualized ties with farmers, wholesalers, porters, and customers. Indeed, to encourage shoppers' loyalty, some public market retailers develop initiatives that transform food provisioning—a daily activity—into a memorable encounter (e.g., sampling new types of produce). Creating such in-between or 'gray spaces' (Yiftachel 2012, 24) within which they can supply special shopping experiences, vegetable retailers market their enterprises through what Joseph Pine and James Gilmore (1998, 97) term the 'experience economy'.

Baguio City Public Market retailers explain that they ultimately have had little choice but to engage in such everyday politics. In 1995, the municipal government awarded the market redevelopment contract to a private, Manila-based shopping mall developer (*Baguio Midland Courier* 1995, 8). Marketers immediately challenged this outsourced initiative by launching a series of civil lawsuits and appeals that continue, over twenty years later, to thwart city action (Agoot 2009, B26-27, B52; Borja 2010, 1, 13; Caluza 2013; Castro 2009, 1, 22; Refuerzo 2009, 1, 43). Baguio City councillors frustrated with delays to their development agenda increasingly launch market clean-up exercises and more stringently enforce minor trade infractions, both of which can constrain marketers' businesses (Fontanilla 2014, 2, 4). At the same time, and particularly since 2000, small-to-medium size supermarkets, as well as the large-scale shopping mall Shoe Mart (SM) Baguio City, have been constructed across the city, each offering residents multiple food shopping options.

Such city government and private development initiatives, however, do not mean that public market vegetable retailers necessarily lose out to new market players or to government constraints. Rather, customers variably shop in both locales, depending upon their immediate needs, loyalty, and convenience. I suggest that, by maintaining important social capital and the type of hands-on food access ordinary urbanites across all classes still seek, Baguio vegetable marketers' practices engage with and challenge the 'unreal reality of the modern city' to materialize a diverse 'cityness' by, and more relevant to, urban residents (Robinson 2006, 10).

To conceptually situate the shifting trajectories of trade within the Baguio City Public Market, I first review studies arguing that how governments choose to frame their city's identity has important implications for the sustainability of diverse urban livelihoods. I then explore the concepts and practices of social capital and everyday politics, subsequently demonstrating the extent to which retail vegetable marketers can operationalize these

actions to secure their food provisioning systems despite the development challenges they face.

## 2 Repositioning 'Cityness' and Rights to the City

With growing urbanization in Global South cities and the unpredictability of global financial markets, municipal governments have privileged development projects designed to enhance their city's public cultural and economic positioning—its world-class status—rather than implementing livelihood options that address the everyday subsistence needs of most urbanites (Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer 2012; Douglass, Ho, and Ooi 2008; Perera and Tang 2013). Such a development agenda—clearly evident in Baguio's aim to become the regional industry, education, and tourist centre—has had devastating consequences for low- to middle-income residents in terms of equality in service access and provision and the redistribution of goods (Douglass 1998, 111). Rather than governments imposing a vision of 'cityness' in which one aspect represents an entire urban identity (e.g., sports stadiums, communication towers), Jennifer Robinson (2006, 10) encourages policies to adopt an 'ordinary city' perspective—an approach that 'considers the city as a whole in all its diversity and complexity'. Such a perspective implies a stronger, locally-oriented 'reterritorialization' of the individual city or city-region rather than an outward-looking emphasis that gauges global status—the degree to which a city is immersed in transnational flows (Robinson 2006, 10).

By considering all cities as 'coeval'—as existing in the same time, rather than along a developing-developed continuum—we can more integrally understand the diversity of city economies and thereby effectively respond to urbanites' on-the-ground subsistence needs (Robinson 2006, 85; Douglass and Danieri 2009). Work such as street vending or public market trade, rather than indicating activities of 'underdevelopment', provide evidence of how sellers use proximity to foster relations of trust between individuals and organizations in economic interactions and thus create a more responsive and reflexive city (see Smith and McQuarrie 2012). As Mike Douglass, K. C. Ho, and Giok Ling Ooi (2008) remind us, in situations of limited infrastructural development such as that in Baguio (e.g., poor housing, social service provision, and employment options), the street, public markets, and other public spaces become crucial settings for inventing ways of being sociable, earning a living, and gaining recognition. Finding ways of being modern in cities worldwide is not only realized in the built environment, but also

in flexible private and public spaces and enacted in personal performances and innovative socioeconomic practices.

For urbanites to challenge the largely exclusionary effects of modernism imposed from above, they need to be able to access rights that gives them power over the city's socioeconomic and political resources. This demand for the right to the city is 'a right not only in the legal sense of a right to specific benefits [and ...] to a set of rights to justice within the existing legal system, but a right on a higher moral plane that demands a better system in which the potential benefits of an urban life can be fully and entirely realized' by the majority of residents (Marcuse 2012, 34). Peter Marcuse (2012, 36) argues that the right to the city—which may at first seem like 'a right of consumption—a right to consume what the city, and city life, has to offer'—should also include the 'integrally linked' right to produce the city to meet one's particular needs. Rather than simply having the right to choose 'what is produced after it is produced', urbanites should be able 'to determine what is produced and how it is produced and to participate in its production' (Marcuse 2012, 36). Baguio's market vendors favour market improvements as long as *they* are part of the planning process—part of determining the rules of the game that enables them to instrumentalize city resources on more of their own terms.<sup>2</sup>

### 3 Activating Everyday Politics, Social Capital, and 'Gray Spacing'

Given that the public market vendors' umbrella association, the Baguio Market Vendors Association (BAMARVA Inc.), continues its court challenge of the city government's market redevelopment plan, and given that a legal resolution will take years to achieve, public marketers use 'everyday politics'

2 Holston's (1999, 169) discussion of cultural citizenship similarly addresses this issue, as he argues that simply having the legal status of 'citizen' does not guarantee effective access to the rights and protections offered by the nation state. He suggests that, 'although in theory full access to rights depends on [national] membership, in practice that which constitutes citizenship substantively (rights and duties) is often independent of its formal status. Indeed, it is often inaccessible to those who are formal citizens (e.g., the native poor), yet available to those who are not (e.g., [well-off] legally resident "aliens")' (Holston 1999, 169). In the Philippines, this difference between formal and substantive citizenship is, at least in part, mapped according to one's type of employment. Despite the nationalist rhetoric that guarantees all Philippine citizens basic social, economic, and political rights, in practice the livelihoods of public market merchants, for example, consistently place them outside national and globalized standards of modernity, progress, and appropriate urban development (see also Guarnizo 2012).



to secure their livelihoods in the short term. Benedict Kerkvliet's (2009, 232) concept of 'everyday politics' provides a framework for analyzing how disenfranchised individuals assert their rights to livelihood given the wider political system within which they function. For Kerkvliet, everyday politics involves 'people embracing, complying with, adjusting, and contesting norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources and doing so in quiet, mundane, and subtle expressions and acts that are rarely organized or direct'. Everyday politics involve 'little or no organization, [are] usually low profile and private behaviour, and [are] done by people who probably do not regard their actions as political' (Kerkvliet 2009, 232). Within everyday politics Kerkvliet identifies four forums of action: 'support, compliance, modifications and evasions, and resistance' (2009, 233). To secure and diversify the commodity chain flows that sustain their enterprises, Baguio's public market vegetable retailers activate these everyday tactics by, for example, respecting market code guidelines in some instances while respatializing market zones (e.g., occupying public market aisles) in others.

### 3.1. Social Capital

In the Philippines, as is customary throughout the Global South, the strength of one's social networks is integral to the success of one's economic pursuits. To overcome situations in which formal financial and legal infrastructures are not well developed or not easily accessed, most Filipinos form *suki* ('favoured relationships') to reduce risk in economic transactions. These customary trade relationships involve trust and reciprocal favours, such as being able to purchase goods on credit, pay a debt in installments with little or no interest, and (for producers) to receive a fair price for their goods from traders (Davis 1973, 211; see also Dannhaeuser 1983; Lin 2001). As Gina Porter et al. (2010, 31) note about Nigerian markets, 'social networks and small acts of human agency have been used to build trust, to diffuse tension, and to effect reconciliation.' Given that Baguio's public marketers' work falls outside the state's vision of appropriate urban development, merchants depend on their social capital to access new business options and garner support when unexpected challenges arise.

Early scholarship on social capital focussed on positive outcomes and paid inadequate attention to the 'dark side' of this practice. Because social networks can isolate non-members and frustrate efforts to build a unified front against top-down development initiatives, analyses must also consider the differing power relations and inequality among people who seemingly

hold common goals (Narotzky and Moreno 2002). To this end, Alejandro Portes and Patricia Landolt (2000, 532) identify four negative consequences of social capital, namely ‘exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward levelling norms’—all of which can challenge new sellers seeking entry into the public market’s fresh food provisioning network, for example.

### 3.2. ‘Gray Spacing’

‘Gray spaces’, Oren Yiftachel (2012, 153) argues, ‘have become a dominant feature of contemporary urbanism’ created both “‘from above” by powerful groups linked to the centers of power’, and more commonly from below by city residents whose rights have been marginalized. The latter, rather than ‘being powerless recipients of [unfavourable] urban policies, [...] generate new mobilizations and insurgent identities’ by using ‘gray spacing’ to create ‘bases for self-organization, negotiation, and empowerment’ (Yiftachel 2012, 153). Gray spaces thus emerge as ‘developments, enclaves, populations, and transactions positioned between the “lightness” of legality/approval/safety, and the “darkness” of eviction/destruction/death’ (Yiftachel 2012, 153). Baguio’s public market retailers use everyday politics to create such in-between ‘gray spaces’ by, for example, expanding their product displays into public market aisles and thereby contravening market guidelines. Although such ‘gray spaces’ are rarely fully ‘integrated’ into or ‘eliminated’ from contemporary urban regions, they persist partially outside of the knowledge of or are tolerated by state authorities when the latter feel they can gain some benefit from looking the other way (Smart and Zerilli 2014, 229; Yiftachel 2012, 154). Understanding that ‘gray spacing’ is a quiet ongoing process of refashioning socioeconomic spatial relations (Yiftachel 2012, 153) dissolves the modernist dichotomy between legal and illegal to yield a more inclusive sphere that Alan Smart and Filippo Zerilli (2014, 222) term ‘extralegality’.

These approaches thus provide critical lenses for charting marketers’ strategies to mitigate the ‘hypercommodification’ (Robinson 2006, 2) that is currently steamrolling Baguio’s urban life.

## 4 Baguio City Public Market

In the early twentieth century, the American colonial government in the Philippines established Baguio as its mountain summer resort to escape

the hotter lowland temperatures. Baguio, an urban centre of 300,000, is the government, educational, and administrative hub for northern Luzon's five mountain provinces; its extensive public market offers wholesale and retail sales of fresh produce, manufactured goods, and crafts, supporting businesses throughout the region. The city is home to a wide range of colleges and universities that, along with the city's government services, retail stores, and new shopping malls, provide the customer base sought by prospective entrepreneurs. Across commercial sectors, however, individuals must negotiate personalized strategies to realize the potential of this urban market. Although Philippine government policies continue to put forward anti-poverty programs for urban and rural renewal, many initiatives have fallen short of achieving long-term economic and political reforms (e.g., more work opportunities, accessible financial infrastructure) that can effectively benefit anyone other than well-off Filipinos—a situation common to urbanizing centres throughout the Global South (Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2012, 98-99; see also Balisacan 1995; Bello et al. 2005).

As the altitude of much of Benguet province, where Baguio is located, is above 1,500 m, the cool temperatures enable farmers to grow temperate-climate vegetables that those in the hotter lowlands cannot produce. For this reason, Benguet province markets have emerged as the country's key collection and distribution hubs for upland vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, beans, potatoes, carrots, cabbage, tomatoes, and lettuce. These upland vegetables, as well as vegetables transported daily to Baguio from neighbouring lowland provinces, are available locally to urban consumers in public market stores, in neighbourhood satellite or roadside markets, from itinerant street vendors, and as noted, in new supermarket venues scattered across the city.

The Baguio City Public Market (BCPM) is located in the heart of the city's Central Business District and was formally established in 1913, shortly after the 1909 founding of Baguio (Agoot 2009, B26). The market is the regional hub for the wholesale and retail trade of a variety of local and imported fresh products, dry goods, and selected services (barber shops, women's hair salons, shoe stores, and cosmetic care salons). Market buildings Blocks 1 and 2, which house wide aisles and product-specific zones for fruit, vegetables, rice, housewares, cut flowers, souvenirs, meat, fish, and tobacco, remain the showcase of the market for local residents as well as for tourists. In the late-1970s, the Maharlika Livelihood Center was constructed to house regional crafts and prepared food outlets, and from 2011 to 2014, the city renovated two smaller mixed-use buildings, Block 3 and Block 4 (Agoot 2009, B26-27; Milgram 2015).

The Hanger Wholesale Vegetable Section at the far end of Block 2, past the Rice Section, handles a major part of the region's extensive wholesale trade in upland Baguio vegetables. Wholesale produce from Benguet's intensive cultivation is also funnelled through the La Trinidad Vegetable Trading Post and the Benguet Agri Pinoy Trading Center both located in neighbouring La Trinidad, Benguet's capital city. Each wholesale market supports trading networks that distribute upland produce to local retailers and wholesalers throughout northern and southern Luzon and the central Philippine islands. While the overall parameters of the wholesale upland vegetable trade are beyond the scope of this paper, the fact that Baguio's upland vegetable retailers first source their goods at the Hanger Wholesale Vegetable Section of the public market means this site is a key node in the vertical commodity flow from producer to consumer.

The guidelines for trade within the BCPM and its surrounding streets where itinerant vendors are active are outlined in the Market Code, which stipulates rental rates, lease terms, and locations for and types of permitted trade (City of Baguio 2000–2001). The implementation of the Market Code is administered by the municipal government's umbrella department for city-wide trade, the Committee on Marketing, Trade, and Commerce, and for everyday affairs by the Baguio City Market Authority. The latter consists of a market manager, market office staff, and guards who are all municipal employees. Market officials allocate market stalls, collect market fees, and enforce the market's general security and business guidelines. Despite being administered by the city government, the market management allows trade to take place fairly freely and, as described by the majority of BCPM merchants, primarily focusses on efficient administration. The market management does not undertake trade negotiations and only intervenes in vendor conflicts if called upon by the merchants themselves. The task of settling disputes is usually handled by the traders' umbrella organization, BAMARVA, Inc., which, in turn, comprises smaller product-specific associations (e.g., BCPM Vegetable Vendors Association, BCPM Tobacco Traders Association, etc.). As Julie Batton, one vegetable retailer, explains, 'We want to police ourselves such that we retain some business flexibility and maintain the power to penalize or benefit our association members on a case-by-case basis' (interview by author, 23 May 2014, 9 February 2015).

This customary 'arms-length' pattern of public market trade can, however, shift with a change in mayoral leadership. Throughout the early 2000s, for example, some Baguio councillors sought to emulate the modernizing development initiatives of Manila's Marikina City government. The

then-Marikina mayor passed controversial legislation to clean up the city's public market by regularizing store size, restricting sales to specific types of goods, and banning itinerant vendors from the surrounding streets. The resulting sanitized market was achieved only by officials resorting to extreme punitive measures such as repeatedly destroying vendors' goods, dismantling stalls that violated size and product guidelines, imposing large fines, and installing permanent camera surveillance in the market office (Koki 2010; Viliran 2008). At times when a majority of Baguio councillors favour a similar urban vision, municipal authorities are less tolerant of market trader infractions, imposing fines and more stringent clean-up initiatives. At such times, marketers regain their hard-won trade rights only through persistent lobbying and everyday politics.

The fact that Baguio's current food provisioning landscape supports more shopping options does not mean that urbanites have abandoned the BCPM—a so-called traditional consumption site. Instead, and not surprisingly, most residents across classes shop in different retail venues depending upon the products they need for a particular purpose, the time they have to shop, and the convenience of the store location. Many consumers explain that they continue to shop for fresh produce (e.g., fruit, vegetables, fish) at the public market and at supermarkets for their bulk dry goods, although some continue to frequent the public market section specializing in the latter products, which are often sold at discounted prices. More well-off consumers, part of the Philippines' rising middle class, explain that they still visit public market stalls. As one shopper states, 'If I can, I will always return to my favourite BCPM retailer to secure specific fresh produce. I rely on my *suki* to most consistently sell me the best quality and safest food' (interview by author, 26 May 2014). Consumers who have nurtured long-term provisioning relationships with specific market retailers want to maintain these links grounded in trust, as Karen Monteban, another middle-class shopper, confirms: 'My neighbours and I visited the new SM Supermarket when it first opened to experience this large facility and the wide range of goods it offers. And I return to SM to shop when I am in the area. But I prefer to go to the public market where I can find the freshest and most varied produce' (interview by author, 2 June 2014). As such personal accounts suggest BCPM retailers remain competitive players despite the city's top-down efforts to minimize diversity in urban consumption options. Vegetable marketers, in particular, have effectively activated everyday tactics to successfully refashion their trade's ongoing relevance to shoppers and its preservation, as the following case studies demonstrate.

## 5 Upland and Lowland Vegetable Commodity Flows

### 5.1 Upland Vegetable Commodity Chains

Upland vegetable retailer Julie Batton, who is 38-years-old with two years of college and three children, took over her aunt's vegetable store in 2008 after working with her in this business since 2004. Julie's husband works as a night security guard. Julie's family connection, her 'bonding social capital', (links among tightly associated groups such as kin and community members) (Putnam 2000, 22-24) enabled her to secure this rental agreement amid keen competition for public market stalls. Julie's business is similar to that of other vegetable retailers who specialize in upland produce. Julie sells what she calls 'vegetable sets', namely, vegetables that are commonly used together in customary dishes; this sales tactic enables consumers to purchase, in one place, the ingredients they need for specific recipes (Figure 2). As one shopper explains: 'When I was purchasing produce in the supermarket, I found *camote* ['sweet potatoes'] next to *calmunsi* ['limes']; this product arrangement makes no sense to me? When I shop at my market *suki* I am certain I will obtain all the ingredients I need for a particular dish, as my *suki* organizes her vegetables more logically. I do not want to start cooking at home only to realize that I forgot one item' (interview by author, 5 June 2014). With a rotating capital of approximately 5,000–8,000 pesos (US \$110–180),<sup>3</sup> typical of most small-scale businesses, Julie purchases the majority of her upland vegetables from the public market's Hanger Wholesale Vegetable Section, visiting her favourite wholesalers each day at 5.30 a.m. As each wholesaler usually specializes in only a few types of upland vegetables, Julie builds 'bridging social capital' relationships (links with non-kin heterogeneous groups) (Putnam 2000, 22-24) with four to six key *sukis* to obtain the variety of produce she needs. Once Julie makes her purchases, she obtains a receipt from each wholesaler and gives these to her porter, who subsequently collects and delivers her goods to her store. To collect his payment from Julie at the end of the day, the porter totals the number and route of his deliveries and is paid according to this delivery schedule.

BCPM porters belong to their own member association, the Baguio City Public Market Porters Association, which has established standard rates of pay depending upon the weight of each delivery and the distance it is carried (e.g., 0.50 pesos per kilo, or 50 pesos per 100 kilos). To equitably share

3 The exchange rate I use is US \$1.00 = 45 Philippine pesos.

employment among market porters, association guidelines stipulate the specific market areas within which each porter is permitted to work. For example, some porters transport produce only within the Hanger Wholesale Vegetable Section and between this wholesale area and the outside unloading and loading facilities reserved for traders and farmers; other porters' routes operate between the Hanger Section and either the Block 2 retail Vegetable Section proper or the upper retail Hilltop Section, while others carry goods between Hanger and off-site storage warehouses. The movement of both upland and lowland vegetables into, out of, and within the public market thus goes nowhere without the essential service of market porters—a key node in the multi-sited flow of these commodities and a main forum of employment for unskilled labourers and new immigrants.

Relations of trust anchor the negotiations among porters, retailers, and wholesalers. Julie pays the Hanger wholesalers cash for her vegetables, but she most often pays in instalments by making a down-payment when she orders her goods and giving the balance due at the end of that business day. When sales have been slow, Julie carries over her interest-free credit to the following day. If she needs to restock her produce but cannot leave her store, Julie reorders by sending a text to her wholesaler and subsequently contacting her porter to pick up and deliver her goods. In such instances when Julie does not personally choose her produce, she explains, 'I trust my wholesaler will supply good quality produce and that my porter will correctly total the receipts. I have been in business for over eight years and my *sukis* know that if they include spoiled goods, I will take my business to other dealers. We have a good understanding' (interviews by author, 23 May 2014, 9 February 2015).

Similar negotiations that maintain allegiances occur in retailers' everyday buying and selling practices with one another. Given that market store displays are located very close to one another and that upland vegetable retailers generally sell the same type of produce, at times it is difficult for consumers to discern where one shop's products end and another's begin. Julie explains that when customers, in error, choose goods belonging to a neighbouring vendor, 'I just sell the products for my neighbour and give her the payment; she would do the same for me' (interviews by author, 23 May 2014, 9 February 2015). In addition, if a customer needs an item that Julie does not stock, she personally visits a fellow vendor's stall to purchase the required vegetable for her client. Julie does not earn a commission on this sale, nor does she mark up the price; rather, her gesture earns her bridging social capital with her fellow vendor and the consumer. I witnessed such a transaction while visiting Julie one morning when she disappeared for a

few moments only to reappear with mushrooms she had purchased for a customer from a trader who specializes in this product.

In an effort to distinguish her upland vegetables from those of her neighbouring sellers, Julie develops additional vertical producer-to-consumer commodity chain flows by negotiating agreements with independent farmers to purchase their seasonally harvested produce—vegetables and herbs, such as parsley, watercress, basil, spinach, and cherry tomatoes. Leveraging her bonding social capital with relatives who are farmers, Julie is able to purchase the latter two vegetables at very competitive prices. She has also started to carry different types of lettuce (e.g., iceberg, red, and green curly lettuce) and shorter, thicker white radishes to meet the food preferences of the city's growing Korean and Vietnamese residents while also cleaning and cutting local *gabi* leaves and stems to facilitate customers' food preparation at home.

To further ensure that she can supply customers with most of the ingredients they need for specific dishes, Julie currently sells what she calls 'spices'. These include garlic, different types of onions, ginger, and chilies. She purchases these goods from *viaheras*—lowland wholesalers—who bring their regional produce to Baguio from the neighbouring lowland provinces each day, an hour and a half trip by road.

Other upland vegetable retailers have activated additional tactics to distinguish their enterprises. Patricia Tayad, for example, who is 54 years old with one year of college and adult children, has been selling upland vegetables in the market for over twenty years, inheriting her store lease from her mother. In 2011, Patricia established an edgy business strategy by building a wood and metal table to extend her store premises into the market aisle. Patricia's store extension—her 'gray spacing' (Yiftachel 2012, 153) of public market space—is technically 'illegal'. However, with the support of her neighbouring vendors, Patricia has been able to negotiate an unofficial agreement with the market superintendent in which retailers can pay twenty pesos extra rent per day to erect similar store expansions (see also Milgram 2013, 85–86). Patricia uses this space not only to display her produce, but also to mount customer service events such as offering shoppers tea stored in her thermos or free samples of new products. As Patricia explains, 'I want customers to linger at my store to enjoy a personalized experience and, of course, I hope they will return to purchase additional vegetables' (interviews by author, 26 May 2014, 10 February 2015). Patricia's initiative can be understood as simply offering good service, but I suggest that this tactic also creates a memorable participatory interaction that enables consumers to engage the vibrancy—sights, sounds, smells—of the market in what Pine and Gilmore (1998, 97) term the 'experience economy'.



As these authors note, ‘Commodities are fungible [...] services intangible, and experiences *memorable*’ (1998, 98, original emphasis). Although Patricia has ‘wrapp[ed]’ an experience around her commodity transactions, such ‘inherently personal’ interactions, in which customers actively perform and participate to co-create the shopping experience (Pine and Gilmore 1998, 98–100), link consumers and retailers in the long term and distinguish face-to-face public market shopping from more disengaged supermarket encounters.

## 5.2 Lowland Vegetable Commodity Chains

Down the row from Julie Batton’s store, Heidi Montelo, 43 years old with two children and a college degree in communication, has been operating her lowland vegetable business for seven years while her husband does contract wage labour (Figure 3). After working for another lowland vegetable dealer for four years, Heidi was able to rent a neighbouring store when the former owner died and the family decided to rent out the site. Heidi’s

**Figure 8.3** A Baguio City Public Market retailer stocks her display with vegetables grown in the neighbouring lowland provinces



Source: author

small-to-medium size business, with a typical rotating capital of 8,000–10,000 pesos (US \$180–225) is similar to that of other lowland vegetable retailers. Like Julie, Heidi sells produce that is combined in customary dishes, including eggplant, squash, assorted greens, square and long string beans, banana hearts, and okra. Heidi purchases her produce each morning at about 5.00 a.m. from her five favoured *suki* suppliers who, along with other *viahera* from the neighbouring lowland provinces (e.g., La Union, Pangasinan) unload their regional produce in the Hilltop Section of the market. As Heidi can gauge the volume of produce she requires each day, she sends a text with her order to her *viahera* the night before the morning delivery. If she requires further items, Heidi purchases these from the extra goods the *viaheras* usually bring with them. Each morning, Heidi checks the orders she has placed with different suppliers, leaving her porter to collect and deliver her purchases. Heidi explains, 'It is up to you to choose and train your porter. My porter knows my purchasing patterns and he knows the *viaheras* with whom I conduct business. I do not need to give him receipts; he simply visits each *viahera* to ask "What has Heidi purchased today?" Our negotiations are based on trust' (interviews by author, 4 June 2014, 23 February 2015).

In a business strategy similar to that of upland vegetable retailers, each morning Heidi tops up the produce she has on hand with newly purchased vegetables to ensure her display tells consumers they are purchasing the freshest goods. Shopping at the public market enables consumers to personally inspect the produce they buy and to purchase the specific volume they require. As one shopper explains, 'Much of the fresh produce at supermarkets is already packaged and thus I have to buy pre-determined amounts. The products in the plastic and Styrofoam packages often look good from the top, but what does the underside look like?' (interview by author, 14 May 2013). According to Heidi, 'Customers carefully examine the quality of the vegetables I display to choose what they think are the freshest. For my regular customers, I will even divide into smaller amounts the larger volumes of produce I have bundled together. This helps those who need to shop each day because they have limited refrigeration facilities at home. I have to offer personalized service in such a competitive field' (interviews by author, 4 June 2014, 23 February 2015). In an initiative similar to that of Julie's trade in upland vegetables, Heidi also diversifies her sourcing by purchasing selected seasonal produce directly from farmers who go store-to-store offering their recently harvested vegetables and herbs.

Given Baguio's growing population, independent lowland vegetable wholesalers have increasingly started operating businesses on speculation. These new traders canvas lowland farmers to find produce that has not

been previously promised to other buyers and after purchasing the most in-demand types of lowland vegetables (e.g., eggplant, beans, assorted greens), they resell these to BCPM retailers on a store-by-store basis. Unlike the lowland *viaheras* who have more established *suki* arrangements with producers and retailers, these new businesspeople do not take advance orders, but simply sell whatever lowland produce they have been able to secure on a particular day. Their lack of local social connections and the fact that their trade competes with the trade of more established *viaheras* precludes these new lowland sellers from renting a public market store, even if they had the funds to do so. Their businesses thus remain irregular—illustrating the dark, exclusionary side of social capital. The ongoing, albeit fluctuating, demand for these interloper sellers' services, however, evidences an additional channel through which lowland vegetable retailers can diversify the vertical commodity flow of their produce and thus the horizontal variability in the lowland vegetable trade across vertical chains (e.g., alternative commodity flows for the same goods) (Bush 2004, 39; see also Fine 2002, 118-121; Leslie and Reimer 2003, 428).

In another everyday political action that realizes the multiplicity of commodity chains for lowland vegetables, Heidi sells small amounts of vegetables (about 3–5 kilos) on a consignment basis to itinerant street vendors who sell in the public market aisles and on the surrounding public streets—sales that are prohibited in the Market Code (City of Baguio 2000-2001, 54) (Figure 4). When these ambulant vendors have sold their consigned goods, they return to Heidi to pay her for their sales and replenish their stock. In this way, Heidi conducts business as both a retailer and a wholesaler. Selling lowland vegetables is a particularly opportune business option for periodic sellers because obtaining this particular produce at wholesale prices is possible only through personal connections with lowland *viaheras* and volume purchases—both of which preclude periodic vendors' access to these goods. Itinerant vendors selling upland vegetables do not have this challenge, as they can purchase upland vegetables without a personal introduction and in amounts as small as 1 kilo in the market's Hanger Wholesale Vegetable Section.

Ambulant market vendors working on consignment and the new lowland vegetable entrepreneurs working on speculation both lack Baguio municipal business licenses and hence their trade is technically 'illegal', as is marketers' tactic of extending their store displays into public market aisles. The arms-length administration style of the BCPM officials, however, enables vegetable retailers to engage in the everyday politics of 'evading' and 'modifying' the market guidelines that prohibit such unauthorized actions (City of Baguio

**Figure 8.4** Itinerant vendors obtain vegetables on consignment from store retailers and sell their produce in the aisles and streets of the Baguio City Public Market



Source: author

2000-2001, 54–55; Kerkvliet 2009, 232). Although public market retailers have been able to institute these practices to facilitate their generally autonomous trade, their apparent successes have not been protected by new laws and thus are inevitably precarious, temporary ones that the city can remove at will (Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer 2012, 4). Tolerance and informally agreed upon regulations are always ‘concessions rather than rights’, and these can change when the city feels that these tolerated systems no longer meet its interests or when new strategies for the control of market activities emerge (Smart and Zerilli 2014, 229).

## 6 Persistence of the Public Market Vegetable Trade and Food Safety

Amid ongoing urbanization and a market redevelopment plan that could threaten the viability of public marketers’ businesses, Baguio’s upland

and lowland vegetable retailers have engaged in everyday politics to (thus far) stymie any stark 'spatial polarization' (Douglass, Ho, and Ooi 2008, 17) between 'traditional' public market and 'modern' supermarket shopping patterns. While some consumers prefer the prescriptive order of supermarket venues, most explain that they shop in both venues depending upon the goods they need, their purpose, and the convenience of the location. As one consumer, Kathy de Guzman, explained about shopping at the new SM Supermarket, 'I prefer this option of one-stop shopping in the supermarket rather than ten-stop shopping in the public market although we often have to wait in long supermarket check-out lines' (interview by author, 6 June 2013). Indeed, many consumers who agree with Kathy added that they are additionally attracted to supermarkets that are housed within a larger shopping mall, as occurs in the SM Baguio City complex. Other consumers strongly voice their preference for shopping in the public market as Nel Nunag outlined: 'Baguio residents seeking convenience or those with large families may prefer bulk-style supermarket shopping as prices can be lower. But I like to personally choose my vegetables to ensure I obtain the freshest and safest items. And who is there at the supermarket to ask about these concerns? The young staff who only stock the shelves do not have the product knowledge I seek' (interview by author, 6 June 2013). As another shopper noted about supermarket shopping, 'Since we now divide our trash into solid waste and compostable materials, the extra plastic and Styrofoam packaging from supermarkets contributes to our household trash accumulation and this added material may cause us to exceed our collection limit' (interview by author, 9 June 2014). Maia Green's (2015, 301) research in urban Tanzania reveals a similar pattern of cross-sector shopping: 'supermarket-style stores [...] are not the preferred retail-destination for low- and average-income Tanzanian citizens, who buy unpackaged foods [...] by volume from market traders and small shops that sell basic, low-price products in small quantities.'

Food safety is another important issue among local consumers, as Nel explained above. Although private sector and government agricultural reports—which to date have not been effectively acted upon—acknowledge that Benguet province's intensive upland vegetable cultivation, as well as much lowland vegetable farming, depend upon using high concentrations of pesticides (Lu 2009; Reyes and Laurean 2006 and 2007; Reyes-Boquiren 1989), the fear of food safety has not precipitated a move away from public markets towards supermarkets (Matejowsky 2008; Moustier et al. 2005; Reardon et al. 2003). As the head agriculturalist in Benguet province explained, 'Few Baguio shoppers trust supermarkets to be the best source of safe produce.

All consumers believe that produce procured from any source contains chemicals and is therefore potentially unsafe' (interview by author, 10 March 2015). With no conclusive way to know the origin of produce unless one purchases it directly from the farmer, consumers stated that their best recourse is to purchase from individual vendors who they trust are procuring the safest possible produce (see also Gerber, Turner, and Milgram 2014, 58). Another shopper, Aileen Munoz, commented: 'If I purchase my vegetables at a particular retailer's store and the quality is consistently good, then I trust this vendor and she becomes my *suki*' (interview by author, 7 June 2013).

Trust, then, emerges as the closest thing to a guarantee that consumers have regarding the safety and origin of their goods (see also Gerber, Turner, and Milgram 2014, 57–8). Once retailers have earned the trust of their customers through ongoing transactions, the latter tend to purchase the majority of a specific type of produce from the same retailer, or will at least visit that merchant first to check the quality of his or her stock. As upland vegetable retailer, Julie explained, 'I try to deal directly with individual farmers and wholesalers on a continuing basis so I can have confidence in the safety of their produce as well as obtain a good variety of products' (interviews by author, 23 May 2014, 9 February 2015). Lowland vegetable retailer Heidi described an incident last year in which some of the vegetables she had purchased from one of the new entrepreneurs selling on speculation spoiled quickly, resulting in customers returning to her with complaints. Losing the trust of some of her regular clients—a decline in her social capital—represented a challenging financial loss for her small-scale business.

Although the supermarket sector is expanding throughout Southeast Asia, 'sales of fresh food—fruits, vegetables, meat, and fish—are still a stronghold of the traditional retail markets and itinerant retailers' (Cadilhon et al. 2006, 31; see also Goldman, Krider, and Ramaswami 1999; Green 2015; Manalili 2005). In Baguio, as in much of the Philippines, supermarkets have tended to develop a complementary rather than a singularly competitive relationship with the public market and street vending sectors (Matejowsky 2008). In this light, in a provocative marketing initiative, SM Supermarket in Baguio currently sets up specialty product displays in the supermarket aisles and in the foyer of its main entrance. This potpourri of kiosks offering regional baked goods, prepared foods, fresh produce, and crafts in a spectacle market atmosphere simulates the vibrancy of the Baguio City Public Market located at the other end of the street—in effect, materializing an 'experience economy' similar to that initiated by Patricia Tayad, the BCPM vegetable retailer (Pine and Gilmore 1998).

## 7 Conclusions

Baguio's rapid economic growth in the late-1990s and early new millennium means that consumers can currently access a growing number of food provisioning options for their everyday subsistence needs. Yet, shopping at the Baguio City Public Market remains an essential part of the Baguio experience for local urbanites across classes, as well as for visitors. Upland and lowland vegetable retailers, including Julie Batton, Patricia Tayad, and Heidi Montelo, have ensured the ongoing relevance and perseverance of public market trade by activating a modernism 'from below' (Ribeiro 2009, 298). These vegetable marketers have closely coordinated their initiatives with the social and economic interests of the other market players on whose allegiance they depend for livelihood survival—wholesalers, porters, peri-urban farmers, retailers, and consumers—thereby innovatively reconfiguring long-held commodity flows to secure their contribution to, and integration into, the city's economy. Taking advantage of newly opened wholesale and local producer networks while flexing to the specific, informed demands of their changing consumer base, vegetable retailers have thus largely mitigated the challenge of supermarket expansion and government constraints (see also Cadilhon et al. 2006; Green 2015).

Baguio City Public Market retailers' struggles to secure the commodity chain flows that anchor their livelihoods rarely entail heroic confrontations with government authorities; nor do they produce large-scale, collaborative strategic actions. Rather, marketers use everyday politics in 'a quiet encroachment' to access their rights to the necessities of daily life (e.g., business opportunities, consumption choices) (Bayat 2004, 81). By familiarizing themselves with the fissures in the city government's power, they continuously activate small-scale initiatives to create 'gray spaces' of survival and innovation that are 'neither fully coordinated, nor fully articulated, but cumulatively significant to upset the prevailing urban order' (Yiftachel 2012, 152).

The resulting complexity of food provisioning systems in Baguio thus highlights the futility of characterizing urban centres by having one part of a city stand for the whole (Robinson 2006, 10). Understanding cities as 'multiplex' and 'internally differentiated' spaces encompassing relations that span 'interaction and disconnection, sociability and alienation' foregrounds the diversity of ordinary cities and the 'diversity of ways of living in [ordinary] cities' (Robinson 2006, 171-72). That Baguio City Public Market vegetable retailers have effectively sustained and diversified patterns of fresh food provisioning in the face of government constraints evidences

how conflict and reconciliation, civic engagement and everyday politics can be effectively negotiated when competing ideologies clash over rights to livelihood, marketplace modernization, and the best way to facilitate a city's quality of life for and by its residents.

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