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Experts of Crisis: Exclusive Planning Discourse and Community Resistance in Detroit

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Experts of Crisis:

Exclusive Planning Discourse and Community Resistance in Detroit

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirement
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Planning

by

Lisa Katarina Berglund

2017
Often regarded as exceptional in its degree of economic decline, conditions of abandonment and population loss, the city of Detroit has garnered the attention of media, academics and planning professionals. Significant to this draw is the role of development ‘expertise’ and its hopes of mitigating the challenges of the city through largely economically motivated development strategies. A number of scholars contributing to the literature on political economy have related expertise to neoliberal agendas, contending that the status of experts relies on the economic rationalization of policy decisions. In the context of Detroit, I will explore the role of development experts (practitioners formally trained in development professions) at a time of economic restructuring, and the discursive practices employed to reproduce their status as experts; I will also explore the communities that resist such expertise. I used discourse analysis to compare the values and rationale for redevelopment strategies as presented in four discourses: 1) urban planning academia; 2) media; 3) development professionals and 4) community groups. More specifically, I aim to understand how
the narratives within differently situated development discourses frame problems and prescribe solutions and how such narratives relate to worsening disparity across race and class groups. In addition to exploring the narratives that give leverage to the economically motivated and state sanctioned development strategies that dominate planning discourse, this work focuses on the resistance to these strategies through political mobilization of community groups. These explorations focus primarily on two disparate development landscapes: Downtown-Midtown, an area of burgeoning, state-subsidized private investment, and the 48217 zip code, an area with some of the worst air quality in the state, undergoing state supported expansion of noxious industries.

From these explorations, I conclude that discourse on the development of Downtown-Midtown is largely framed by a handful of private investors deemed development experts, and the philanthropic foundation community that bolsters their interests. These individuals and institutions utilize their expertise in branding campaigns that simultaneously attract a wealthier class of young professionals to the city’s core, while at the same time pathologize outer neighborhoods of the city not seen as fit for investment. Building from the racialized historic context of the 48217 zip code, community groups were found to mirror the strategies of neoliberal expertise in their efforts to stop the expansion of industry, to no avail. This points to a more complex power dynamic between experts and supposed non-experts than the literature currently offers. Finally, this dissertation considers the ways that both the media and academic planning discourse potentially denigrate lower income and communities of color in the city, treating them as outside of the goals of dominant development discourse.
The dissertation of Lisa Katarina Berglund is approved.

Vinit Mukhija

Helga Leitner

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017
In memory of my brother Erik.
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BIOGRAPHY

Lisa Berglund received a bachelor's degree in architecture from the A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan. She earned her master's in urban planning and design at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden before coming to UCLA to pursue a doctorate in urban planning. Her research focuses on the potential for redevelopment after disasters to exacerbate race and wealth disparities in cities. She has studied this dynamic during the housing crisis, after natural disasters and in the contexts of financial crisis, as in this dissertation.
INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of its population decline in the 1950s, Detroit has suffered from large-scale economic decline, abandonment and crime. From its peak population of 1.8 million, today around 700,000 people live in Detroit (U.S Census 2016). Of this population, one third are living in poverty, while one quarter of Detroiters over 25 do not have a high school diploma (U.S Census 2016). The built environment reflects these figures, emblematic of racial segregation and wealth disparity. One quarter of homes in the city are vacant, large scale development is focused mainly in a Downtown core that comprises 7.2 square miles (of Detroit’s total 139 square miles), and 37,000 properties faced tax foreclosure last year (about 10% of the city’s 349,170 housing units) (Mahoney et al. 2015; U.S Census 2016; Detroit Eviction Defense 2016). Staggering numbers like these are certainly unprecedented in the American context, however, they are linked to processes of globalization, as well as racialized housing and development policies that mar the planning histories of cities across the country (Sugrue 2005a). Further, today’s landscape of privatization and cutbacks of city services, in the face of dwindling resources, comes only after decades of municipal strategizing on how to ward off the worsening economic crisis; a battle that eventually resulted in the city’s bankruptcy (Thomas 1997b; Galster 2014).

Historical accounts describe problematic and fragmenting city policies like redlining and the banning of Black families from some suburbs of Metropolitan Detroit (Fishman 2005). However, they often do so while ignoring the powerful sense of agency held by Black and working class Detroiters that made way for some of the most important social movements in American history (Boggs, Kurashige, and Glover 2012). The Detroiters that helped forge some of the strongest unions in the world and guided the Black Power movement were anything but complacent in their political exclusion and denial of basic civil rights (Shaw 2009). In spite of the city’s history of community
mobilization, much of the attention with regards to a supposed ‘renaissance’ of the city favors the recent large scale developments and investments of Downtown and Midtown (Safransky 2014; Gregory 2015). In addition, the low land values and an inviting culture of entrepreneurialism have allowed private developers to find business opportunity in Detroit’s market for disaster capitalism, or the tendency for new markets to emerge in the process of crisis mitigation (Klein 2008).

Detroit’s conditions of unusual economic decline have served as somewhat of an invitation for private development ‘experts’ and entrepreneurs to try their hand at reviving the city. In other words, popular narratives have presented, “Detroit as a victim, and the entrepreneur as Salvationist” (Gregory 2012, 223). Boosterist headlines like “Detroit’s Billionaires Hope to Change Downtown with Development Spree” celebrate this private development in the Downtown core, in anticipation that it will revive the city (Barrionuevo 2016).

The development experts that have been attracted to the city under the prospect of playing a role in “righting the ship,” is not the only example of rational economic expertise being applied in the context of fiscal austerity in Detroit and the state of Michigan. Perhaps the highest profile instance of this dynamic can be shown in the power of the governor of Michigan to declare a state of financial emergency, and replace the voting and legislating powers of local officials with the unilateral authority of an appointed emergency manager. It has been observed that the state of Michigan has instituted emergency managers in cities comprising the majority of the Black population in the state, such as Detroit and Flint. Such appointment of emergency managers has created conditions in the past where the majority of the Black voting population in Michigan were not represented by direct or representative democracy (Hammer 2016). Diminishing the votes of local taxpaying communities in favor of what is deemed to be superior expert knowledge has been
considered by some scholars as ‘taxation without representation’ (Longley 2012; Michigan Radio Newsroom 2011). In 2013, the financial strain of circumstances in Detroit came to a head when the city’s emergency manager decided to file for bankruptcy, making Detroit the first city of this size to do so. Though the financially strapped city practiced extreme austerity measures in terms of public and social services before bankruptcy, the filing resulted in a court ordered “Plan of Adjustment” that cut city services further (Hammer 2015).

I relate this context to the literature on the practice of expertise and the status of experts (Abbott 1988; Carr 2010; Boyer 2008; Nader 1972). Further, the role of the expert in this context is relevant to political economy literature that relates the “disenchantment of politics with economics” in the context of fiscal austerity that promotes the power of technocratic readings of social problems (W. Davies 2014, 4). However, this literature often treats the role of the expert as a one-directional power relation, where technocrats control an increasing amount of aspects of public life. I aim to address the gap in the literature that results from this hegemonic understanding of expertise by investigating the ways that communities directly resist technocratic approaches to quality of life challenges in the city. An additional weakness of the literature is that while the scholarship on political economy successfully explains how neoliberalism enables the reproduction of social inequality, it is less successful at understanding the precise discursive practices that allow it to do so. I will utilize discourse analysis to uncover such rhetorical strategies. Additionally, the literature minimally addresses the role of expertise in the expansion of neoliberal governance. This dissertation aims to provide an understanding of the framing and rhetorical devises used in expert discourse relative to neoliberal agendas.
Through a discourse analysis of four discourses (development professionals, community groups resisting development expertise, the media and academic literature) I aim to answer the following:

* How do different discourses (and conversations within discourses) frame planning problems in Detroit, and subsequently offer solutions?

* What are the most prominent narratives used to describe the current social and economic conditions of Detroit? How are historical conditions described in terms of their role in creating these conditions?

* Does a comparison between expert narratives used to support planning interventions in academic discourse, media outlets, and interviews with Detroit residents reveal a tension with the goals of local communities?

* Do the solutions promoted in the different narratives aim to benefit some groups over others?

The investigation of these questions is presented in the following format. Situated within the literature on expertise and technocracy under neoliberalism, I begin with a review of this literature (Chapter 1). The methodology and case selection are outlined in chapter 2, which explains the rationale for a discourse analysis of development professionals, community groups, the media and the academic literature. Chapter 3 presents the findings of the discourse analysis of development expertise in Downtown-Midtown, the setting of large scale, privately sanctioned development often presented as the core of the city’s revival. Further, it discusses the role of private investors and philanthropic foundations in the rebranding of the Downtown core. On the contrary, chapter 4 presents the findings of a discourse analysis of expert proposals to expand noxious industries and community resistance in the highly industrialized and disinvested 48217 zip code. It pays special attention to the strategies for resistance, and how the community navigates their perceived role as non-experts. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of media accounts of 48217 and Downtown-Midtown, exploring how narratives about the respective areas relate to the development agendas promoted by experts. Chapter 6 analyzes the recent academic literature on development in Detroit, and the shrinking cities literature it is often situated within, to uncover problematic and pathologizing tendencies of such work that may potentially further marginalized residents of such cities. Finally,
the concluding chapter addresses summarizes the contributions made to the literature and the implications for this work in academia and practice.
CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW: POLITICIZING the ROLE of the EXPERT

INTRODUCTION

This literature review links the scholarship on the status of technical and economic expertise with the context of cities and neighborhoods in crisis. The literature addresses discursive practices utilized by experts to maintain their authority and frame development goals around entrepreneurialism over issues of urban inequality (Hackworth and Smith 2001; Fainstein 2010; Peck and Whiteside 2016). Scholars refute the notion that experts are capable of taking an objective stance, arguing that the nature of the power of expertise and the ability to assert it are inherently political (Corburn 2005; Easterly 2014; Murray Li 2007; Agrawal 2005). Furthermore, this literature review focuses on the argument that a key component of the use of expert knowledge is its ability to reinforce the dominant authority of the expert through the exclusion of other forms of knowledge and ingenuity (Perlman 1980; Bayat 2004; Roy and AlSayyad 2004; Carr 2010; Scott 1998). This elitism leads to “poverty knowledge”, where urban environments and communities living in poverty are pathologized, ‘othered’ and framed as a problem in need of expert solutions (O’Connor 2002, 1; Goode and Maskovsky 2002; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011).

This chapter begins with a short overview of anthropological literature that aims to understand persistence and reinforcement of power structures through the ethnography of experts. It then turns to political economy literature to help shed light on the role of the expert under neoliberalism. Scholars argue that the role of the state in promoting solely economic rationales for planning and development projects primarily serves the purpose of capital accumulation, but hides under the guise of technical objectivity (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009; D. Harvey 2007b). Although the
literature on neoliberalism helps to further problematize the belief in expert objectivity, highlighting its potential to reinforce class and race inequality in urban development, it does little to explain the discursive practices that enable this dynamic. In order to discuss the role of discourse in promoting inherently politicized expert ideology, I introduce post-colonial theories around the role of the state and economic structures and their contribution to race and class oppression (Bayat 2004; Yiftachel 2009; Roy and AlSayyad 2004; Perlman 1980). Though some post-colonial theorists adhere to the idea that post-colonial contexts, such as those of the global south, must be understood on their own terms separate from other historic backdrops, this literature review takes the stance that these theories can be helpful in understanding inequities of the north as well (Roy 2009; Mayer 2012).

Regarding the belief that analyses of conditions of the global south can not be projected onto other contexts, Nutall and Mbembe (2005) argue, “The human destitution in many U.S. cities is now too well documented for anyone to pretend that slum life is to be found elsewhere and not here” (195). Literature focusing on the social codes and ingenuity of ‘slum’ life are easily translated to the conditions of Detroit, where many scholars have documented similar resistance to municipal neglect and racial segregation (Kinder 2016; Vogel 2005; Boggs, Kurashige, and Glover 2012; Herscher 2012; Hocking 2006). Finally, this literature review ends with an overview of the literature on geographic metaphor and several key tropes that serve as discursive practices to reinforce both the dominance of expert knowledge and economic rationales for urban development (Herscher 2015; Cahn 2014; Smith and Williams 2013).

THE CONSTRUCTION of EXPERTS and EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

Anthropologists have introduced the idea of “studying up”, or the study of experts and other groups with relatively high political and social leverage. This approach aimed to provide an alternative to a long anthropological tradition of studying mainly marginalized groups (Nader 1972; Priyadharshini
The importance of the shift to also examine the practices of experts instead of solely marginalized groups as a way of understanding power structures in society lies in the ability of the expert to create and reinforce power structures. In other words, the urgency of the study of experts is linked to the reality that “never before have so few, by their actions and inactions, had the power of life and death over so many” (Nader 1972, 1). The production of expert authority and professional expertise has been studied as a social construction emerging from the modernist era (Scott 1998). High modernism, in its promise of creating social order through technical progress, organized technical experts around separate professions. Anthropologist James C. Scott (1998) problematizes this tendency: “The troubling features of high modernism derive, for the most part, from its claim to speak about the improvement of the human condition with the authority of scientific knowledge and its tendency to disallow other competing sources of judgment” (93). A central aspect to the authority of the expert is the organization of professions that claim authority over certain realms of knowledge. In establishing modes of acceptable professional practice, power is reproduced and value is ascribed to the artifacts created by expertise and expert institutions (Carr 2010; Abbott 1988; Boyer 2008).

Sommarson Carr (2010) describes expertise as a performative act where individuals are not simply experts, but must constantly assert themselves as such through their practice in order to maintain authority. An important instance of experts legitimizing their status is the use of practices specific to certain professions that are inaccessible to the non-expert, such as jargon or professional codes of ethics. Arun Agrawal (2005) argues that the authority derived specifically from the technical practices of experts, including the divisions and groupings ascribed to subjects and ways of technically measuring commodities serves as means of expert control over environments. Though quantitative, measurement-based data used by experts is thought to be universal and objective, the
construction of data hierarchies and categories is socially informed. The subjectivity of quantification arises in “The questions asked (and not asked), categories employed, statistical methods used and tabulations published, [and depend] on political and economic choices about what to measure, how to measure it, how often to measure, and how to present and interpret the results” (Agrawal 2005, 37–38). The supposedly objective role of the expert may carry political connotations, and further, the performative aspects of expertise can play to the exclusion of those not technically trained in a given field, reifying the authority of technical expertise (Carr 2010; Abbott 1988).

FRAMING and the REPRODUCTION of EXPERT POWER

Scholars have discussed the ability of experts to use framing to present their findings and proposed courses of action in ways that often support dominant political agendas, despite their supposed objectivity (Murray Li 2007; P. Harvey and Knox 2015; Ferguson 1994; Agrawal 2005). Frames are generally defined in the literature as “an interpretive scheme that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment” (Snow and Benford 1992, 136–137). The use of frames as a discursive practice allows information to be presented with a subtext, carrying additional connotations beyond face value. Though frames are often described as constructs that emerge organically from broad or specific social ideologies and interactions, they can also be purposefully developed as tools or strategy. These messages or ideas are “also enforced discursively through political actors manipulating symbols to ‘spin’ issues or events. In other words, political actors skew the flow of information and opinions in public deliberation toward their advantage by using discursive means” (Pan and Kosicki 2001, 36). The ability for experts to use their status to frame their knowledge is significant, as it again points to expertise as a tool of political agents, and not merely objective problem solvers.
Social anthropologist Tania Murray Li (2007) describes the bias in rhetoric coming from technical experts that goes unscrutinized because of their status that assumes them to be objective problem solvers. She argues that in order to protect their positionality as experts in a field, experts frame development problems according to what their skill sets can provide solutions for. Expert rhetoric is valued over the opinions of others because of its ability to assert supposedly objective, expert opinions on how to solve problems; what is actually a socially constructed value system being falsely promoted by experts is “rendered non-political” and accepted as the best outcome for all (Murray Li 2007, 7). Further, urban planner Jason Corburn (2005) argues that there is a prevailing and fallacious view that “public problems ought to be analyzed by a group of autonomous, highly trained and specialized professionals”, that are thought to be free of value bias, when the power to produce knowledge is inherently an indication of dominance in social relations (39). The expert use of totalizing language supported frequently by quantitative data further widens the gap between those who have the status to produce dominant knowledge and those who have not. In his studies of colonial rule of India’s forestry industry, Arun Agrawal (2005) described the dynamic between technical knowledge and competing forms of non-expert, experiential knowledge: “…once precise, statistical, generalizing arguments are invoked in the service of policy, it is difficult to counter them with vague, descriptive anecdotal evidence. It is in this characteristic of statistical representations -- their capacity to displace non-numericalized arguments and advocacy--that their colonizing effects are to be found” (35).

Speaking to Li’s idea of rendering expertise non-political, anthropologists Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox (2015) observed that the creation of technical documents used for public works projects often use professional standards to frame problems as having a sense of urgency. This
framing, supported by technical expertise, is used to mobilize resources and spike interest, while the actual technical solutions prescribed may be tentative and in flux. The power differential between technical experts and others deemed as non-experts is compounded by what Dominic Boyer (2008) has explained to be the advanced ability and resources for experts to control and frame information about their work. Boyer explains, “Cultures of expertise are usually socially privileged, quasi-sovereign, often able to restrict ethnographic access, to monitor the acquisition and subsequent circulation of their expert knowledge, and even, if they are so inclined, to police ethnographic and theoretical content” (43). In this way, converse to the scientific and apolitical ideal that the expert is held to, the practice of expertise and the decisions made about how it is disseminated become immensely political.

NEOLIBERALISM and TECHNOCRACY

In the context of development in the midst of structural crisis, as in the case of Detroit, the power of the expert is strongly validated by processes instigated by neoliberalism (Peck and Whiteside 2016; D. Harvey 2007b; W. Davies 2014; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009). As a shift in governance emerging during the fiscal conservatism of the Reagan and Thatcher eras, “Neoliberal ideology rests on the belief that open, competitive an unregulated markets, liberated from state interference and the actions of social collectivities, represent the optimal mechanism for socioeconomic development” (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009, 50). The scarcity of federally funded municipal projects created an environment where cities began to pursue entrepreneurialism as a means to fund services, infrastructure projects and other development needs. Looking to the private sector to invest in urban projects as public-private partners as well as creditors, the concerns of urban governance shifted to the appeal of financiers as a “second constituency” (Peck and Whiteside 2016, 11). Furthermore, municipalities have become increasingly austere in their provision
of public services, wages, welfare and education not profiting the investment community (D. Harvey 2007a). David Harvey (2007b) explains that neoliberalism, “hammered home the view that the role of government was to create a good business climate rather than look to the needs and well-being of the population at large. Fiscal redistributions to benefit the upper classes resulted in the midst of a general fiscal crisis” (31). The supplanting of social welfare minded policies with entrepreneurialism has over time become the norm, and represents a new common sense to urban development, where privatization is seen as a necessary step to becoming viable in the competition between cities (D. Harvey 2007a; Peck and Whiteside 2016). William Davies (2014) points out the contradiction in neoliberalism’s rejection of state power in favor of market forces and its simultaneous reliance on state support to assert its authority.

In a mode of governance that represents the “disenchantment of politics with economics”, it is development experts aiming to solve urban problems through technical economic expertise and rationale, who often drive policy (W. Davies 2014, 4). The power of the economic expert under neoliberalism relies on, “[t]o a large extent…the basis of particular economic claims and rationalities, constructed and propagated by economic experts” (D. Harvey 2007b, 6). Furthermore, some argue that the use of economic metrics as main motives for development practices legitimizes a culture of individualized and competitive behavior, instead of an egalitarian and cooperative outlook on urban policy (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009). The fixation on individual freedom over collective action presents problematic assumptions about the social structures that systemically oppress some groups, while allowing the elite classes of society to remain powerful. In other words, a focus on individualist economic actions over the reality of systemic oppression rests on the following logic: “If conditions among the lower classes deteriorated, it was because they failed for personal and cultural reasons to enhance their own human capital through education, the acquisition of a
protestant work ethic, and submission to work discipline and flexibility” (D. Harvey 2007b, 34). The focus on econometrics by experts in neoliberal regimes allows for the supplanting of the urgency of issues regarding class and race oppression with apolitical, strictly economic motivations for urban policy.

Though universal in certain broad tendencies, some caution against describing neoliberalism in totalizing, monolithic terms. Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2005) argue that contrary to the vague terms often used to describe neoliberalism, there are tendencies of site specificity and complex evolution of governance strategies that should be taken into account. The ways that neoliberalism encounters “regulatory landscapes”, “political outcomes” and “forms of confrontation” differ by context (102). Further, Brenner and Theodore highlight the importance of neoliberalism as a process as opposed to an outcome, emphasizing the continuous evolution in tactics used to mobilize market logic within the public realm.

Economic expertise as a form of authority under neoliberalism has been used in various aspects promoting urban and regional competition (Peck 2005). A prominent example of non-objective expertise being mobilized to achieve wealth accumulation is the trend where cities attempt to attract certain classes of people in the interest of economic development. Urban theorist Richard Florida (2003) coined the term “the creative class” to describe a class of young, educated, entrepreneurial members of creative professions that he claimed to be key to the economic development of cities. Attracting the highly mobile creative class, Florida argues, is now “key to regional growth [that] lies not in reducing the costs of doing business, but in endowments of highly-educated and productive people” (6). In this way, Florida’s argument promotes the commodification of culture into economic terms as a way of creating economically competitive cities and neighborhoods (Peck 2005). Florida’s
conception of the creative class as strong catalysts for economic development has gained traction in the economic development strategies of several cities, not as an alternative to neoliberalism, but as a way to advance it. Jamie Peck (2005) writes:

“The reality is that city leaders from San Diego to Baltimore, from Toronto to Albuquerque, are embracing creativity strategies not as alternatives to extant market-, consumption- and property-led development strategies, but as low-cost, feel good complements to them. Creativity plans do not disrupt these established approaches to urban entrepreneurialism and consumption-oriented place promotion, they extend them” (761).

The promotion of the skills of the creative class as a main impetus for economic development has evolved into the creation of metrics that describe how attractive a city or region is to educated members of creative professions. A municipal government’s interest in entrepreneurialism is supported by development experts whose economic motives are used to define the financial validity of urban development over social welfare merits. This perspective is fought by critics who have argued that the attraction of a class of creative professionals is a “profoundly class-biased, and capital-privileging notion” (D. Wilson and Keil 2008, 842). Furthermore, Wilson and Keil (2008) argue that in the process of neoliberalism and related privileging of the creative class, working class culture is denigrated when, “all other creativity in the productive, consumptive, and cultural spheres of our cities is denied” (844). Though expertise certainly preexists neoliberalism, the unique application of supposedly objective expertise as a political tool that creates avenues for wealth accumulation is unique to neoliberalism as a form of governance.

MARGINALIZATION and EXCLUSION from EXPERTISE

The power of the expert to impose technical solutions on ‘non-experts’ can be seen in “the rationalization of complexity” as a practice where complex cultural and social patterns are dismissed in favor of universal solutions and professional best practices (P. Harvey and Knox 2015, 9). Harvey and Knox (2015) write: “For those more interested in how ordinary people deploy practical skills in
their everyday lives, such generic solutions are by definition blind to human creativity, and hugely destructive of the relations through which such creativity is recognized and reproduced” (9). For this work, the unpacking of the social construction of expert hegemony can be closely linked to the questioning of assumptions made about the vast majority of Detroiters, who have been placed at the margins of development discourse in favor of formal economic development experts.

Scholars in several disciplines have refuted academic and political narratives that assume groups living in poverty to be without agency or political awareness, existing in spaces of the city absent of culture or ingenuity (Wacquant 1997; Roy 2003; Perlman 1980; Bayat 2004). Peter Marcuse (1997) emphasizes that in the American context these ideas are largely mobilized against Black residents cloistered in neighborhoods separated from other areas of the city, pointing to the tendency for segregation to be based on socially constructed identities one cannot change. An equally important point is that these identities are ascribed from the outside, by groups in power. Many problematic assumptions about residents of racially segregated communities are bound together by their tendency to treat poverty and race-based oppression as evidence of pathologies of individual mindsets or choice as opposed to broader societal and economic failures whose burdens are placed on the poor (Perlman 1980). Further studies have highlighted the alienating nature of this perspective, finding assumptions of disorganization and lack of political mobility fallacious. In contrast, some scholars have observed that an adaptive set of social and economic practices can emerge from the ingenuity required to subsist under the oppressive societal conditions that generate poverty (Wacquant 1997; Perlman 1980; Roy 2004; Marcuse 1997; D. Wilson and Keil 2008). These adaptive and resistive practices may also rely on exploitation of “cracks”, or the navigation of exceptions in formal systems of bureaucracy and control that are “never complete the way the authorities and prominent literature present” (Perera 2009, 52–53). Indeed, Wilson and Keil (2008)
call the poor and politically marginalized “the real creative class” for their ability to creatively subsist despite the challenges of every day systemic oppression.

Literature on social movements has covered forms of resistance and collective action and their ability to mobilize behind appeals to emotion. Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2001) argue that political mobilization and its relationship to emotion is long understudied. Historically understood by scholars of the modernist era as invalid, impulsive and uncalculated, the tactic of using affect to garner interest in resistance to oppression and economic exclusion is now understood differently. Snow and Benford (1992) believe that emotional appeal is not directly opposed to so-called “rational” motives for acting, but relies on a cognitive agreement with a cause as well. This mobilization can be linked to framing based on many types of appeal, including the reliance on existing social networks (like those of people living in the same community) and collective identities (like organizing on the plight of a marginalized race, class or gender) (Polletta, Jasper, and Goodwin 2001). Utilizing emotional framing to mobilize supporters is now seen by some scholars as a crucial component to influencing outcomes, and not the irrational counterpoint to “rationalistic, structural, and organizational models that dominate academic political analysis” (Polletta, Jasper, and Goodwin 2001, 1). This view supports the post-colonial scholarship reviewed earlier that problematizes the view that marginalized communities are absent of political awareness or revolutionary spirit.

Some caution, however, against an overly romanticized view of these practices of resistance, arguing that stories of empowerment and self sufficiency do not adequately describe the dynamics of exploitation at play (Bayat 2004; Roy 2004; Perlman 1980). Further, the treatment of communities as marginal to the formal economy undermines the reliance on their exploitation for capital accumulation. Sociologist Asef Bayat (2004) explains that the treatment of the poor as existing
outside of formal economic systems is a fallacy and an “instrument of social control of the poor, and that the marginalized poor [are], in fact, a product of capitalist social structures” (83). Scholars argue that descriptions of the poor as belonging to a culture of poverty are a matter of rhetoric designed to reinforce existing power structures. In presenting the ingenuities and solutions of those living in poverty as being marginal to the workings of the formal economy and mainstream culture, Janice Perlman (1980) explains, “What we are talking about is class bias. On the most fundamental level, the myths arrive not because of snobbery, moralizing, or ethnocentrism, but because they fulfill the ideological-political function of preserving the social order which generated them” (246). Yiftachel (2009) describes the geographies occupied by groups that are racially oppressed and politically marginalized by the state as “gray spaces”. These “concurrently tolerated and condemned” places created from race and class exclusion exist “between the ‘lightness’ of legality/approval/safety and the ‘darkness’ of eviction/destruction/death. Gray spaces are neither integrated nor eliminated, forming pseudo-permanent margins of today’s urban regions, which exist partially outside the gaze of state authorities and city plans” (Yiftachel 2009, 249–250). These authors argue that conditions for the poor and racially oppressed groups are both made possible and are necessary in perpetuating the dominant power structures that simultaneously exclude such groups. Conceptualizing the expert creation of both ‘gray spaces’ and the importance of marginality to capitalism can help illuminate how and why development in Detroit has taken place on such uneven and racially polarized terms.

POVERTY as an OBJECT of EXPERTISE

In addition to using expertise to produce realms of knowledge that exclude certain groups, areas of expertise have also defined poverty as an object for expert intervention. Poverty expertise is relied upon to solve urban problems associated with poverty and the challenging circumstances of disparity and disinvestment. Alice O’Connor (2002) argues that this scholarly pursuit of “poverty
knowledge” by policy experts is an “inescapably political act” as it “can be characterized as the project of an increasingly credentialed, formally educated segment of the middle class—one that, despite important contributions from prominent female and non-white social scientists, has for most of its history been predominantly white and male” (11). Communities living in poverty are constructed as objects of expert study, and by “Drawing on a medical model, [governments] assert the presence of a social or psychological pathology that expert authorities must ‘cure’” (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011, 26). Historically, urban poverty has been linked to segregation caused by problematic housing and labor policy that became increasingly racialized and concentrated in inner cities (O’Connor 2002; Wacquant 2010; Goode and Maskovsky 2002). Further, suburbanization and ‘White flight’ leading predominantly White families to leave the central city for the newly formed suburbs played an integral role in shaping the identity of ‘Whiteness’ by exacerbating segregation and labeling the inner city as predominantly Black (Ruben 2001). With the image of inner cities largely shaped by racialized images of poverty, expert conversations about how to alleviate poverty became increasingly urban and focused on people of color (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). The image of White suburbia poised the suburbs to become the vantage point from which the inner city was viewed as ‘other’, and pathologized it as an object of poverty and Blackness, ripe for expert intervention (Ruben 2001).

Scholars have critiqued the tendency for poverty expertise to be overly concentrated on corrective measures for individual behaviors deemed to be pathological (Wacquant 1997; Goode and Maskovsky 2002; O’Connor 2002). In recent decades, the role of the poverty expert has taken a neoliberal shift, primarily offering solutions to poverty and wealth disparity that focus on individual behavior as the root of poverty as well as offering market driven strategies and incentives for its remediation (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011; O’Connor 2002). This focus on individual behavior
as the root of poverty paints poor people as childlike and in need of a voice of reason in the form of policy to train the poor into the civility of mainstream society. This perspective represents not only a neoliberal turn to poverty expertise in its focus on individual responsibility, but has been called an approach of “neoliberal paternalism” to poverty policy in its overlooking of the agency of the poor (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011, 1). On the other hand, Judith Goode and Jeff Maskovsky (2002) argue that problems arise from a politically liberal stance that urban poverty can be solved lifting people out of poverty “through the magnanimous hands of the rich”, erasing the agency of the poor by making them a case for charity instead of highlighting a need for substantial structural reform (3). Further, “In this manner, the poor continue to be marginalized. They are not permitted full political, economic or moral citizenship. Alternatively pitied and reviled, they are peculiarly in the US society but not of it” (Goode and Maskovsky 2002, 3). Matthew Ruben (2001) addressed the objectification of the poor and the imposition of poverty expertise on them when he suggested that, “We might set about trying to help poor people be makers of policy, rather than its object, and return poor people’s agency to the center of analysis” (464).

A neoliberal shift in poverty expertise can also be seen in the tendency for the challenges of urban decline to be met with investment and development as a coping strategy. This growth machine approach relies on a form of development that focuses on the physical manifestations of poverty, such as vacancy and infrastructure decay (Goode and Maskovsky 2002). In the context of municipal austerity, the private sector is called upon to remediate physical decline of the urban form as a response to urban poverty (Ruben 2001). Ruben (2001) explains, “How can we save the city?’ when asked uncritically and unreflexively in the current climate, inevitably produces a supply-side answer that balances budgets on the backs of the poor, leaves neoliberal development unchallenged, and clears the way for the vilification and marginalization of grassroots poor people’s movements that
protest new forms of development and state policy” (463). In alignment with Goode and Maskovsky’s (2002) concerns about current discourses rendering the poor invisible and without agency, the focus on restoring the built environment through private investment in development may contribute to a similar exclusion from popular discourse of those living in poverty.

METAPHORS and TROPES in URBAN DEVELOPMENT of DECLINING CITIES

Literature exploring the representation of communities and the built environment argues that such descriptions are inherently reflections of the social context of discourses, and that no objective or apolitical reality exists in reproducing images of surroundings (Barnes and Duncan 2011). For this reason, the often trusted assessments of urban landscapes by both urban planning professionals and economic development experts must come under scrutiny (Barnes 1992; Linovski and Loukaitou-Sideris 2013; Kenny 1992). Further, the use of metaphors to construct visions of landscapes and their pathologies when employed by expert authority are “not necessarily testimony to the empirical robustness of the theories employed, but to the power that these...metaphors have in the [economist’s] imagination” (Barnes 1992, 119). The use of tropes and metaphors by experts again points to the problematic assumption that the expert’s position is apolitical or objective.

Scholars argue that the use of metaphors related to the city in urban planning discourse can be used as a way of leveraging power to complete planning projects (Cresswell 1997; Barnes 1991; Hartman 2002). In comparing urban relationships and processes to other parts of the human condition such as death or rejuvenation, we appeal to emotional and psychological convictions that would not otherwise be universally associated (Tuan 1978). Our use of metaphor can be laden with connotations and biases; metaphor is often used to evoke an emotional response or to further a specific social or political agenda. Pointing to the inability to employ metaphor in a socially or
politically objective way, geographer Trevor Barnes (1991) explains that: “On the one hand, metaphor is viewed as, at best, frivolous and ornamental, and at worst, obfuscatory and logically perverted” (p. 111). Furthermore, human geographer Tim Cresswell (1997) has studied the use of metaphorical narratives in their ability to establish power dynamics in the city, making for biased and discriminatory social and political processes. Part of belonging to a dominant group in a power structure, he says, is the ability to create narratives and rhetoric as a political strategy designed to reproduce existing power relations and inequity (Cresswell 1997).

The social construction of understandings of urban environments introduces the potential for denigrating language to reflect the social marginalization of some groups in society and the geographies they occupy (Gregory 2012; W. J. Wilson 2011). In the use of biased language that ignores the strengths of existing communities and instead describes marginalized populations in terms of social pathology, there is a danger for residents to normalize a set of values that is damaging to their self-esteem and community identity. William Julius Wilson (2011) argues that the lack of effort in the planning process towards gaining a deep understanding of the perspectives of certain communities creates a bias that can become internalized so that people themselves begin to believe that they have no place influencing the planning process in their city. In gaining prominence in dominant discourses on the urban landscape, certain metaphors loaded with bias become integrated into the social imagination of a place. Barnes and Duncan (2011) argue that once metaphors “acquire habitual use” in this way, they become “dead metaphors” and are “equivalent to the literal” interpretation of landscapes (9). The sections that follow discuss the literature on three prominent ‘dead’ metaphors that are used to mobilize development tactics in urban environments: the social construction of blight, death as an economic metaphor, and the city as an urban frontier.
Urban Renewal and the Social Construction of Blight

In what have become notorious periods of urban renewal in the United States, increased land value was directly associated with the clearance of older inner city neighborhoods that housed high numbers of low-income and communities of color. The 1940s-1970s period experienced an intense wave of urban renewal initiatives that sought to revitalize inner cities and increase real estate values (Hyra 2012). Formal planning rhetoric that defamed the residents of these areas as being poor, criminal and transient fueled the desires to redevelop areas that were in many ways more stable and community oriented than these stereotypes portrayed (Fullilove 2009; Hartman 2002). As this image of the urban poor propagated, politicians and the public became convinced that the demolition of physical structures was the only way to fix social problems that resided within them (Fried and Gleicher 1961).

From this context of environmental determinism came the social construction of the term “blight” to describe neighborhoods deemed economically and socially undesirable by planning authorities (Pritchett 2003). According to Amy Laura Cahn (2014): “One major critique of midcentury urban renewal projects is that municipal governments applied blight identification with a subjectivity that unduly provided them with flexible power over neighborhoods so identified. City governments exercised this power without consulting residents to determine their real needs or concerns” (p. 457). The use of vague and at times subjective parameters for identifying blight allowed racism and other prejudice to drive redevelopment decisions; blight began to be associated with certain populations, and both were then viewed as pathological (Cahn 2014; Pritchett 2003). Further, the use of blight to pathologize the social characteristics of specific neighborhoods is representative “of a politics that renders race-based socio-economic disadvantage into a public threat that legitimizes and even necessitates the vanquishing of that threat” (Herscher 2015, 21). With this bias, slum
clearance programs became a way to supposedly address social issues faced by the low-income residents of the inner city as well as turn a profit by driving up land values (Hartman 2002).

In the context of Detroit and other cities experiencing environmental degradation, blight is still used as a way of describing undesirable and aesthetically unappealing city areas. From the rationale used to demolish the predominantly Black neighborhood of Lafayette Park in the 1950s, to the release of the Blight Removal Task Force Plan in 2014, the use of the term “blight” has proved a persuasive metaphor in Detroit development. Planning theorist Andrew Herscher (2015) has problematized the use of the term blight in Detroit, and its tendency to reduce the challenges of the city to a matter of environmental determinism. In describing blight separate from its social and economic context in merely physical terms, the issue is “symptomatically articulated and acted on as a natural phenomenon instead of an artifact of spatial racism” (Herscher 2015, 23).

*Death as an Economic Metaphor*

Journalists and academics alike have normalized metaphors relating economic decline to biological functions (Gregory 2012; Cresswell 1997; W. J. Wilson 2011; Barnes 1992). This allows privileging exchange value over other values (such as socially or historically valuable aspects of place) by speaking of the state of economically declining cities in terms of “death” or “decay”. Conversely, an economic revival may be described as a “reawakening” or “new life” (Gregory 2012). In the use of life as a metaphor for investment in the city, the experience and value of residents who have persevered despite the economic state of the region are discounted. Similarly, the conversations centered on the effects of White flight after WWII, describe a time when many wealthier Detroiters (including some affluent Black families) left the city (Schrupp 2002). Emphasizing the impact of White flight implies that an economic decline of Detroit is due to White families leaving, instead of
being the result of large scale migration of industry endemic to the decentralizing nature of industry under capitalism (Smith and Williams 2013). Anthropologist Siobhan Gregory (2012) explains that a consequence of rhetoric that focuses on White flight as a main cause of “death” implies that the “life” of Detroit neighborhoods hinges on the return of an affluent White population, thereby denigrating existing low-income communities of color.

The Urban Frontier: Narratives Encouraging New Development and Revitalization

Empirical data on the extent of gentrification and who are the gentrifiers in certain neighborhoods in Detroit are currently limited. However, the language used to describe new investment and entrepreneurship in cities points to attitudes that encourage the exploitation of low land value and high vacancy rates in shrinking cities (Smith and Williams 2013). Narratives regarding the depressed economic value of the city as being corrected by a returning capitalist class that will invest time, money and skills, have been used to promote activities of entrepreneurs and the creative class. In this viewpoint, the city is seen as an object of low economic value that is for sale to the highest bidder, as opposed to a landscape rich with history, culture, and more importantly, many struggling working class communities (Smith and Williams 2013; Fainstein 2010; Hayden 1997).

While the desperate need to increase the tax base of cities and neighborhoods experiencing drastic economic decline is widely accepted, some critics are skeptical of how well benefits (such as jobs and housing) will be distributed to vulnerable segments of the population (Schrupp 2002; Galster 2002; Fainstein 2010). Emphasis on narratives describing “revitalization” and even “salvation” as being possible through investment in low economically valued land and real estate pave the way for entrepreneurs to become the “saviors” (Gregory 2012). This same rhetoric often creates a vision of Detroit as a “blank slate” capable of serving the whims of investors hoping to realize entrepreneurial
dreams that would be impossible anywhere else, since few landscapes present such low economic risk (Gregory 2012).

Related to this perspective is the metaphor of Detroit as a sort of new economic frontier providing unbridled opportunity at low economic risk, overlooking the struggles of existing communities. In the same way that real estate is ‘up for grabs’, so too are the livelihoods of long-term residents. Neil Smith (2013) explains how the metaphor of the frontier has been adapted to disinvested urban areas:

“Just as…the existence of Native Americans but included them as part of [a] savage wilderness, contemporary urban-frontier implicitly treats the present inner-city population as a natural element of their physical surroundings. Thus the term ‘urban pioneer’ is as arrogant as the original notion of the ‘pioneer’ in that it conveys the impression of a city that is not yet socially inhabited; like the Native Americans, the contemporary working class is seen as less than social, simply part of the physical environment” (p. 16).

In the same way that pioneers were credited for the ‘discovery’ of the West, entrepreneurs filled with a frontier spirit are credited for their visions for the future of this ‘abandoned’ city. In this way, the city comes alive again with their investment, instead of having been the home to many working class communities all along.

In conclusion, an extensive amount of literature exists on the habits of experts, and their role in reinforcing their own power as well as the power of the regimes they represent. To a lesser degree, studies also document the discursive practices employed to support such power structures at the expense of marginalized populations deemed outside of authoritative ‘expert’ knowledge. Literature on expertise often focuses solely on the practices of experts, with much less emphasis on their actual interactions with the public or their encounters with resistance to their expertise. This dissertation aims to use the existing literature on expert power and framing as a way of understanding power structures at play, but will also build on the literature around expertise by exploring the interface between experts and community groups that either resist or coalesce with them. Furthermore, with a
focus on Detroit, I will explore the specific role of the power of the expert in times of structural crisis, and the discursive practices used in this context to maintain expert authority.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW and RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the context of Detroit, a city often characterized by its lack of public resources, scholars have linked conditions of disinvestment and inequality to processes of neoliberalism (Peck and Whiteside 2016). However, little attention has been given to the ways in which state supported privatization of city services and amenities are promoted through discourse (Clement and Kanai 2014). The literature on political economy has become very adept at identifying broader processes of neoliberalism, and has suggested that its tendencies must be linked to local histories and politics. Further, as Brenner and Theodore (2002) contend, these processes must be viewed as dynamic, and constantly evolving. Therefore, I aim to understand governance structures in Detroit under extreme fiscal austerity as they continually distribute public resources in new ways. Additionally, this research examines the ways that communities impacted by the social disparities of this form of governance must also adapt through new forms of resistance and activism. As a window into this dynamic, this work focuses on development experts and their potential to leverage expertise towards neoliberal objectives (as discussed by Harvey (2007) and Davies (2014)).

The dissertation employs discourse analysis of planning and development expertise. It examines how such expertise operates in the context of extreme economic strain, and how policies respond to such challenges. Further, it examines strategies employed by communities aiming to improve their quality of life through their own local expertise. In order to understand the contributions of different actors through the social and political narrative surrounding development in Detroit, I undertake an analysis of four discourses: 1) Development expertise; 2) local community knowledge; 3) popular
media and; 4) academic planning literature on Detroit. This analysis aims to answer the following research questions:

* How do different discourses (and conversations within discourses) frame planning problems in Detroit, and subsequently offer solutions?

* What are the most prominent narratives used to describe the current social and economic conditions of Detroit? How are historical conditions described in terms of their role in creating these conditions?

* Does a comparison between expert narratives used to support planning interventions in academic discourse, media outlets, and interviews with Detroit residents reveal a tension with the goals of local communities?

* Do the solutions promoted in the different narratives aim to benefit some groups over others?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

For a doctoral dissertation that inquires notions of expertise and the power dynamics implied by expert status, an awareness of the practices of experts is a crucial point of departure. As discussed in the literature, the ability for experts to manipulate data through different collection methods, categories, and framing of their work and research questions represents a significant part of their power (Agrawal 2005). Further, as both Ferguson (1994) and Li (2007) have suggested, development professions have historically been responsible for using their expertise and positivist approaches to urban problems as a way of depoliticizing power imbalances across race and class divides, as well as exonerating professionals of their inherently politically biased stances. This work considers the strategies of planning and development professionals to be no less political than the organizing and mobilizing work of community groups who operate from outside of these professions.

An understanding of this work, in light of the power-laden role of the expert planner, implies a political stance in the use of qualitative and inductive research methods. In gathering data through open-ended interviews and immersion in the community organizing process, I aim to allow residents
to present ideas and values in their own words. Further, the method of discourse analysis veers away from biases of predetermined definitions and categories for measurement leveraged by professions (Agrawal 2005; Scott 1998; P. Harvey and Knox 2015). In this work, my use of open-ended questioning allows for a reading of the values inherent in discourse to emerge both from the often privileged, objectively understood opinions of experts as well as the experientially informed development knowledge of Detroiter.

Critical Discourse Analysis

This research uses discourse analysis of in-depth interviews and articles using coding. Coding is a systematic process of analyzing ideas in qualitative data by sorting it into “codes” or excerpts that “symbolically assign a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute” relevant to the research questions (Saldaña 2012, 3). As a way of closely studying the themes and meanings underlying communications, coding is an ideal way to conduct a discourse analysis. Discourse analysis engages in the “close study of language and language use as evidence of aspects of society and social life” (Taylor 2013, 7). By analyzing the language used to describe issues and proposed ways of solving problems, cultural and social ideals of the authors or respondents can be revealed. Furthermore, the development of critical discourse analysis has focused on the ways that power dynamics are revealed in discourse, and how discourse may be used to leverage power in certain instances and contexts (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). In this way, critical discourse analysis pays special attention to the “discursive struggle,” namely the idea that “Different discourses—each of them representing particular ways of talking about and understanding the social world—are engaged in a constant struggle with one another to achieve hegemony, that is, to fix the meanings of language in their own way” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, 6–7).
An additional consideration in this dissertation is the dominance of planning “experts” (such as academics and practitioners) due to the mere absence of voices from local discourses offering alternative planning and organizing strategies. As a field often focused on quantitative and deductive research, planning is necessarily dominated by formally trained experts of the field, as opposed to being informed by members of local communities carrying out planning solutions based on local, indigenous knowledge of urban landscapes. In contrast, I aim to weigh equally the experiences and perspectives of formally trained experts with the ideals of Detroiters actively seeking planning solutions on their own terms, as these emerge through critical discourse analysis.

The Practice of Studying Experts

Anthropologists have examined the concept of “studying up”, studying experts and other groups with relatively high political and social leverage as an alternative to a long anthropological tradition of studying mainly marginalized groups (Nader 1972; Priyadharshini 2003; Boyer 2008). This study pairs the practice of ‘studying up’ with the use of critical discourse analysis with the aim of uncovering the habits and beliefs of experts who, unlike historically marginalized populations, increasingly control the lives of others (Nader 1972; Carr 2010). An understanding of expert thought through the analysis of interviews and development documents sheds light on the broader workings of social and economic power in this context of crisis. As law scholar Peter Hammer (2015) explains, the development documents emerging from expert discourse in Detroit, “can be approached as artifacts. These artifacts embody the dominant belief systems of the planners and society that produce them” (4).

The practice of studying up can bring to light important information about the creation of power structures; it can also assist in challenging the problematic notion critiqued by post-colonial theorists
that challenges faced by marginalized people are the result of individual pathology, not dominant power structures (Perlman 1980; Bayat 2004; Roy and AlSayyad 2004). However, the literature on experts (the results of the practice of studying up) often paints experts as agents of dominant, one-sided power dynamic. I will supplement this lapse in the practice of studying up by investigating the ways in which communities employ discourse to directly resist expertise that they feel is harming them and their neighborhoods.

NEIGHBORHOOD SELECTION
The goal of neighborhood case selection was to understand the development rationale behind two contrasting patterns: concentrated private investment and state sponsored disinvestment. Initial fieldwork in Detroit shed light on the highly publicized investment in the Downtown core and its presentation in media accounts and planning documents as an economically viable area of the city. From conversations with planners working in the Greater Downtown area, I determined that both Downtown and Midtown (adjacent parts of the Downtown core) were the most viable cases of concentrated investment for this research. Both neighborhoods are standouts in the amount of investment they have attracted in recent years, and have undergone significant physical and demographic shifts as a result (Mahoney et al. 2015). Conversely, the treatment of a neighborhood known by its zip code, 48217, represents an area where development and investment interests are minimal. Further, for decades, this neighborhood has been slated by both public and private plans for a zoning shift, away from its current largely residential composition and towards industrial expansion (Detroit Future City 2015; City of Detroit 1970; City of Detroit Planning Commission 1950). The role of uneven development and neighborhood change is often explored in terms of private investment in public amenities and gentrification. These contrasting cases allow for the investigation of the relationship between expertise and patterns of both investment and
disinvestment. The following sections explain the development context of Downtown-Midtown and 48217 in more detail (see figure 1 for a map of the study neighborhoods in the context of the city).

**Downtown-Midtown**

After a long investment hiatus, Downtown and Midtown Detroit have recently drawn interest from investors. The results of this development can be seen in the area’s relatively high residential occupancy rate (98% and 97% respectively), urban design investments and branding strategies (Mahoney et al. 2015; “A Placemaking Vision for Downtown Detroit” 2013). Additionally, in recent years, several corporations including BlueCross/Blue Shield of Michigan, Quicken Loans, Little Caesars and DTE Energy have relocated their headquarters to Downtown Detroit and have subsequently made the area attractive to their employees who have relocated to Greater Downtown (Isidore 2013). For this work, the boundaries of Downtown and Midtown are defined by two prominent, privately initiated development documents: the Detroit Future City framework and the 7.2 SQ MI report (described in more depth later in the paper). Downtown consists of one square mile bounded by the Detroit River, I-75 North, M-10 and I-75 South. Directly adjacent to the north, Midtown consists of 3.3 square miles bounded by M-10, I-75 South, I-75 North and I-94 (Mahoney et al. 2015).

**48217**

A neighborhood called 48217 by residents, is home to a community that has endured decades of continuous expansion of industry including Marathon Oil, DTE Energy and AK Steel, along with the environmental and health impacts associated with poor air quality. In fact, an air quality study from the University of Michigan School of Public Health named it “the most polluted zip code in Michigan” (Milando, Martienies, and Batterman 2016). Over the course of decades, heavily polluting
industries have been permitted to increase emissions by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), despite the input of health professionals who noted in a public hearing earlier this year that cancer rates there exceed the statewide average by 25% and asthma rates by 50% (author’s notes).

Over the course of the last 50 years, the area has become increasingly industrial, continuing to threaten the adjacent residential communities, and making them unviable for amenities like local businesses or housing development that may enhance quality of life. In the context of economic crisis, the city, in partnership with local industry, often approves plans for industrial expansion. Despite these challenges, the 48217 community has continued a strong local tradition of activism against environmental injustice. The neighborhood is bounded on the north by the Rouge River, the municipalities Ecorse, River Rouge to the east, Lincoln Park to the south and Melvindale to the west. Table 1 gives some brief demographic features of the two study areas over the last five years.
Figure 1: Map of Downtown-Midtown and 48217 in the context of the city of Detroit and southeast Michigan region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>48217</th>
<th>Downtown-Midtown*</th>
<th>Detroit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>10,515</td>
<td>8,887</td>
<td>7,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race + Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino (of any race)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Poverty</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Selected demographic information on study areas.

* Data for Downtown-Midtown is a weighted average of the Census data from the zip codes 48201, 48202 and 48226 that comprise the study area.

† Downtown-Midtown is the location of Wayne State University and the College for Creative Studies; student populations (about 27,000 and 1,400 respectively) likely inflate this rate considerably.
SAMPLING PLANS

I conducted a discourse analysis of academic literature, media coverage, community groups and development professionals by collecting interviews, development documents, field notes and publications about development in Detroit relevant to each discourse (see table 2). The data collected in each of the study neighborhoods is based on who was carrying out development and what this development was comprised of. For example, the dominant discourse in 48217 was based on industrial expansion, while in Downtown-Midtown, the development of amenities for new tenants took the spotlight. These different focuses of development discourse inform who is deemed responsible for, or who does development, and the type of development processes in each of these cases (see table 3 for how these participants were distributed across discourses and neighborhoods). As I became more familiar with the development landscape of each neighborhood, I was able to identify the tendencies of certain groups to dominate the development discourse.
<table>
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<td></td>
<td>* Books</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Book chapters</td>
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<td>“Detroit community development”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Interviews with academics</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Detroit economic development”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>* News articles</td>
<td>2010-present</td>
<td>“48217 Detroit”</td>
<td>Articles=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Downtown Detroit”</td>
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<td>“Midtown Detroit”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Groups</td>
<td>* Field notes from meetings</td>
<td>January-August 2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Interviews= 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Interviews with residents and activists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Professionals</td>
<td>* Field notes from meetings</td>
<td>June-September 2015</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Documents= 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Development documents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews= 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Interviews with development professionals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Data type, duration of collection and sample size by discourse.

* The total number of individuals interviewed was 67

Interview Participants

Across groups interviewed (planning and development professionals, planning academics and community members), conversations aimed to tease out narratives about the beliefs behind the development promoted by each group respectively, and the problems such development was thought to mitigate. This was done by formulating interview questions that sought to define the following: problems, solutions, main actors and visions for the future of the city and neighborhood. Interview instruments were developed to be specific to the discourse they aimed to understand, and questions were tailored to the individuals being interviewed. However, on the whole, questions were consistently related to each of the main themes to ensure continuity that would allow for comparison of perspectives across discourses.
Planning and development practitioners consisted of formally trained in development professions including real estate developers, architects, urban planners and investors. These professionals were selected using emergent sampling, beginning with directors of projects and organizations frequently discussed in the media. Emergent (or purposeful) sampling is a sampling technique based on, “identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. In addition to knowledge and experience [researchers note] the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner” (Palinkas et al. 2015). The developers and designers of projects receiving media attention in the Detroit News and Detroit Free Press over the last five years in Downtown-Midtown and 48217 served as a point of departure for emergent sampling. From these initial interviews regarding highly publicized projects, the additional relevant participants for this study were determined by triangulation, or their mention by multiple interviewees. In all, 34 development professionals were interviewed.

Similar to the recruitment of development experts, I recruited community groups and residents for interviews through emergent sampling. Participation in community group meetings and public hearings allowed me to identify individuals, who were especially active and taking on leadership roles. From conversations with these individuals, I was able to understand how groups organized themselves, and consequently to identify additional individuals for interviews. These included five activists who played pivotal roles in community groups while not living in the neighborhood itself, and eleven resident activists who organized on behalf of the community they live in. Returning to the question of who “does” development, the interviews in 48217 were largely centered on community members and activists who influence development through their organizing. Conversely,
the heavy role of professional planners and diminished voice of community groups that emerged in the context of Midtown-Downtown is reflected in the numbers of professionals interviewed versus community members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Downtown-Midtown</th>
<th>48217</th>
<th>Detroit at large</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Development Professionals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>City Officials</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Foundations</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Members</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL*</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Distribution of interview participants by group and geography.

* Some participants spoke to their experiences in relation to more than one locale or had more than one role. These participants have been double-counted. Thus, the sum of the “TOTAL” row does not reflect the sum of participants. The number of interviews collected was 67.

Planning Documents

I identified relevant planning and development documents through their reference by the media or by interview participants. Of particular interest were planning and development documents that were indicated as playing a role in the rationale of development strategies. See appendix E for a full list of professional planning reports and documents along with their authoring institutions included in this analysis.
Academic Literature

The examined literature included planning and development journal articles, books and book chapters that focused entirely or in part on Detroit. These pieces were selected based on both criterion sampling and emergent sampling. They were selected based on two criteria: 1) articles had to be written after 2010, ensuring their relevance to the most recent, post-bankruptcy surge in development in the city and 2) articles had to make claims about the current development climate in the city and/or 3) attempt to provide solutions for development challenges. These pieces were largely located in the urban planning literature, but also emerged from the fields of architecture, urban design, economics, anthropology and political science. I found literature that fitted these criteria through Google Scholar searches of the terms “Detroit urban planning”, “Detroit development”, “Detroit community development” and “Detroit economic development”. In addition to these criteria, I added literature to the analysis if its significance was evident from the interviews. For example, if an interview participant mentioned that a specific piece of literature was influential to his/her work or worldview, it was added to the analysis.

The literature on Detroit totaled 42 pieces. In addition to pieces referenced by interviewees or found through the above search terms, I also reviewed the broader literature on shrinking cities that informed some of the scholarship on Detroit. I reviewed literature on shrinking cities if it was cited in any of the 42 pieces focusing on Detroit that I reviewed. This strategy added 17 pieces of scholarship on shrinking cities that related to the conceptual frameworks of the dissertation. See appendix D for a full list of the literature included in this analysis.
I collected media articles from news outlets that were determined through interviews to have the most impact on the development discourse in Detroit. These sources included The Detroit News, The Detroit Free Press, and The New York Times. I located articles using the following search terms in the archives of these publications: “Downtown Detroit”, “Midtown Detroit” and “48217 Detroit”. The first ten pieces returned in each search (by relevance) within each publication were included in the sample. Relevance was established by removing pieces that were not about development work in the case neighborhoods. When fewer than ten relevant articles where returned, all relevant articles were used; this totaled 100 articles. Similar to the selection of academic literature, the timeframe for these pieces was 2010 to the present, allowing me to include articles that were about both pre and post bankruptcy development. I added a considerable number of additional media articles to the data when they were mentioned in interviews specifically by title or author. These articles were from the three aforementioned publications, but also included pieces from Time Magazine (that covered much of the redevelopment of Midtown and Downtown) and Al-Jazeera (that has taken particular interest in exposing environmental justice issues in 48217). See appendix C for a full list of article citations included in this analysis.

ANALYSIS

I recorded and transcribed interviews and field notes. I coded interviews, media articles, academic literature and development documents using ATLAS.ti. I analyzed these materials latently, or by determining “the underlying meaning of communications” (Babbie 2012, 336). Across academic, practitioner, journalistic and community discourses, codes generally fit into the following groups:

* Description of Detroit/relevant case neighborhood

* Challenges for Detroit/relevant case neighborhood
I used these codes as a way of conceptualizing themes in a first round of analysis; through these categories. Subcodes emerged that were tailored towards themes specific to each of the discourses. I then undertook another round of coding using these emerging subcodes to determine patterns in the data, including similarities among perspectives as well as idiosyncrasy that some argue should be regarded as a pattern in itself (Saldaña 2012). In the tradition of critical discourse analysis, I paid special attention to power differentials that may be implied, most notably in the valorizing of expert knowledge as having an elevated status to other forms of knowledge (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002).

See appendix F for a full list of subcodes by discourse used to analyze data.

QUALITATIVE RIGOR

The use of similar standards of rigor for qualitative and quantitative work has been a source of debate; measuring rigor in a qualitative study using the same benchmarks for rigor as those used in quantitative studies unnecessarily minimizes qualitative work and vice versa (D. Davies and Dodd 2002). In a quantitative sense, rigor refers to the ability to confirm the reliability and consistency of data collection through strict administration of measurement and an appropriate assessment of the validity and operationalization of elements in the research plan, otherwise known as internal validity (D. Davies and Dodd 2002; Guba 1981). This standard for rigor applies to the coding of this study. In this case, the careful use of coding software to establish trends, frequencies and correlations of themes within discourses helps to maintain consistency, although some amount of subjective interpretation may be required to check these results for relevance to the research question. For this
reason, maintaining qualitative standards for rigor in both the data collection and analysis phases is crucial.

In a qualitative sense, rigor mainly refers to the honesty and reflexivity with which data is collected and analyzed. A main goal of qualitative work is to uncover meaning in data, which means that rigor is understood in relation to the biases imparted on data collection through the social and cultural contexts of the research setting. One component of this is reflexivity, or the ability to assess data as it is being collected. Since the collection of a set of qualitative interviews, for example, requires a certain learning curve and context familiarity, the collection of data and the proficiency with which it is collected are likely to improve through the study. If researchers were practicing reflexivity, they would be able to note the moments in the data collection process that are not as thorough or that do not answer the intended question and go back to the source to collect any missing data (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010). This also means having an awareness of the role of the researcher and monitoring possible biases in the world view of the researcher, and what ways it may skew the collection of qualitative data (Guba 1981). In order to be sure that quotes have not been taken out of context or misunderstood, I have asked participants to revise quotes included in text and explained the context that they appear in. Additionally, I have had conversations with several participants to verify my findings, another way of triangulating my data and conclusions.

LIMITATIONS

In order to exercise reflexivity, it is important to address some of the potential limitations and biases inherent to research methods. First, as a member of the academic planning community undertaking research on planning expertise, I had some difficulty getting planning academics to engage with research by being subjects themselves. As people who are normally analyzing the behaviors of
others, it felt that academics at times resisted the idea that their work or their professionalism could be analyzed in terms of social construction, and not the positivist tradition of science that dominates academic discourse. Most academics were very cooperative once I explained in detail that I was hoping to understand their motivation and their values around planning research. However, some were not able to see themselves as anything but professionals who possess objective expertise, meaning that it was difficult to get them to speak frankly about their role and experience as academic planners personally. Some academics also saw my positionality as a doctoral student as an opportunity to mentor me, a hierarchy that created an additional obstacle for open conversation. This challenge has been remedied through my primary reliance on the literature itself as an artifact of planning values (42 pieces), that is supplemented by the moments of open conversations I was able to have with cooperative academic participants (10 participants). Participants were selected by how widely cited their work was in the literature to gain perspectives from the most influential academics.

An additional limitation to this work was the difficulty of engaging with community groups and residents of 48217. Due to the long history of distrust between the community and government entities, journalists, and to a lesser degree academic researchers, it took considerable time to build a relationship with the community and be able to carry out interviews. This challenge was mitigated to a degree through my attendance at community group meetings, public hearings and other public engagement efforts facilitated by planners. By patiently and consistently being present at community events, I was able to develop, to an extent, a rapport with groups working in the zip code. Further, I gained credibility by being referred to some interview participants by trusted community leaders. As a non-native Detroiter and as a White person, I was understandably treated as an outsider in both study neighborhoods. However, since this work aimed to uncover the worldviews of participants, I
found this to be an advantage in some ways. As someone viewed to be alien to the circumstances of the city (though I grew up little more than an hour away), participants explained their most foundational beliefs and included expanded histories of the area that made for data rich in meaning and value.
CHAPTER 3
THE EXPERT ENTREPRENEUR: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE and its ROLE in the EXCLUSIONARY RENAISSANCE of DOWNTOWN and MIDTOWN

INTRODUCTION
This chapter investigates the emergence of a private development community as a primary form of planning and development expertise in Downtown and Midtown. This trend is analyzed as a product of shifts in governance precipitating from a pivotal moment of structural crisis and fiscal austerity in Detroit. In the context of Downtown-Midtown, I treat the discursive practices embedded within conversations with development professionals and the development documents used to support their agendas as artifacts of the development climate in the city as perceived by development experts. Further, I discuss the expertise of the actors credited with a revival of the Downtown core in light of their vision for the future of Detroit, the social implications of such goals and the role of the city in advancing these initiatives.

BACKGROUND: URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS in DOWNTOWN and MIDTOWN DETROIT
This chapter’s discussion of the current trends of privatization of development and public services does not begin with the most recent wave of development around the time of the city’s bankruptcy, but has persisted for decades. For instance, the 1970s brought the People Mover, a Downtown circulator on elevated tracks funded largely by federal transportation dollars that aimed to spur private development and investment but ultimately failed to do so (Neill 1995; Thomas 1988). A revitalization plan for the Detroit Riverfront in Downtown under the Coleman Young

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1 As a contiguous area, Downtown and Midtown will be referred to as Downtown-Midtown unless a statement applies explicitly to one or the other.
administration (1974-1994) aimed to renew the image of Detroit as an economic power house in an era of decline when the city’s image was still being shaped by the race riots of the 1960s (Neill 1995). This reconstruction involved the private funding of the now iconic Renaissance Center that is home to General Motors’ world headquarters. The development of the Renaissance Center in 1973 aimed to resurrect the largely vacant and decaying Downtown through private investment, but instead “dropped its unwanted millions of square feet of office space into the mix”, making conditions of low real estate values worse than ever (Galster 2014, 228).

Today, formal development projects of Downtown and Midtown are often attributed to larger planning strategies that emerged from private funders in the midst of a lack of municipal and county resources to undertake them. Over the last decade, private planners and developers have vowed to save the city through paradigms like “planned shrinkage” that aims to scale down the built environment for the current population and the addition of “green infrastructure”, that some have argued are novel concepts primarily aiming to produce profit and encourage investment (Pallagst et al. 2009; Schilling and Logan 2008a; Safransky 2014). These strategies, though popular in the literature on declining cities and even making appearances in development documents and discourses in Detroit, have yet to be fully implemented. In other words, the promotion of these largely untested strategies has contributed to the ideology that, “when planning’s underlying objective is to make sure that a place is appealing to capital, anything can seem like a good idea” (McKeon 2014). These planning strategies, for example, include a privately funded master plan known as the Detroit Future City framework and a public-private partnership that resulted in the construction of a Downtown light rail circulator known as the QLINE (after its main benefactor, Quicken Loans) (Lawrence 2016; Detroit Future City 2015). Largely supplanting the roles of
municipal planners and other government planning entities, private initiatives to redevelop Downtown and Midtown have taken center stage.

Downtown is also seen as the “entertainment center” of Detroit, with a newly emerging night life, and also housing sports arenas, where the Redwings, Lions and Tigers play (Mahoney et al. 2015, 13; Detroit Future City 2015). Since 2010, over 300 residential units have been created Downtown; about half of one-bedroom units are rented for $1,200 or more (as compared to the median rent of the city of Detroit of $649) (U.S Census 2015). According to the Hudson-Webber-Foundation, over 70 commercial development projects are currently underway in Downtown. Midtown houses the medical campuses of the Henry Ford Hospital and the Karmanos Cancer Institute, along with Wayne State University. It is also regarded as a cultural center, where the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), College for Creative Studies and the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) are located. Currently, over 100 development projects are being completed in Midtown (Mahoney et al. 2015, 86).

FOUNDATIONS, PRIVATE DEVELOPERS and PLANNING AGENCIES as CITY BUILDERS

Participants across the groups interviewed praised private development based on the belief that municipal urban planning was largely absent in the city in the recent decades of financial strain. Indeed, at the time of this study, the planning department had just increased their staff to about 18 people, and the city’s master plan was still largely based on a comprehensive plan approved in 1992. Members of the private development community implied that since the planning department often lacked the resources to pursue planning projects and infrastructural improvements, there was little urban planning being done in the city prior to the most recent bout of intense private investment.
As a Detroit developer argued: “Detroit was so, I would say, just devoid of any real planning or organization around economic development. It was very ad hoc for a number of years. The business community and the foundation community and the economic development folks from the private sector have really thought the most about planning over the last 20 years” (phone interview, 2015). This prominent line of thought is significant in the establishment of private sector experts as main catalysts for development ingenuity in the city during this extended period of social and financial crisis. Consistent with trends of municipal austerity under neoliberalism, the expectations that the city government would continue to lack power and resources underpinned the assertion of many interviewees that planning and development must come from the private sector, if anything is to be accomplished. Findings from the interviews revealed several examples of individuals and organizations that are celebrated for their expertise by the Downtown-Midtown development community, namely private non-profit foundations (and their high profile collection of board members), and billionaire developer Dan Gilbert. Additionally, the leadership of the municipal planning department and their adherence to plans created by private sector actors was also found to offer expertise valuable to the private development community.

Before private, for-profit investment started to take off in Downtown-Midtown in the mid-2000s, investment in the area was strongly supported by a handful of private philanthropic foundations. Initially, in the absence of municipal capacity and more traditional sources of development capital such as tax revenue, private foundations invested in multiple projects across the city. Funded by both trusts (independent of their often corporate roots) and as subsets of corporations, these foundations like the Kresge Foundation, Hudson-Webber Foundation, Knight Foundation, Skillman Foundation and Ford Foundation gained momentum and began influencing development through their funding of projects before a handful of wealthy private developers started accumulating land in
Downtown-Midtown. In recent years, private non-profit foundations have been responsible for partnering with business to create economic development frameworks such as the 7.2 SQ MI report (a partnership between the Hudson-Webber Foundation and the business coalitions Detroit Economic Growth Corporation and the Downtown Detroit Partnership), Detroit Future City (a partnership between the Kresge Foundation and the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation among others) and the Live Midtown Initiative (a partnership between the Hudson-Webber Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Detroit Medical Center and Henry Ford Hospital) (Mahoney et al. 2015; “Live Midtown” 2010; Detroit Future City 2015). Board members who make decisions regarding the mission of these foundations and the specific projects to be funded are often composed of members with corporate business interests, architects, developers and attorneys. Additionally, many board members sit on the boards of multiple foundations. A representative from one foundation described the expertise on their board and some potential conflicts:

“…there’s a lot of board overlap, you know, where trustees sit on a lot of boards and [are] trustees of other entities. So, it’s a very interconnected, knowledgeable group…In order to invest well in revitalization, you need people that are very knowledgeable about what’s happening in the city and all the different dynamics that are at play” (interview, Detroit, 2015).

In addition to displaying a strong connection to business agendas and potential conflicts of interest, the overlaps in board members across companies and foundations speak to the small number of key individuals making development decisions in the Downtown core.

With such a large amount of capital at their disposal (a $3.6 billion endowment in the case of the Kresge Foundation) and the collusion of their missions with private, for-profit interests via agreements and board members affiliated with business, the foundation community in Detroit plays a strong hand in private development (“The Kresge Foundation” 2016). The influence of these foundations has come under media and public scrutiny, as has their strong presence that seems to attempt to fill the gap created by the lack of public financing for development. A representative
from one of the more prolific foundations explained the difficulty in drawing the boundaries between the role of the public and private sectors in Detroit: “There’s a discomfort in a philanthropic organization stepping into what’s traditionally the space of the public sector and, for many reasons, we need to be very cautious and thoughtful in our approach, even as we do some partnership with the public sector. We do it because there is a tangible need—a change that wouldn’t be realized but for our resources, in whole or in part” (phone interview, 2015). The difficulty of this quandary is immediately visible in the presence of the foundation community in the planning and direction of Downtown-Midtown, and its deep entanglement with prominent private, for-profit development entities. In addition to private non-profit entities playing a strong role in the privatization of planning initiatives and public amenities in Downtown-Midtown, recent years have brought an interest in for-profit development in the city, namely at the hands of developer and financier Dan Gilbert.

*Celebrity and Individualism in Downtown Development*

A billionaire, Dan Gilbert currently owns or leases 78 properties Downtown that he has rapidly purchased in the last five or so years (Gallagher 2015). Gilbert has become a local celebrity since his arrival in Downtown real estate in 2007, and the relocation of his company Quicken Loans to Detroit. He has been lauded for his business savvy and credited for Downtown’s redevelopment. He has also been a main private funder of public amenities such as light rail, fiber optic internet, exterior renovations of buildings and public spaces as well as a placemaking plan (Gallagher 2015). Gilbert’s name and his contribution to development Downtown were repeatedly mentioned by many interviewees. Indeed, it was unusual to come by an informant who had not worked for Dan Gilbert as a partner or consultant of some type. Several informants referred to him as “Dan”, giving an air of fondness and familiarity, despite admitting that they had never met him.
In response to the large amount and fast pace of development taking place in Downtown at Gilbert’s hands, a representative from a main philanthropic foundation opined:

“I think what’s different [now] is…we have a single, very well resourced beneficiary or benefactor, the Gilbert companies. There aren’t too many places where you have someone with that amount of resources who owns property across such a wide geographic spread and has such an acute interest on attracting and retaining a work force. Sometimes you’ll be walking Downtown here and one day it will be a normal sidewalk. You’ll come back the next day and it will be a totally public space type spot and that’s a very rare thing for someone to have that level of focus, that level of resource….The Gilbert effect is very evident in how widespread that is” (interview, Detroit, 2015).

Among the most extensive of these investments has been the QLINE light rail, largely privately funded through a federal matching grant (see figure 2). The line will serve as a Downtown circulator for people living and working there. As an urban designer and scholar said:

“I think in some ways, he’s single handedly created this revival of Downtown. You know…I worked on the very initial stages of [QLINE]. Before they were funded, the university did the first feasibility [study] for it and Dan Gilbert said I’m going to move my corporation Downtown, but I’m not going to do that unless there’s a light rail system. Well, he almost single-handedly pulled that off, at least the first three miles” (interview, Detroit, 2015).

It is also interesting to note that despite this project being in large part funded by public entities (like the U.S. Department of Transportation and the State of Michigan), Gilbert, as a real estate expert, is credited for it (Lawrence 2017). The celebrity of Dan Gilbert as part savvy businessman, part savior of Downtown Detroit is emblematic of the power leveraged by private development ‘experts’ in the context of limited municipal resources. Further, the celebration of Dan Gilbert and the prominent heads of private foundations as leaders in economic development speak to a logic within neoliberalism described by Harvey (2007) that assumes solutions to challenges in the public realm to be matters of individual character and motivation, instead of systemic issues with collective social consequences.
The Planning Department’s Embrace of Private Initiatives

Amidst a development landscape in Downtown-Midtown largely driven by the expertise of private developers, the new head of the urban planning and development department, Maurice Cox, also emerged as a highly lauded technical expert. It is important to note that at the time the data for this study was collected, the planning director was newly hired through a long handpicking process by the Duggan administration and had held his position for only about four months. His reputation as an expert architect and urbanist preceded him, and his work in New Orleans as a scholar and designer was a main selling point for this expertise. This work included teaching in the Tulane School of Architecture and working with New Orleans communities through the Tulane City Center to create and implement high design versions of community based projects like community centers and community gardens.

The clout around this new arrival to the city was astounding, especially given the fact that at the time, Cox was still getting his bearings in a brand new city full of all new challenges. However, he seemed to already have achieved a status as a visionary and was expected to breathe new life into the urban planning department that had (in the eyes of many interviewees) stagnated over the last several decades. Since his hire, both the planning department and the Duggan administration have fully embraced the use of the privately developed master plan, Detroit Future City. This plan undertook a series of community engagement efforts to ultimately develop solutions for the city in
terms of “economic growth”, “land use”, “city systems”, “neighborhoods” and “land and building assets” (Detroit Future City 2015, i). Ultimately, the framework uses these findings to propose a 50 year land use vision that consolidates the current urban form into a series of newly proposed land uses as well as identifying areas for future economic growth. These land uses include “live+make” spaces intended to repurpose industrial lands for live-work spaces and “innovative ecological…landscapes of innovation, where ecological development types predominate” (Detroit Future City 2015, 115; 117). The new land uses also include “green residential” that transforms “vacant and underutilized land into a canvas of green, supporting single- and multi-family residential along with community maintained recreational spaces, productive landscapes, and blue/green infrastructure” (Detroit Future City 2015, 114). Use of the term “blue/green infrastructure” to describe “Blue infrastructure—water based landscapes like swales retention ponds and lakes that capture and clean stormwater” and “Green infrastructure—forest landscapes that improve air quality by capturing air-borne pollutants” were discussed by development experts and frustrated residents alike as a case in point for what some felt was too much professional jargon for the general public (Detroit Future City 2015, 133).

Interviews with community development groups and Detroit Future City staff revealed an awareness that the framework has raised considerable suspicion around its private initiation and potential exclusion of Detroit residents, along with concerns that it mainly serves the agenda of the business community. For example, the framework pinpoints areas ripe for continued development and investment. Staff of the planning department indicated that they, too, would treat these identified areas as places to focus public resources in the city master plan. It is interesting to note that when I first began my fieldwork, I often misspoke referring to the “Detroit Future City framework” as the “Detroit Future City plan” when interviewing representatives from the organization. I was almost
always corrected to say ‘framework’, getting the impression that the term was seen as disarming and tentative, meaning to convey that there were no concrete plans to implement any of its strategies, despite public statements from the Duggan administration.

The ability for municipalities to further business agendas through their policies is a vital component of neoliberal governance that is not merely a takeover by market forces, but the adherence of municipal policies and visions that allow for it (W. Davies 2014; Peck and Whiteside 2016). As a case in point, members of the planning department described the degree to which Detroit Future City will directly inform municipal strategies. One paper reported that “Cox’s description of the plans he and officials from several departments are drawing up marks the first time city officials have moved on implementing a broad strategy, influenced by Detroit Future City, aimed at making over the empty parcels and linking them with thriving neighborhoods” (McGraw 2015). Another media interview with the Planning Director described his vision for the city, saying that, “Admittedly, many of the schemes he’s setting in motion are an outgrowth of the plan initially called Detroit Works and later Detroit Future City, drawn up during the Dave Bing administration” (Jacobs 2016). Thus, the promise of municipal pursuit of economic growth coincided with the boosterist attitudes from the private development community in choosing Maurice Cox as a visionary planning expert to revive Detroit.

Interviewees shared high expectations that Maurice Cox would provide development expertise in terms of strategies for economic development, which the development community felt was sorely needed. A landscape architect said: “I’m very excited about him coming to our city, because now we have a truly experienced planner, a visionary person. That’s what we need in the city of Detroit—professionals that can make things happen” (phone interview, 2015). Another designer felt that,
“Things are looking better, starting with a really terrific director of city planning whose mandate is to rebuild the [department’s] professional staff.” (phone interview, 2015). These perspectives were not unique among participants in this study, and illustrate the high expectations for Cox to utilize his technical expertise as a planner to add ‘vision’ to the city. By extension, this perspective implies that the city lacked vision before his arrival, in keeping with the narrative that conditions in Detroit relied on being corrected by the work of individual, visionary ‘experts’. However, participants in the study (both public and private) largely anticipated that Cox would be focusing his ‘vision’ outside of the Downtown-Midtown area, leaving the Downtown core to continue to be developed privately.

TALENT and INVESTMENT ATTRACTION as EXPERT VISIONS

The power to frame narratives informing the desirable direction for planning outcomes and impose them on development in the city is a large advantage enjoyed by development experts taking part in the interviews of this study. Main economic stakeholders have used their expert positionality to shape the direction of development, and subsequently the clientele that this development aims to attract. This research has found that developers in Downtown-Midtown have largely focused on achieving two main goals in their development projects: the appreciation of their investments in the Downtown core and the attraction of entrepreneurial ‘talent’. Further, the documents created to frame and advance investment attraction strategies require marketing and design skills that help constitute a significant body of planning expertise in their own right.

The appreciation of Downtown-Midtown investment can be seen in the addition of privately funded amenities by prominent investors such as fiber optic internet, a light rail line and streetscape improvements, to name a few. Often painted in a philanthropic light, the installation of these amenities has aimed to increase the attractiveness of newly renovated buildings and other
developments in Downtown and Midtown (see figure 3). Conversations with developers and philanthropic foundations along with promotional documents for their projects have revealed the goal of attracting young, educated professionals to work in newly relocated businesses and corporate headquarters in Downtown-Midtown (Mahoney et al. 2015). According to Bruce Katz, Vice President of the Brookings Institution, who was quoted in the transit oriented development plan of Downtown-Midtown:

“I think the broader question for Michigan is, when you’re competing for talent, not just domestically, but globally, the younger generation in the world is looking for quality places. A lot of those quality places would be traditional cities with their downtowns and their waterfronts and their cultural institutions, and that sort of magic mix of street life. If you don’t have cities that have that, it’s hard to imagine how you can compete for the talent of the world” (Hamilton Anderson 2011).

This desire to attract ‘talent’ through specific development interventions that cater to young professionals implies two problematic notions. First, that claim that the city of Detroit lacks ‘talent’, denigrates current Detroit residents. Secondly, the notion that talent primarily comes in the form of young, educated professionals reifies class disparity and validates the role of technical experts, reproducing their dominance.

Figure 3: Campus Martius, a renovated public park Downtown known for its events, public spaces and pop-up amenities.

Private Initiatives for Downtown-Midtown Talent and Wealth Attraction

Private non-profit and for profit investment in developing places attractive to capital as well as more affluent clientele have been made possible by initiatives of both marketing and technical experts in
the form of plans and frameworks. The work of private foundations, most notably the Hudson-Webber Foundation and Kresge Foundation, has supported the influx of educated, young, mostly White professionals to economically revive the Greater Downtown area. Several years ago, the Hudson-Webber foundation launched an ultimately successful initiative called “15x15” that aimed to bring 15,000 “young and talented” individuals to the Downtown core by 2015 (“15x15 Initiative” 2015). This group, identified partly by their age and education attainment (under 35 with at least a 4-year degree) was touted by the foundation to be desirable residents as they are “mobile, urban inclined and entrepreneurial” (“15x15 Initiative” 2015). In a city where 7.7% of residents over 25 hold a bachelor’s degree, the unlikelihood of attracting ‘talent’ locally supports concerns about redevelopment benefits in Detroit bypassing local residents (U.S Census 2015). This strategy can be viewed as a direct parallel to Florida’s (2003) promotion of the creative class as being a vital economic driver for cities hoping to revitalize neighborhoods through the attraction of what is thought to be a more entrepreneurial, upwardly mobile demographic.

The Hudson-Webber Foundation also created the 7.2 SQ MI report that served to portray the investment potential of the 7.2 square miles making up Greater Downtown (see figure 4). Similarly, in its strategy to achieve revitalization of the Downtown core, the 7.2 SQ MI report boasts that Downtown development “has attracted thousands of new employees and hundreds of new residents, demonstrating a healthy demand for the mix of renovation and new projects that are in the development pipeline” (Mahoney et al. 2015, 13). Further, the term “7.2 SQ MI,” referring to the Greater Downtown area deemed viable for investment, has been adopted as a commonplace term in the development discourse, and was used throughout conversations with development professionals. The 7.2 SQ MI report shares the goals of other frameworks like Midtown Detroit Inc.’s Live Midtown initiative that have been responsible for utilizing economic and urban design
strategies to attract a gentrifying population to the Greater Downtown area (“Live Midtown” 2010). Unlike the 7.2 SQ MI report, Live Midtown provides incentives for employees of Midtown institutions (such as Henry Ford Hospital and Wayne State University) to relocate to Midtown by subsidizing relocation and housing expenses and providing funding for exterior renovations and improvements in the case of new homeowners (“Live Midtown” 2010). Similarly, Opportunity Detroit, a Downtown branding initiative owned by Dan Gilbert has put forth a placemaking vision for the neighborhood, framing Downtown as a place of economic opportunity for entrepreneurs, and a trendy, hip place attractive to young professionals (“A Placemaking Vision for Downtown Detroit” 2013).
Figure 4: The area encompassed by the 7.2 SQ MI of desirable places to develop (source: 7.2 SQ MI Report).
It should be noted that the branding of the plans and frameworks as objects and products of expertise often has a high production value and speaks to the aim of branding the city as young and trendy (see figures 5-8). This value is seen in the high design quality, trendy graphics and overall visual appeal of the documents. The design and branding expertise of private firms responsible for developing these initiatives in many ways serves to validate these projects to investors. Some felt that the branding and high design standard of these documents play a role in advancing their ability to communicate ideas, allowing for easier distribution to the public, and more in depth media coverage.

Further, some interviewees felt that the documents served as a way to convey Detroit as a competitive city, despite the development challenges on the ground. The documents were seen by some as a way to rework the narrative of Detroit dismissing its image as a place of economic stagnation or lacking vibrant communities. A staff member involved in the production of the 7.2 SQ MI report commented about its wide media attention:

“…both by nature of putting it online and by it being simple and accessible, the media pick up of it was incredible…Certainly it saturated kind of the local media when the first one came out but over time the media inquiries from all over the world were pretty significant. Again, because partially, I think lots of reporters were reporting on this doom and gloom story of Detroit and they would come across this that told a very different story …in the context of lots of national, well known narratives around the challenges of the city, telling the other story became attractive” (interview, Detroit, 2015).

In this way, as Carr (2010) and Abbott (1988) have suggested, the status of the expert is not only enjoyed by the people and institutions regarded as experts, but adds value and validation to the objects created by such experts. These documents and the branding they entail might be considered entrepreneurial efforts in themselves; the private sanctioning of many of these initiatives that display the intention of attracting investment speak to an interesting moment in austerity where city services and projects are not only taken on by the private sector (in this case, by investors, development firms and philanthropic foundations). In addition to this, the privatization of planning processes is
done in a way that beckons others to join in investing in a city full of economic potential. In the case of development documents with high production value, such as the Detroit Future City framework or the 7.2 SQ MI report, the expert narratives and visions reframing the ‘doom and gloom’ image of the city reached a far wider audience than the brick and mortar development actually being carried out.
Figure 6: The cover of the 7.2 SQ MI Report by the Hudson Webber Foundation (source: 7.2 SQ MI Report).
Figure 7: The cover of the Detroit Future City Framework by Detroit Future City (source: Detroit Future City Framework).
As literature on expertise has suggested, the power of the expert is largely derived from what is
thought to be a neutral stance that allows them to propose solutions that will yield the best outcomes for all (Murray Li 2007; Easterly 2014; Corburn 2005). This research found that the development experts’ pursuit of wealth accumulation, valuing the involvement of private entities, is at the core of development discourses in Downtown-Midtown. Though in many instances, these developments show the potential to increase the tax base, the distribution of those benefits to populations outside of Midtown-Downtown remain to be seen. Furthermore, as Carr (2010) argues, the power to direct these goals is harnessed through the performative acts that constitute ‘doing’ expertise, such as the creation of boosterist documents and the proposal of seemingly innocuous development goals. However, these development strategies should be questioned, in light of their small handful of benefactors and the small geographic area it impacts.

MIDTOWN-DOWNTOWN VERSUS the REST of the CITY

The relationship between the high volume of development taking place in the Downtown core and the rest of the neighborhoods in the city receiving less attention and investment was a strong theme in the data. In many instances, areas outside of Downtown-Midtown were viewed as uncharted territory, yet to be seriously considered for private investment funds. A Detroit architect explained this dynamic, saying that in the Downtown core:

“…there’s people on the street, housing’s maxed out, apartment occupancy is over 99%, in that 7 square mile area. That’s what’s driving everything right now. It has sustainability to it because once you’ve got people residing here and kind of making a stake and feeling comfortable, that’s going to kind of feed on itself over time. The tough part is that that’s going to take care of the 7.2 square miles. How quickly that will spread out to the remaining 132 square miles is a whole different question” (interview, Detroit, 2015).

Others in the development community seemed to allude to Downtown-Midtown as almost an oasis of urban development, surrounded by nothingness. A landscape architect explained: “There’s all this Detroit rebirth that’s basically focused Downtown and up the Woodward Avenue Corridor to New Center. If you go a mile, or not even a half-mile off of Woodward, that redevelopment is
maybe 6% of our land area in 140 square miles. Everywhere else is still very, very challenging” (interview, Detroit, 2015). In several instances, development documents seem frame Downtown-Midtown as an ideal set of investment circumstances, while denigrating other areas of the city, which will be discussed in depth later in this section.

While some members of the development community seemed to be content with private developers taking responsibility for projects (including infrastructure) in the already thriving Downtown-Midtown, there was a sense that the rest of the city’s neighborhoods fall outside of that mission. For the rest of the neighborhoods, some participants viewed the large infrastructural challenges as the government’s responsibility, and not something that could feasibly be addressed by private investment. This perspective initially seems contradictory when considering the infrastructural challenges that were to a degree met by the private sector in the already developing core (though with significant government subsidy). However, it speaks to a logic that has allowed private entities to profit from public subsidy in the city, and is consistent with pursuing lower risk investments in hopes of higher rates of return. A designer described the government’s responsibility to the rest of the neighborhoods in the city as follows: “80% of the development in the city is happening in those 7.2 square miles, then what about the 131 square miles? We’ve got to find some answer to that…If the government started an infrastructure program and started fixing roads and building bridges and stuff like that, putting people to work, we need some kind of program to start employing people.”

This perspective also points to the issue of unemployment being primarily a public sector responsibility, when much of the boosterism behind Downtown-Midtown development revolves around a projected potential for job creation and talent attraction, as discussed previously. One developer explained the barriers for private development in other areas of Detroit, again insisting that the government should find the capacity to make necessary infrastructural changes. As he
mentioned:

“…ok, well, Downtown will get fixed, but the rest of Detroit’s going to…fall into the lake, right?…For a long time, and it still is, the rest of Detroit…is a huge area, a gigantic economic problem. Just from a city infrastructure standpoint and a safety standpoint and a lighting standpoint. You know, the Duggan administration and the [Emergency Manager’s] office during the bankruptcy really chipped away at that issue. But it’s going to take persistent help and fortitude on the part of the Mayor’s office for generations to come to actually fix the rest of Detroit” (phone interview, 2015).

Some development experts in Downtown-Midtown find development outside of the study area infeasible due to infrastructural challenges, but those same challenges have been addressed on a smaller scale through largely private funding in Downtown-Midtown. Regardless, development discourse presents the challenges of neighborhoods surrounding Downtown-Midtown as a lack of investment due to infrastructural hurdles. In order to make the surrounding areas tenable for investment attraction, the private sector must continue to rely on public subsidies to pave the way through strategic infrastructure investment, indicative of neoliberal market reliance on state collusion to support private sector initiatives (W. Davies 2014; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009; D. Harvey 2007b).

Experts Framing the Value of Downtown-Midtown through Discourse

In an exemplary moment of the tension between the Downtown core and the rest of the city, the Kresge Foundation partnered with private, for-profit entities and community development organizations to create the previously mentioned framework, Detroit Future City. In the absence of an up-to-date municipally sanctioned master plan for the city, the framework was created to set forth a 50-year vision. The project was initially developed through a partnership with the city government, known as the Detroit Works Project under Mayor David Bing’s administration, but as the project developed into the Detroit Future City framework, the explicit role of the city diminished.
This framework employed development ‘experts’ from around the country and world, including Toni Griffin, a CUNY scholar, and firms like AECOM, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Boston based firm Stoss and England based firm Happold Consulting to interpret the results of a large-scale community outreach effort (Detroit Future City 2015). The framework was created in two phases; the first was a series of face-to-face community outreach events consisting of workshops, question-and-answer sessions and interviews with Detroit residents as well as engagement through social media and web interfaces. Secondly, this data was translated into a 350-page framework by a team of what the document refers to as ‘technical experts’. Released in 2012, it states, “As we move toward implementation of Detroit Future City, Detroit stakeholders will be able to continue to meet with technical experts so they can dive into the portions of the plan that will best amplify work already being done, while aligning it with a broader vision for the city” (Detroit Future City 2015, 3). In addition to the framework, the raw data from the various community engagement events was analyzed and refined by this team of experts resulting in a second document, the Civic Engagement Appendix that contained the curated and categorized data from engagement sessions.

The Engagement Appendix took answers to both open and closed ended questions asked of residents, such as “Which of the following investments is most important to Detroit’s Future?” and “What challenges must be addressed in the city?” and organized them into a 310-page document before it was used to inform the Framework itself (Detroit Works Project 2011, 49, 50). It should be noted that while this was a high production value appendix, adhering to the same design standards of the Framework itself, a PDF of this document was quite difficult to obtain, and many people interviewed were not aware of its existence. Instead, to many people, the ‘technical’ manipulation of data from community engagement events seemed to enter a black box, emerging as a neatly
packaged city plan. A designer for a firm tasked with creating the final document described her role: “…as the project moved further along I was the designer in charge of taking 2000 pages of research and analysis and consolidating it into that 350 page document that became Detroit Future City and helped lead the team of, I think we had 10, designers and architects and graphic designers working together to create that book.” (interview, Detroit, 2015). As discussed previously, the result was a framework that provided a set of broad recommendations for redevelopment across the city, including the reassignment of land use, consolidation of residential areas and strategies for rolling back city services for efficiency purposes.

Questions remain about the explicit implementation of the framework verbatim. While the exact use of the Detroit Future City framework in the greatly anticipated update of the 1992 master plan is mostly unresolved, since its release, in addition to planning department’s staff, Mike Duggan’s mayoral administration has embraced the document, displaying willingness to support its proposed interventions. As discussed previously, the planning department described the update of the city’s master plan as being largely based on the strategies outlined in the framework. This updated plan will reassess the provision of public services in largely vacated areas, target areas for economic investment and define new land use strategies for high vacancy areas among other objectives. Although a clear path to implementing the Detroit Future City framework has yet to be determined, the release of this document in itself served to solidify a vision for the city and used technical expertise and branding to insist that it is a feasible way forward. In this way, as Knox and Harvey (2015) have suggested, the expert driven and only speculative Detroit Future City document in its mere framing of issues has come with very tangible consequences for the future of development in Detroit.
Throughout this research, planners and developers noted that there was in some instances strong pushback after the release of the framework. A main complaint among Detroiters is that the resulting document is too technical, and for that reason, not accessible to the average person. Community members and facilitators of the community engagement process voiced concern about its disconnect with the overly technocratic design process that seemed to disregard community input in favor of expert advice. Furthermore, even after the community engagement process, many communities were surprised to see that their neighborhoods were suggested for uses other than their current residential state. Others noted that the document is seemingly devoid of the tense racial relations in the city, and pays no attention to the history of racial disparity and oppression that some feel is a large obstacle in moving forward. Law scholar Peter Hammer points out that this omission is particularly salient when one considers the scope of the framework that includes the city limits, lacking any regional cooperation and failing to address the heavily racialized discourse between Detroit and its suburbs regarding development (Hammer 2015). Further, the omission of the racial dynamics in the Detroit Future City Framework was quite emblematic of discussions with development professionals at large, who when asked about the major challenges for the city rarely mentioned racism or racialized uneven development.
**Figure 9:** Map of current land use patterns from Detroit Future City Framework (source: Detroit Future City Framework).
**PROPOSED: 50-YEAR LAND USE SCENARIO**

![Map of 50 year proposed land uses, considering Downtown-Midtown to be a “district center” and “community center” (source: Detroit Future City Framework).](image-url)

*Figure 10:* Map of 50 year proposed land uses, considering Downtown-Midtown to be a “district center” and “community center” (source: Detroit Future City Framework).
Geographer Daniel Clement and urban planner Miguel Kanai (2015) criticized the plan, arguing that its designation of areas ripe for commercial and residential development served as a means of ‘discursively Whitening’ certain areas of the city, labeling them palatable for a return of a more affluent White population, like that of the recent Downtown renaissance. In its lack of an analysis of race and class inequality, the plan “symbolically purifies] the problematic racial inscription of city neighborhoods” (378). In a spatial analysis of the proposals for converting ‘high residential vacancy’ areas into open green spaces or spaces for ecological innovation (a vague term coined in the framework), the authors found that areas that were up for grabs for experimental development largely corresponded with some of the poorest areas of the city, populated by people of color (Clement and Kanai 2015). A representative from a local community-based organization called the plan, “very problematic” in its release to the public, adding that in their call for community input for “making decisions, the assumption is that the decisions haven’t been made. [When] You put out a map, you’re already showing, here’s the decision we’ve made” (phone interview, 2015). Though presented as a ‘framework’ and only a tentative set of plans, many felt that Detroit Future City sent the wrong message to communities, proposing that their neighborhoods might be something altogether different in 50 years. News outlets covered the mixed reactions to the framework, many of which focused on concerns of Detroiters who felt that the plan threatened their homes and communities. Other concerns included a lack of transparency in the process, and the lack of inclusion of existing civic groups like block clubs (Cwiek 2013). This initial vision that proposed large scale zoning changes shocked many, and although the document continues to develop, you can’t un-ring a bell (AlHajal 2014; Cwiek 2013). Concerns about the framework, as expressed by residents of 48217 will be discussed in the following chapter.

In the case of the Detroit Future City framework, technical experts took the role of mediating
perspectives from community members as a supposedly necessary step to translate the challenges, concerns and hopes of Detroiters into what they deemed a legitimate and viable technical solution in a 50-year vision for the city. Further, the feelings many had that the document used language and figures that were not accessible to everyone, such as the new land use types or the confusion of the meaning of terms like ‘blue/green infrastructure’ were thematic in the data. The translation of community input into technocratic, inaccessible language is a case in point of experts protecting their positions of power through framing issues as having solely technical solutions, and rendering the challenges of redevelopment “non-political” (Murray Li 2007). Furthermore, the results of the outreach from Detroit Future City and its deviation from what some participating community members had imagined potentially perpetuates a cycle of distrust in light of Detroit’s problematic history of exclusionary and racialized planning. As a discursive practice, the highly publicized framework plays a role in framing the development solutions for the city away from its complex social and political history continuing to afflict Black Detroiters, and towards a development discourse that focuses on technical aspects of redevelopment as chief concerns.

Pathologizing Outer Neighborhoods through Blight

The Detroit Future City framework is referenced and pursued throughout development strategies, and notably in the goals set forth by the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force Plan (2014). In partnership with the federal government, Dan Gilbert helped to form the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force that aimed to identify blighted properties and make a plan for their remediation. This Task Force used a systematic approach of canvassing to create an inventory of all the blighted properties in the city, and published them in a document called the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force Plan. Including maps and suggestions for how the city might go about removing blight, this plan targeted the areas outside of the Downtown core as being the main problem areas for blighted
As described in the literature, ‘blight’ has long been a contested term in urban planning and development discourses. Some argue that it was used to justify the demolition of low-income and mostly Black neighborhoods during the urban renewal era (Cahn 2014). Others argue that in Detroit today, it is often understood as neutral, when really the urgency of the pathology and danger implied by ‘blight’ are used to garner support for the inherently political endeavor of deciding which communities are most afflicted (Herscher 2015). The Blight Removal Task Force Plan (2014) describes blight as “a cancer...Blight is radioactive. It is contagious. Blight serves as a venue that attracts criminals and crime. It is a magnet for arsonists. Blighted properties are dangerous places for firefighters and other emergency workers to perform their duties” (i). In the Task Force’s plan, blight takes on a broad definition. A property is considered blighted, if it:

“meets any of the following conditions as determined by the applicable governing body: a public nuisance; an attractive nuisance; a fire hazard or is otherwise dangerous; has bad utilities, plumbing, heating or sewerage disconnected, destroyed, removed, or rendered ineffective; a tax-reverted property; owned or is under control of a land bank; has been vacant for five consecutive years, and not maintained to code; has code violations posing a severe and immediate health or safety threat” (13).

With such broad terminology, it is interesting that the Task Force was able to discern such striking differences between the amounts of blight in Downtown-Midtown versus other areas of the city (see figure 11). The report recommends that the city partners with private entities to fund the necessary demolitions outside of the Downtown core (Gilbert, Price, and Smith 2014). Dan Gilbert’s company, Quicken Loans, along with private foundations, is prominently listed in the report as private partners and funders of blight removal efforts. The language of this report could be met with reasonable suspicion, as it defines blight according to numerous definitions and a malleable set of criteria and yet manages to quite strictly locate blight as a problem that occurs outside of Downtown-Midtown. Potentially even more problematic, and to Li’s (2007) point, the prescribed
solution of public-private partnerships seems to play to the economic advantage of the private interests that helped frame and define the problem of blight to begin with. Further, as Harvey and Knox (2015) describe, the experts’ use of this report to frame blight as a cancer and a threat to the economic prosperity of the city ascribes a sense of urgency to the problem. Ultimately, the experts involved in the making of this report seem to have created a clear narrative that necessitates the involvement of private entities in the provision of blight removal, similar to the provision of other services generated by private partnerships across the city.
Figure 11: A map from the Blight Removal Task Force Plan, depicting Downtown-Midtown as seemingly absent of blight (source: Detroit Blight Removal Task Force Plan).
CONCLUSION

This chapter noted the shift to private sector professionals as development experts spearhead processes and plans typically guided (at least in part) by a municipal planning department. Furthermore, this chapter examined the context of crisis that allows the development ‘expert’ to be represented as a highly valued problem solver, where his or her ideas take on an entrepreneurial spirit. Under this narrative, circumstances are so dyer that often economically rationalized expert solutions are favored over the ingenuity of non-technical experts. Further, the adoption of expertly conceived private initiatives by public entities, as in the case of the Detroit Future City framework, represent a crucial moment of state compliance in market forces endemic to neoliberal governance. I argued that the valorization of the expert as individual problem solver, as in the cases of Dan Gilbert and the leadership of private foundations, and Maurice Cox as the head of the planning department, represents a trend where development outcomes are thought to be the consequences of rational individual choice as opposed to understanding them relative to social and political limitations that societies collectively face. In other words, the celebration of experts bringing economic development to Downtown-Midtown and their financially measured outcomes have left many unanswered questions in terms of mending the problematic socioeconomic fabric of the city, and potentially pave the way for it to be perpetuated.

The power of experts in this context was also leveraged to frame the broader goals of development in the city. An important part of this expert intervention is the involvement of philanthropic organizations, namely the foundation community. Foundations often overlapped directly with private, for-profit development ventures in the city through their board members, and played an active role in advancing wealth accumulation in the city. Study participants and development
documents created through partnerships between foundations and for-profit ventures heavily relied on arguments for attracting investment and talent to the city in their visions for Downtown-Midtown. This chapter questions this notion, arguing that expert development knowledge is leveraged to make investments attractive in certain parts of the city and create profits for the private sector, while excluding the majority of Detroiters from the benefits of such investment. Equally significant to exclusive benefits from investments in Downtown-Midtown is the exclusion from the discourses on development decisions and planning processes that precipitate them.

In a logic parallel to Richard Florida’s (2003) ideas of attracting the creative class, this argument was supported by the desire in development discourse to categorically prioritize the attraction of young, educated, entrepreneurial population. The pursuit of the attraction of ‘entrepreneurial’ talent, as proposed by development experts who participated in this study, plays a role in justifying the exclusion of Detroiters, implying that since talent must be attracted, it must come from outside of the city. The focus on the attraction of a formally educated and entrepreneurial talent base serves to reinforce the power of the expert in this context, supporting the practice of excluding the knowledge and history of problem solving of other Detroit communities from the dominant development discourse. The branding of development initiatives like the Detroit Future City Framework, 7.2 SQ MI Report and the Blight Removal Task Force Plan’s high design documents served as vehicles for shaping this discourse. Through maps, figures and a branded aesthetic, these documents developed a narrative that Downtown-Midtown is the future of the city, ripe for investment, while other areas are afflicted with blight or lack of potential for profitable development.

This is not to suggest that planners, designers, engineers and architects taking part in the redevelopment of Downtown and Midtown do not possess invaluable skills to the enhancement and
reconstruction of the built environment nor the necessary resources to do so. This work suggests that the unchecked power of experts, often from outside the city, and the experience of poverty in Detroit comes at the price of further underplaying the value of Detroit communities in the future prosperity of the city. This research has shown the tendency for development experts to be viewed by the development community as rightfully economically motivated, and generally beneficial to the city, despite their main goals of individual wealth accumulation and talent attraction to the urban core. Furthermore, these self-interested goals of technical experts, as Li (2007) has pointed to, frame the challenges of structural crisis in Detroit to be centered on the lack of technical expertise and resource scarcity and away from larger structural forces (such as deindustrialization and post-Fordism) that have impoverished the majority of residents for decades. To focus attention away from the ingenuity and resilience of Detroit communities and their expertise on their own circumstances and their history of political mobilization in the face of extreme adversity dismisses an important resource in addressing the city’s painful reality of race and class disparities.
CHAPTER 4

‘WE’RE FORGOTTEN’:

EXPERT DISCOURSE, DISINVESTMENT and RESISTANCE in DETROIT’S 48217 ZIP CODE

INTRODUCTION

Detroit’s downtown core has been the overwhelming focus of privately initiated amenities, development and branding with the goal of attracting additional investment. By contrast, neoliberal expertise has been used to justify the disinvestment of other areas. The residents of the zip code 48217 have experienced the negative consequences of many planning initiatives typically viewed by development professionals as being for the greater good. Local infrastructure disinvestment, highway construction and industrial expansion have been justified as collateral damage on local scale but with benefits to the society at large; they raise, however, concerns about environmental justice for the adjacent neighborhood, that is inhabited by a mostly (80%) Black population (U.S Census 2016). This chapter details the development climate in 48217 that consists of government-backed expansion of private industry and the strong history of local activism that has provided services and political resistance in the context of active disinvestment of the neighborhood.

This chapter begins with an overview of planning initiatives in the neighborhood, and their role in informing the political approach of community groups and residents resisting industrial expansion and disinvestment in 48217 today. These projects, and the continuation of the capitalist rationale that has allowed for their completion, exists today and results in a general lack of resources and public amenities in the area. It can also be seen in the issuance of additional industrial permits that allow facilities to pollute, despite existing air quality and health concerns in the area. Following this
description of historical and current development strategies, this chapter will then analyze the discursive practices that have been implemented to rationalize such actions. Finally, this chapter will discuss acts of community resistance to expertise that favors industrial expansion. This will shed light on the discursive practices used by the residents of 48217 to defy the disinvestment and environmental injustices inflicted on their community.

A NEIGHBORHOOD KNOWN by a ZIP CODE

The origins of the unusual practice of calling a neighborhood by its zip code were described in several different ways by residents, and serve as an illustration of the history of resistance in the community. While one resident felt that calling the neighborhood 48217 was dehumanizing and disrespectful, others shared more empowering origin stories for the naming. One resident explained that the name came after the construction of the interstate that divided the zip code into two parts. As a highly disruptive act that was affecting communities of color across the country, residents of the zip code resisted by calling themselves 48217, indicating solidarity and that they would not be divided. The resistance to the physical division of the zip code was also described in relation to racialized gerrymandering in the area; one resident explained that for a time, the zip code was represented by different members of congress in what they felt was an act of voter suppression. Several residents described the move to call the community by its zip code as a reaction to what they felt was their exclusion from other areas of Southwest Detroit. Residents felt that when they were lumped into other areas of the predominantly Latino Southwest, they became even further neglected as they lacked representation of their distinct culture and history (other manifestations of this dynamic will be described in more depth later). Understanding the naming of 48217 as a discursive practice in itself helps to frame the resistance to planning practices throughout the history of the community outlined in the following sections.
HISTORICALLY RACIALIZED DISINVESTMENT in 48217

In what many middle-aged and senior residents of the zip code described as a close-knit community when they grew up, the social fabric of 48217 in the 1950s and 1960s was looked back on fondly. With a strong, Black, middle class, 48217 was believed by residents to be one of the first areas of the city that allowed Black homeownership. One resident described a strong community that collectively raised children and looked out for one another. A community leader said:

“…you want to talk about a tight knit community, it really was growing up there…we didn’t know what a wonderful childhood we had, and we really did. You know, when you look back on it. You know, they talk about now the school systems being horrible. I didn’t see that. I had teachers who cared and you knew they cared. It was a collaborative effort with the parents as well. You know, back then, education was a priority in our community” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

Although situated in the context of a tumultuous time with regards to racialized violence and oppression in the city, many residents old enough to remember this era, look back on a strong community with shared values. Memories of Black owned businesses that flanked the main streets in the neighborhood and beautiful housing stock dominated childhood memories, despite the awareness of environmental degradation and poor air quality due to adjacent industries. Over the subsequent decades, 48217 was confronted with planning policies that many residents felt represented an intentional and racialized dismantling of the social structure of their community. The following sections describe these policies and how they fragmented the community both geographically and economically, making way for more intense industrial uses. Further, these sections help to frame the current struggles in the community as a continuation of racialized violence and exclusion.
48217 is one of the many communities in Detroit racially defined by the arrival of Black Southerners during the second great migration (1941-1970), lured by the promise of work opportunities and freedom from Jim Crow policies. This era is significant in the construction of race politics in Detroit, as European ethnic enclaves became less homogenized, while simultaneously, large numbers of new Black Detroiters arrived from the South. Thomas Sugrue (2005) explains that in this context, “Residents of Detroit’s white neighborhoods abandoned their ethnic affiliations and found new identity in their whiteness” (22). Though not legally bound, elements of the Jim Crow South followed arriving Black residents to the highly segregated and racially tense city. This oppressive cultural context was described by many residents of 48217, a population that is today comprised largely of the children of the second great migration.

The struggle of Black families in 48217 at the time of the second great migration, many of whom were supported through jobs in local industries, was very much alive in the memories of residents. Looking back on her parents’ experience in the 1950s, one resident said, “I now focus on how much of a challenge it really was for them to provide for their families and go [work] somewhere where they weren’t really welcome, and deal with that pressure, and come home, and try and make sure their family [was taken care of]” (interview, Detroit, 2016). Many residents recalled the residual spatial effects of segregation. In the memories of their childhood were cognitive maps of where White children played and where they spent their time. Some recalled specific dividing lines that separated them from the adjacent White parts of town. On a drive around the neighborhood, one resident recalled, “This here is the dividing line, Pepper Creek. We used to catch frogs, tadpoles, you know, boy stuff. We knew if we crossed this line, we were likely to get our asses kicked, and the other way around too, if they crossed over” (interview, Detroit, 2016). Another resident recalled, “If
you crossed Outer Drive, then you automatically, you used to get pulled over. For no reason, just for crossing Outer Drive and being a Black person in a car. But then, they couldn’t come on our side. If they were riding a bike or walking down the street, they would get beat up” (interview, Detroit, 2015). As children and teenagers, many viewed segregation as more of an innocuous fact of life than a problematic policy engineered to ensure racial tension and mutual aggression.

The boundaries created by segregation are still very much engrained in the geography of Detroit-adjacent Downriver communities. Some residents were able to recount the specific streets, railroads and other features that separated and continue to divide White areas from Black areas in the region. When the residents’ descriptions of the racial dividing lines are mapped with the distribution of Black and White Detroiters today, we see that effects of segregation policies, though officially abolished, are still strongly intact decades later (see figure 12). These memories help to explain the deep understanding of the racialized geography of the city in the community’s current organizing efforts to resist developments based partially on their identity as Black Detroiters.
Urban Policies Furthering Fragmentation in the Community

Building on this context of racialized geography, residents described multiple planning policies that made them feel as if the city and its industrial partners were systematically dismantling their community. According to an historian with the Michigan Department of Transportation working on a project in 48217, beginning in the 1940s, the city’s unofficial policy was to not invest further in residential infrastructure in the area, in effect passively changing the land uses in the area to be more welcoming to industrial expansion than to the community. This is corroborated by city plans of the 50s that project no new investment in parks, schools or public safety, as well as the 1970 urban design plan that fails to include the zip code within the city’s boundaries at all (City of Detroit 1970; City of Detroit Planning Commission 1950) (see figures 13-14).
**Figure 13:** The 1950 master plan of the city shows 48217 comprised of industrial areas (blue) directly abutting residential areas (yellow) (source: Detroit Master Plan: The Official Comprehensive Plan for the Development and Improvement of Detroit as Approved by the Mayor and the Common Council).

**Figure 14:** The 1970 urban design concept for the city addresses development along the Detroit riverfront. On the far left of the image, the plan is cut off right where 48217 starts on the west side of the Rouge River (source: Detroit 1990: An Urban Design Concept for the Inner City).
Residents recall the air quality problems associated with manmade Zug Island, a steel mill in close proximity to neighborhoods, and the pollution caused by the nearby River Rouge Ford plant, the largest plant in the world at the time it was built (Galster 2014). They described corrosion and particles coating cars and homes, as well as the health effects that accompanied them. The following decades brought further industrial expansion, including the establishment of Marathon Oil, Detroit Salt Mines, asphalt companies, AK Steel and a coal powered energy plant among many others. Air quality regulations have since been drastically restricted by environmental agencies in a broader trend of environmental awareness since the 1960s. However, air quality still presents dramatic health risks for residents of 48217.

A series of planning projects created a geography that increasingly fragmented 48217 and segregated it from the rest of Detroit. As mentioned previously, the construction of Interstate 75 in the 1970s bisected the neighborhood and displaced residents. At the time of its construction, residents recalled that I-75 separated the zip code into two sections: Oakwood Heights, that was primarily low-income and White, and Boynton a primarily Black and middle class neighborhood. In more recent decades, expansion of Marathon Oil, from refinery expansions to its development of tank farms for the storage of petroleum, have been a point of contention, mobilizing residents and community groups against them. In 2008, the industrial expansion was so imposing on the homes of adjacent residential communities that Marathon bought out the part of the zip code known as Oakwood (Gallagher 2011b; Lam 2010a). However, this area of the zip code was largely White, and many residents saw Marathon’s buying out of White families in the area as providing inadequate compensation to Black families, whose property values have also been drastically decreased due to the expansion of the refinery and other industries. This was especially contentious in the eyes of some due to the high
rates of compensation for the homes; residents of Oakwood Heights received a minimum purchase price of $50,000 for homes generally valued around $15,000 (see figure 15) (Lynch 2014).

Figure 15: The largely razed area of 48217, Oakwood that was bought out by Marathon.

Along with the construction of I-75, several other geographic features isolate 48217 from the rest of the city, creating dangerous conditions with regards to its proximity to noxious industries. Two bridges connect 48217 to the rest of Detroit on surface streets: the Fort Street Bridge and the Jefferson Bridge (see figure 16). For several years, both bridges were broken, cutting off access to other areas of Detroit. In the winter of 2015, the Fort Street Bridge was repaired after nearly three years out of commission, and in the summer of 2016 the Jefferson Bridge was repaired several years after it was accidently lowered onto a passing freighter (Ramirez 2016). The slow reconstruction of these vital pieces of transportation infrastructure further isolated the community, and sent yet another message that the zip code was not high priority for public funds.
Figure 16: Isolated from the rest of Detroit by Interstate 75, the Rouge River (with non-functioning lift bridges from 2013–2016) and indirectly by the Detroit River, 48217 and neighboring communities bare the brunt of health impacts from heavily polluting industries like power, steel and oil.

An additional source of geographic isolation, a railroad that services local industry to the north restricts the flow of traffic going in and out of the zip code to other parts of the city. A riverfront community, 48217 is bounded by the Detroit River to the south. The danger this geography poses for residents, caused by the presence and expansion of industry, is significant, not least because it drastically compromises access for first responders in emergency situations. In one emergency situation where access was restricted, a resident explained, “we think they [died], because there was a bad accident on 75, the railroad tracks were blocked by a train, and the doggone [lift] bridge was up” (interview, Detroit, 2016). A city official described the risk I-75 posed while the lift bridges were still
unrepaired: “every day there’s at least one accident on that bridge and a couple of times, it’s been
bad enough to close off that 75 bridge…I think a few times they’ve literally been stuck there for
hours and they couldn’t leave their community” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

Although today the lift bridges have been restored, providing more connectivity to Detroit and
surrounding communities, residents are still put in danger by occasional explosions and spills in the
industrial areas. Today, there is no official evacuation plan for the community, despite 48217
residents advocating for one. This represents to residents a significant disregard on the part of the
city for their health and safety, especially since surrounding municipalities of Melvindale, Ecorse and
River Rouge have long established evacuation routes. In these senses, 48217 is geographically more
cohesive with the Downriver communities. For this reason, many residents note that their
community organizing efforts find more partnerships with groups in the Downriver communities
than those in other parts of Southwest Detroit. Interviews revealed the distrust and alienation
garnered through decades of racialized policy and planned obsolescence in 48217 in favor of the
expansion of industrial infrastructure has solidified the community’s cultural and geographic bond to
neighboring municipalities.

Forgotten

Residents and community leaders complained that funding being used to revitalize other areas of the
city, such as the Neighborhood Stabilization Program and the Hardest Hit Fund, were not
distributed to the 48217 community². Instead of indeed prioritizing the “Hardest Hit” areas, the

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² The Neighborhood Stabilization Program allocates federal funds through the Department of Housing and Urban
Development to urban areas to aid with abandonment and foreclosure (“NSP: Neighborhood Stabilization Program -
HUD Exchange” 2016). The US Department of Treasury’s Hardest Hit fund allocated funding towards foreclosure
prevention and neighborhood stabilization (“Hardest Hit Fund” 2016). In the case of Detroit, a city with a high need for
blight removal, a special exception was made to use the funding for demolition as well.
map shows that despite the city publicly reporting Southwest Detroit as a target zone for funding, a majority of the addresses in Southwest Detroit receiving funding in 2014 were on the other side of the Rouge River from 48217, explaining the frustration of community members in interviews (“Hardest Hit Strategic Plan” 2016) (see figures 17 and 19). This area, known as Mexicantown, is widely considered to be a vibrant, up-and-coming neighborhood, by no means the worst blighted in the city, according to the Detroit Blight Task Force Report (Gilbert, Price, and Smith 2014) (see map of blighted properties in figure 11 in the previous chapter). In the most current iteration of demolition funding, the areas receiving Hardest Hit Funding have expanded to previously neglected neighborhoods (see figure 18).
Figure 17: Map of the distribution of Hardest Hit Funding by demolitions from the Detroit Land Bank Authority; very few demolitions took place in 48217 at the time the interviews took place. The program is currently being expanded to include areas not initially targeted for demolition (source: Detroit Land Bank Authority).
Figure 18: Current Detroit Land Bank Authority map of areas receiving Hardest Hit Funding (source: Detroit Land Bank Authority).
Figure 19: Burned down homes showed to me by a resident. He explained the dangers of fires in abandoned properties that they are unable to get funding to address.

In addition to a lack of public funding, community members along with representatives of non-profits operating in other areas of Southwest Detroit described a lack of non-profit interest in serving 48217. A main reason cited by non-profit staff for the hesitance to pursue non-profit work in the area was the lack of prospects in terms of investment return in this highly industrialized area with lowering land values. The lack of public investment in schools and recreation centers has closed the Kemeny Recreation Center, a place of social and cultural significance to the community, and has reduced the number of schools to one elementary school. High schoolers must go to schools in the neighboring Ecorse or River Rouge municipalities. Some residents feel that this disinvestment is a way of intentionally fragmenting and diminishing their community. One community leader explained, “if you’re not putting any resources or anything to attract young families, then you’re saying, let it die. When you hold out on the rec center, let it die. When do you don’t put any money into a school or you close the majority of the schools, you’re almost saying that, strategically” (interview, Detroit, 2016). Speaking to this exclusion from public and non-profit investment in
development and residential amenities, one resident said “it always stops…it never crosses over the bridge” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

This historical backdrop of planning policies that have been imposed on the 48217 community have disenfranchised and dismantled the social fabric of the zip code. A strong theme in the interviews in this geographically segregated and often excluded from funding community, was a sense that 48217 was “forgotten” by the rest of the city. One resident described a feeling of abandonment with regards to the city government, “We often get forgotten about out here…I think that our situation out here in 48217 and River Rouge and Ecorse is very distinct, and it's very unique, and I think that the city of Detroit has neglected 48217 which ultimately affects the entire Tri-City neighborhood of River Rouge, Ecorse and Southwest Detroit” (phone interview, 2016). Some commented that due to its isolation from the rest of the city, other Detroiter's are often unaware that 48217 was part of Detroit, and that that was reflected in the lack of media coverage. What little coverage exists often associates the zip code with Marathon Oil, instead of the community. Simply put, one resident said, “we’re forgotten” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

48217 as the OBJECT of EXPERTISE TODAY

What was described by many of the residents who grew up in the neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s as a close and supportive community now experiences deep shifts in its social fabric. The deterioration of environmental quality and the disinvestment in amenities worries many residents, who feel that the accompanying criminal activity, blight and lack of opportunities for young people in the community are effects of such changes. With a backdrop of planning initiatives, described by residents as harmful, this history has played a strong role in the community’s understanding of race in decision-making as well as the feeling that business is prioritized over their health and wellbeing.
As a result of this historic context, this research found a high level of suspicion of both government and business initiatives among community groups and individuals. This suspicion, built by problematic and even dishonest development strategies on the part of the city, is visible in the continuation of planning policies that are met with community resistance.

*Kemeny Center Renovation and Opportunities for Young People*

One such example has been the plans for reopening the Kemeny Recreation Center, a staple of many residents’ childhoods. In the context of few public amenities and disinvestment of public schools in the area that were economically rationalized through the Emergency Manager Law, residents felt a sense of urgency in reopening the center that had been closed due to its deterioration (see figures 20-22). They felt that their children were in danger without opportunities for constructive activities. Without a place to go after school or being able to participate in activities that create community among children and teenagers, some feared that young people would turn to crime and violence as so many others had. At a community group meeting, the coach of a local little league baseball team that used to play at the center said of the urgency for restoration and athletics programs to the children, “Guess what happened to the kids that can’t play basketball? They’re out on the block right now…12, 13, 14 year olds selling heroin” (author’s notes). With these concerns, the reconstruction of the recreation center, promised by the city, was central to development discussions among residents and community groups.
Figure 20: The front of Kemeny Recreation Center.

Figure 21: The backside of Kemeny Recreation Center.

Figure 22: Baseball diamond at Kemeny Recreation Center.
Over the course of my fieldwork in Detroit, it seemed that at each meeting of a prominent community group, discussions about the renovation of the Kemeny Center were based on a smaller and smaller budget compared to what was initially promised by the city. Simultaneously, the increase in construction demand created by large amounts of development happening in Downtown, Midtown and other repopulating areas of the city, had increased the cost of the new recreation center. At the beginning of my research, residents looked forward to a brand new facility with a swimming pool. In the end, these plans were reduced to minimally remodeling the existing building with the possibility of re-landscaping for the baseball diamond on the grounds of the center. The initial price tag guaranteed $9 million for construction; towards the end of my research, this was reduced to a budget of $6 million, in addition to the limits posed by increasing construction costs. This reduction was contentious among residents negotiating with the city. Some argued that the question of whether the community should accept the less ambitious but seemingly fundable new design for the center became a question of dignity over access to amenities.

Further Shifts to Industrial Land Uses

In addition to the tendency for the Detroit Future City framework to frame development interests in favor of Downtown and Midtown as discussed in the previous chapter, the document’s effects resonated in the 48217 neighborhood as well. Continuing what has been a long-term shift towards industrialization in the area, Detroit Future City’s vision converts part of 48217 to a green buffer zone that would accommodate growing industrial operations. Densely populated residential areas were rezoned as the previously discussed “green residential” typology, a land use prescribed as an antidote for “areas in which vacant and underutilized land and defunct industrial building stock provide the material for innovative residential environments”. This new landscape typology would “transform existing land vacancy into integrated landscapes, providing recreational, ecological, and
productive functions” (Detroit Future City 2015, 96). Detroit Future City has come under scrutiny by scholars for its plan to shrink the footprint of areas receiving city services, calling for additional investment into areas already experiencing renewed interest in investment. Further, its suggestion to alter the land uses of areas with high vacancy to industrial zones and green space was found to strongly correlate with areas with the highest Black and low-income populations, pointing to a necessarily racialized and class-biased vision for the city (Clement and Kanai 2015). This continues a trend of disinvestment characteristic of neoliberal governance, where disinvestment is justified by economic rationale calling for a rollback of basic services, while other areas of the city experience development through public-private partnerships. In light of this proposal for the further disinvestment in services in the zip code, the release of the Detroit Future City framework was not received favorably by many 48217 residents.

A leader of a community group felt the agenda of the framework and its support from the current mayoral administration, who was elected under the slogan “every neighborhood has a future” was exclusive by design (Duggan 2016). With regards to consideration for the 48217 community, he said:

“[The Mayor’s Office] determined the narrative, is what goes on. And it always is favorable to what they want to do, their outcomes. Every neighborhood has a future. They didn’t say a good future. Some neighborhoods have a bad future. Some of you guys ain’t getting shit, ok…It’s a framework, it’s a guide. No. You’re using that to disenfranchise” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

In addition to the feeling of disenfranchisement of residents from the release of Detroit Future City, the footprint of industry, specifically Marathon Oil, has continued to encroach on residential areas of 48217. The increasingly industrialized neighborhood not only impacts the land area occupied by heavy industrial uses, but increases truck traffic, and has required public funding to accommodate infrastructural challenges associated with it. Above all, the industrialization of the area has been a concern for residents whose health has become extremely precarious due to poor air quality (see figure 23).
Figure 23: The Marathon Petroleum plant adjacent to residential areas of 48217.

Industrial Pollution and Emissions Permits

A final and perhaps most significant element of current policy detrimental to 48217 is the emissions increases requested by operations like AK Steel and Marathon Oil. A substantial tax base, despite receiving staggering amounts of tax abatements ($175 million in abatements versus $18 million in paid taxes in the case of Marathon), led residents to express feelings that the city caters to highly polluting industries to get them to stay in Detroit (Guillen 2014). In addition to the tax abatements, residents were frustrated at the leniency of environmental regulatory agencies, and concerned about what these industrial facilities were doing to their health. The area has been in non-attainment in regards to the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) allowable levels of sulfur dioxide (SO$_2$) since 2013, and the health effects of it and other toxins such as heavy metals, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), poly aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and fine particulate matter (PM$_{2.5}$) are points of concern for environmental and health professionals (“DEQ - Sulfur Dioxide (SO2)” 2016). In a few instances, politicians or representing government agencies spoke out against the actions of other government agencies. One such individual is the Executive Director of the Detroit

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3 AK Steel is located in Dearborn, Michigan, an adjacent municipality. However, as an air quality issue, emissions permits are a concern for residents of the region who resist emissions increases, regardless of where they live.

4 “Non-attainment” refers to the status of being over the legal limit of a given toxin relative to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). With regards to the prevalence of SO$_2$ non-attainment, 48217 is one of two areas in the state of Michigan that do not meet the air quality standards set forth by the EPA (“DEQ - Sulfur Dioxide (SO2)” 2016)
Health Department, Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, who publicly spoke out about the health effects related to pollution in the area, including renal failure, cardiovascular disease, asthma and cancer among others. However, according to residents and scholars working in the zip code, emissions increases are consistently approved by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) (author’s notes). It should also be mentioned that in the recent climate of fiscal conservativism and privatization of the current gubernatorial administration, a central value in the mission of the department is to “support a vibrant economy” and to “expand their role in economic development” (“DEQ Mission” 2016). Residents expressed frustration both in public hearings and interviews that despite being catered to by the city and state through tax abatements and emissions increases, the local industry does little to offer jobs to residents of 48217. At a Marathon Community Action Partnership meeting, a resident brought up this discrepancy, and was told by a Marathon representative that Detroit residents who apply typically “lack the skills” necessary.

Most recently, as part of the EPA’s effort to remove SO₂ from gasoline in order to reduce emission of the toxin nationwide, Marathon Oil was prompted to request an increase in SO₂ emissions locally. This is rationalized by describing the detrimental local effects as collateral damage for improved environmental impacts in the aggregate. The public hearings around this permit request garnered much resistance and attention from 48217 residents and surrounding communities. At one public hearing, attendees reported that six hundred people from 48217 and surrounding communities attended; at a later hearing that I attended, there were at least two hundred. This request to increase emissions coincided with the height of Flint’s water crisis, also understood by many as the result of MDEQ’s economic rationalization of public health issues. The following sections outline the discursive practices employed by industry and government agencies to pursue this expansion, as well as the resistance of 48217 residents.
EXPERT PRACTICES in 48217

In recent decades of neoliberal restructuring of city governance in Detroit, the economic rationale of many city supported development initiatives has had to confront the objections of communities like 48217. In 48217, these complaints are met with community engagement in development processes, namely through public hearings and meetings to gather input about plans for future development. These forms of outreach can be understood in terms of what Theodore and Brenner (2005) describe as the tendency for neoliberal governance to respond to local histories and politics to carry out economically rationalized goals. Residents attending sessions held by various firms and government entities expressed distrust towards community outreach and engagement efforts. In other words, the historical backdrop of disenfranchisement through the state-backed expansion of industry created a tension and suspicion from the community. This is a point of view that needed to be addressed in order for development objectives to be realized. However, many residents view these events as token offers, arguing that community engagement was only nominally the goal. They distrusted what were presented as sincere attempts to listen to the community because of history and the way the meetings were conducted. These various meetings, facilitated by experts in fields like urban design, economic development, and business accounting are constructed in a way that elevates the status of the expert by design. Specifically, this was done by reframing who constitutes ‘community’, controlling the format of interactions and restricting access to information through intimidation.

Community Sample Bias

In community engagement efforts, it became quite unclear what parameters experts used to define ‘community’. How and if they were reaching individuals who were both residents of 48217 and affected by development decisions differed by organization. In the case of Community Action to
Promote Healthy Environments (CA-PHE), a University of Michigan initiative focusing on environmental justice predominantly in Southwest Detroit, ‘community’ consisted of non-profit representatives and researchers from regional universities. During discussions, my comments were also included as community input due to what I believe was the assumption that as a doctoral student in an urban planning program, I must have expertise on environmental justice. Having introduced myself as a student from UCLA, I can be sure that my inclusion was not due to a misunderstanding that I was a community member.

Another example are the practices in Marathon Community Action Partnership Meetings (CAP), that were part of a requirement in the settlement of a class action lawsuit brought on by the community to seek restitution for adverse health effects of Marathon’s operations. These meetings were intended to keep the community informed of the activities at Marathon, and provide a platform to voice concerns. In the case of CAP meetings, ironically, a handful of residents were allowed to attend this community meeting by invitation only. However, for the most part, attendees were representatives from Marathon and staff from municipal agencies. Each of these community members was permitted to bring one guest to each meeting, provided that the guest got approval from public relations staff at Marathon. The Fort-Rouge Gateway project, an initiative that mobilizes a coalition of environmental groups and local industry to create green spaces for 48217 and surrounding communities had a similar disconnect, though it appeared not for lack of trying to engage with the community more broadly. While they attended community meetings regularly to present their work and garner community support, only a liaison that reported back to community members was regularly part of their meetings. In some rare instances, these groups entered the space of community groups to present their proposals, but these scenarios were certainly not the norm for 48217 residents’ interactions with development experts.
Most notable in the interviews with community members was skepticism towards the community engagement process for Detroit Future City, and what was felt to be a handpicking of docile community members to attend meetings. Overall, the framework itself reports having “connected” with Detroiter 163,000 times through various means including online interactions, through podcasts, presenting at existing community group meetings and meetings of their own (Detroit Future City 2015, 322). In comparison to other Detroit communities, such meetings happened much less for 48217 residents (see figure 24). At these meetings, the selection of community members thought to represent the concerns and aspirations of 48217 did not always sit well with residents. One community activist and resident recalled her role as more of a liaison, appointed by a community group she belongs to, than an actual contributor:

“They went and got grass tops, who were business owners and politicians, people who were disconnected from the communities and put them on all the boards. These people were saying, you’re an ambassador. Ambassador to what? A lady said, you’re an ambassador to the community. You go back and tell your people in [the block club]. So we were sitting in separate assigned area, we were the peanut gallery. Community residents were at the meetings but we couldn’t speak. The public couldn’t speak. These people didn’t even know why they were there in the Detroit Works Project” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

Another resident that attended the meetings that informed the Detroit Future City Framework had a similar feeling that the voice of the community was absent. Regarding the presentation of preconceived initial plans for the framework to the community, he said, “we went to those meetings and I see all these fancy ideas come out and I looked at the room and I said wait a minute, where are the people in the community?” (phone interview, 2016). Others experienced more direct silencing of their voices as community members. A local resident and activist described his experience at a

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5 The term “grass tops” refers to individuals who are locally influential figures that may serve as an amicable liaison between a community they belong to and others.

6 The Detroit Future City framework was the result of the findings of the Detroit Works Project, which was the name the community knew it by during the community engagement phase.
meeting that was meant to engage the community, “how are you going to make a plan for the city of Detroit, and you don’t include none of the community people? Eventually, which was the case with me, they didn’t let me in and said I was an obstruction. They put me out. The lady in charge said I was an obstructionist. That I was keeping them from progressing” (phone interview, 2016). In addition to feeling that some participants were handpicked by organizers of the meetings, some residents felt that there were inadequate opportunities to voice their opinions, and were even removed from meetings.
**Figure 24:** A map from the Detroit Future City Framework showing little to no engagement sites in 48217 (the southernmost tip of the city) (source: Detroit Future City Framework).
Overall, the act of defining the community in their own terms was consistent across community engagement efforts by experts aiming to intervene through various development projects in 48217. Their use of community liaisons with amicable relationships to the community, or ‘grass tops,’ as one resident described them, speaks to the limited engagement with average community members. Whether done intentionally as a discursive practice so that they could claim community support, or merely to enhance efficiency of meetings, this trend calls into question the depth of engagement done regarding important community developments. Further, the stifling and ejection of community members in the setting of a Detroit Future City meeting suggests that the participants in meetings were selected strategically in order to avoid conflict and possible resistance to plans. In the case of Marathon, a company with considerable public relations challenges with the community, the requirement of approval by staff allowed them to deny access to individuals. This allowed the corporation to still publicly claim that they were engaging with the community and considering their input in development plans despite restrictions placed on their attendance.

As Agrawal (2005) suggests, grouping or categorizing of information, or in this case, sources of information, can be considered a political and economic strategy by experts whose knowledge is typically considered objective or incontrovertible. In these cases, this was taken a step further, however. Here, not only was the information collected in meetings that were framed through a biased selection of participants deemed to constitute the ‘community’, but the political agency of such participants became compromised as a result. In saying that they were involving the community in their business decisions as an act of goodwill, they were using a manipulated definition of community that suited the advancement of their goals.
Further, this tactic of defining who makes up ‘community’ allows experts to ignore existing politics in the tight knit neighborhood, rich with history and political activism. The disregard for, and circumvention of complex local politics in order to present development plans in a streamlined fashion is an example of the adaptation of neoliberal expertise to local conditions as described by Theodore and Brenner (2005). Similar to Smith’s (1996) perspective on the urban frontier as a place understood as devoid of existing communities or politics, the interactions between development experts and the 48217 community seems to promote assumptions of a lack of agency and political history in the zip code. In an area with high levels of distrust towards new development, particularly when involved with local industry and government entities, these experts attempt to frame their initiatives politically in a way that pacifies this long-standing tradition of community opposition. Taking the idea of the urban frontier one step further, the presentations in such engagement meetings often rewrite the challenges and goals of the community through the lens of industry; this reframing project and its specific discursive practices are outlined in the following section.

*Framing the Conversation in Public Meetings*

The presentation of expert support or contestation of development projects was contingent on the format of public meetings that many times framed issues in terms of economic rationale, and turned attention away from quality of life concerns. Community members commented most on the format of Community Action Partnership (CAP) meetings and public hearings that felt as though they were designed to downplay the voices of residents. Apart from the power differential that results from their status as experts (including finance experts, engineers and spokespeople for industry), technical experts developed the agendas and were in control of moderating these meetings. The format of these meetings set the stage for the dissemination of technocratic rhetoric by experts. The agendas of public meetings organized by both industry and the MDEQ allotted one item to public comment,
allowing the dialogue to first be framed by priority topics defined by industry representatives and employees from environmental regulation agencies (see figures 25). In the case of the public hearings held to consider the viability of Marathon’s request to the MDEQ to increase emissions, experts from Marathon and MDEQ were allotted time to present slideshows that argued in favor of the emissions increase. Following these presentations, politicians and health officials, appearing as authorities on the plight of the community, were allowed to speak and present their perspectives before the community was allowed to speak. This expert hierarchy that holds professional knowledge over that of the community whose perspectives were gleaned from personal experiences was a point of frustration for residents.
Figure 25: An agenda from a public hearing privileging expertise by allotting presentation time to particular individuals, and placing public comment at the end (source: City of Detroit).
In addition to the priority of expert opinions, community members were frustrated by the limitations placed on their speech that belittled them in subtle ways. These ways included placing them at the end of the hearing, limiting public comments to a minute and a half, and not letting them hold the microphone to speak. Further, MDEQ explains that they are generally only able to take action on comments that are “scientifically and legally supportable and defensible” in their permitting decisions, making many public comments based on personal hardship and lived challenges in the community difficult to consider (email correspondence, 2016). A resident and activist explained the suspicion towards politicians who they feel are incorrectly viewed as liaisons with the community in the context of the hearings that often led to emissions increases:

“And then they give [politicians] the utmost respect as community representatives, even though they don’t communicate with residents. And I have a problem with community members not being heard above politicians who don’t live this every day. I have a problem with the community not being respected for who they are, as the ones who are suffering from the pollution that should be heard. They have this protocol going on. When MDEQ comes into the building, they take charge and they facilitate. So they tell you what you can and can’t do, how long you have to speak. That’s outrageous… Then what they do is people who came in after you that are the elected officials, they give them a VIP status… They said we have protocol. I said, what is protocol? You’ve got this senior that’s been here since 6 o’clock, you’ve got this elected official that’s come in at 7:40, but you’re going to take that elected official and put him before that senior. I said shame on you, shame on you, shame on you” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

For several residents, the ability for experts, including politicians, who were speaking on their behalf as policy experts, to skip the public comment line was quite denigrating and disrespectful. The presence of local politicians at public hearings represents an instance where government agencies and representatives are not a monolithic entity that consistently speak on behalf of industry. It is common for local politicians, who are often residents of the zip code or neighboring areas and rely on votes from the community, to actively speak out against the actions of the governor or higher-level state agencies, like MDEQ.
The information that was presented by experts in their slideshows both in public hearings and at CAP meetings set the topics for what would be discussed in the public comments. These issues were often described using very technocratic and quantitative language that some residents were concerned was not accessible to a layperson. The curating of this information was even considered dishonest by many. For example, both Marathon and the MDEQ presented data on SO$_2$ emissions in 48217, arguing that an emissions increase was sustainable by showing that they had consistently decreased emissions of the toxin in recent years (see figures 26-27).
Four facts to keep in mind

In response to a memorandum from President Barack Obama, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued new rules requiring the sulfur content of all gasoline in the U.S. to be reduced to 10 parts per million (ppm) from the current 30 ppm. This rule is known as the Tier 3 rule, and we must comply by 2017. As a result, we will install new equipment at our refinery in Detroit. Although this project may result in a small increase in sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emissions, we are working on other projects that will reduce our SO₂ emissions by much more than the Tier 3 Fuels Project increase.

1) We’re requesting an increase.

In our permit application to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), we’re required to calculate the “worst-case scenario” for how much a project could increase our emissions. Based on this, we’ve requested a 22 tons-per-year increase in our SO₂ emissions. However:

- 16½ tons of this increase reflects required adjustment to existing sources in the permit process, and isn’t associated with the project.
- 5½ tons are the maximum emissions from the Tier 3 Fuels Project

The actual SO₂ emissions increase from this project is anticipated to be 2 to 5 tons per year. And keep in mind that the Detroit refinery emits only about 1 percent of the 16,000 tons per year of SO₂ in a two-mile radius of the refinery.

2) But we’re reducing more than increasing.

At the same time we’re implementing the Tier 3 Fuels Project, we have other projects in the works that will reduce SO₂ emissions from the refinery. These reductions will more than offset the increase we’re requesting from the MDEQ. This chart shows the decreases we anticipate over the next few years.

Figure 26: A handout from an MDEQ public air quality emissions permit hearing compiled by Marathon arguing that emissions increases have consistently approved over the last several years (source: Marathon Petroleum).
3) We’ve reduced emissions. A lot.

Marathon Petroleum Corp. invests hundreds of millions of dollars in technology to enable us to produce fuels and other products more cleanly than ever before. Our efforts in Detroit have dramatically reduced our emissions over the past 15 years, even as we have increased the amount of crude oil we process. This chart shows our significant reduction in emissions of six “criteria air pollutants” that are tracked and regulated by the EPA.

4) We’re a relatively small source of emissions in the area.

Manufacturing is an energy-intensive process, and involves emissions. Manufacturing the fuels used by millions of people every day is no different. Marathon Petroleum Corp. works hard to keep its emissions as low as possible as we perform this critical work. In this pie chart, you can see how our Detroit refinery emissions compare to other industries within a two-mile radius of the refinery. This is based on the latest data available from the Michigan Air Emissions Reporting System.

Figure 27: A handout from an MDEQ public air quality emissions permit hearing compiled by Marathon arguing that emissions increases have consistently approved over the last several years (source: Marathon Petroleum).
However compelling the graphics shown in figures 26 and 27 may seem, it didn't speak to the cumulative effects of SO₂ exposure over decades. Further, it did not measure the threat in combination with the many other toxins emitted by Marathon and other local industries that health officials feel are directly accountable for increased asthma and cancer rates. It is important to consider that the measurement and reporting of individual toxins on their own, separate from cumulative effects, is sufficient proof of compliance with MDEQ and EPA requirements for air quality standards. In this way, the regulations themselves are not written in a way that protects the community. An employee at a public agency explained the shortcomings of his agency in this regard, and how these can become very complex challenges for vulnerable communities:

“some feel that we fall short of expectations [in] that many air pollutants are regulated individually based on individual pollutant toxicity and health risks, while ambient air and public exposures typically involve complex mixtures. Furthermore, public sensitivity and vulnerability to pollutant exposures is affected by many other factors such as individual sensitivity and stresses, existing health conditions, diet and nutrition, life stages, medical care access, etc. We as regulators simply lack the scientific information and tools to account for all these potential variables in a quantitative way that could result in more stringent emission limits, and that can be frustrating for many of the public” (email correspondence, 2016).

Even though the agency is very aware that there are obvious and understandable limits to the forecasting of health risks, due in part to lack of available scientific information and lack of resources, data on single toxins and sources of emissions is reported without a disclaimer. Based on the information provided through these hearings, the public is left in the dark about the fact that they are only accounting partially for the dangers of poor air quality.

Much of the literature focuses on the technocratic and elitist language used by experts. This tactic is described as a way of protecting their status through excluding those not literate in technical jargon, as Carr (2010) and Abbott (1988) have suggested. However, this data suggests something more. In addition to using technocratic speech to support positions, the data found that experts supporting
industrial expansion in 48217 also used political and emotional appeals in their arguments. In the case of the CAP meeting, in light of Marathon’s initial framing of the issues, it became difficult for the community to do anything but respond directly to the information presented to them without being painted as adversarial, or even bullies. For example, at one point, when community members brought up health concerns they had for their families, they were met with this response from a Marathon spokesperson:

“Let me share a personal story with you. My father never lived near a refinery, and he died two years ago from lung cancer. My cousin has never lived near a refinery and he suffers from asthma. So, I’m really not comfortable getting into a discussion about cause and effect here” (author’s notes).

Even though health experts felt quite confident that there is a link between elevated asthma and cancer rates in 48217 and adjacent industry, this concern was deflected through the emotional appeal of relating personally. In another instance, where a community member brought up concerns about a proposed increase in emissions, the manipulative argument that the community relies on Marathon was made, when a spokesperson said, “Everybody here drove their cars here today. You’re all wearing clothing made from petroleum. Someone has got to make this product” (author’s notes). A few minutes later, when a resident continued a line of questioning about community benefits for 48217, one of the presenters cited the example of Robinson, Illinois, a community near one of their refineries that has been “nothing but supportive of Marathon” and that he “really doesn’t understand why Marathon has a disagreeable relationship with Southwest Detroit” (author’s notes).

These tactics manipulate the power dynamic where Marathon, as a corporation not only worth billions of dollars, but also backed by regulatory agencies, plays the victim momentarily. This is an interesting twist on a context that often uses technical rhetoric to render personal anecdotes and the plight of the community invalid by dismissing its emotional appeal. In accusing community members of being unreasonably disagreeable and vicious compared to other comparable
communities, or presumptuous in their views that industry can be blamed for poor health outcomes, Marathon deflects concerns based on personal hardships of residents, making industry look like it is being bullied (and not the other way around). For the most part, the literature understands neoliberal expertise to take on the form of technocratic, economically rational strategies as justification for the public support of private development (D. Harvey 2007b). This case illustrates something that neither the literature on political economy nor the literature on experts has explored in depth: the ability of experts under neoliberalism to adapt by utilizing political and emotional framing to deflect criticism about their technocratic rationale that is often seen as problematic.

*Expert Control of Information and Intimidation*

The experts’ ability to frame issues through emotional appeal in addition to economically rationalized rhetoric was evident in another tactic: control of information. In a few instances, the rhetoric and power dynamic behind expert discourse was shaped through the strict control of the release of information on the part of Marathon and government agencies that aim to protect the industry. In some ways, the company protected the dissemination of information they were presenting to the community. For example, slide shows presented at a CAP meeting were not available to the public, despite the fact that they had just been thoroughly explained during a ‘public’ meeting. At this same meeting, recording of the conversations was not permitted. A testament to the power of the experts in framing the broader dialogues about their institutions, as Boyer (2008) suggests, a privilege of such positions of expert power includes the ability to “police” and restrict the information they produce (43).

Physical protection of the plant from the public through intimidation was also a main aspect of this control of information. Though the refinery is visually obvious from public thoroughfares,
photography is expressly forbidden, even when done from public property. Since the refinery is an energy production facility on an international border, the Department of Homeland Security upholds this rule and investigates breaches. In one instance, a resident-activist told me about a time she had taken a few photos of the plant for her files, as she was interested in documenting the expansion of the plant. Several days later, she said the “secret service” showed up at her home, and interrogated her (phone interview, 2016). In my fieldwork, I had a similar experience. When taking photographs from a public bridge adjacent to the refinery, I was approached by a group of three security vehicles. They appeared suddenly, and one of the drivers put his window down, pointed at me, and yelled to another vehicle, “That’s her!” He looked at me and said ominously, “taking pictures of the plant is a no-no” before driving away with the rest of the cars. At that moment, I felt unsure and anxious about whether or not there would be legal ramifications. In another instance, a resident recalled that during a protest against the company, demonstrators were confronted by police, and told that their cars would be towed, despite the fact that they were legally parked on public property.

In the guise of homeland security, residents are asked to keep a distance from the plant for safety and to refrain from taking photographs, despite its physical imposition on the 48217 community. However, the purpose of this community surveillance does not seem like it could be a preventative measure for security, since pictures of the plant are already widely distributed. Apart from images of the plant circulated in Marathon’s mailings and literature for public consumption, a quick Google image search reveals dozens of pictures similar to what residents would have been able to take from public property (see figure 27). Further, Google maps clearly show aerial views of the refinery with no blurred areas for security (see figure 28). It would appear that these tense interactions with the community with regards to plant ‘security’ are less about safety and more about intimidation through
surveillance of the community. This represents a largely unexplored aspect of neoliberal expertise that employs law enforcement as an arm of state control to assist corporations to maintain their status of power and control.
Figure 28: A screen shot of a Google Image search, showing the abundance of imagery of the refinery, despite strict regulations on photography placed on residents (source: Google).
Figure 29: A screen shot showing a clear, aerial view of the refinery from Google Maps, again indicating an abundance of accurate imagery (source: Google).
RESISTING EXPERTISE

Though experts control many aspects of development in 48217 and Detroit on the whole, their economic rationale with questionable benefits to the community does not go unchecked by citizens. Many scholars aim to analyze resistance tactics by marginalized groups, and the way that they react to limiting conditions with ingenuity and resilience (Perlman 1980; Roy and AlSayyad 2004; Yiftachel 2009). Another broad body of literature addresses the practices of experts and their tactics for maintaining their social status (Corburn 2005; Easterly 2014; Murray Li 2007). However, neither of these bodies of literature does a thorough job of addressing how politically and socially marginalized communities resist expertise directly as individuals or through collective action. The literature on expertise has a strong focus on the power of the expert, implying that those with less social status are powerless, and without the organizational capacity to challenge such expertise. The ways that residents in 48217 challenge the authority of expertise paints a much different picture. This section describes the ways in which the 48217 community has developed strategies to counter economically rational expertise that they feel is harming the health of their community, as well as furthering their political disenfranchisement. Residents of 48217 have developed a sophisticated repertoire of political resistance through self-help, appeal to moral and ethical convictions, and by adapting to technocratic rationale themselves. Further, they have developed an understanding of such tactics and the nature of expert power that informs which tactics are used and when.

Resistence through Self-Provisioning

The fiscal austerity endemic to deindustrializing cities in decline has impacted 48217 severely, reducing access to basic necessities, namely public schools and emergency services (Peck and Whiteside 2016). Daily life in 48217 has changed in many ways throughout the decades, and has
been especially difficult in recent years. A strong theme in the data that I collected was the idea that residents had to ‘fight’ for everything. This included even basic amenities, like street lights, police patrols, and the removal of burned out homes, which residents believed was taking place more in other city neighborhoods than in theirs. On many occasions, it was noted by community members, that the residents of 48217 did not win the fight of getting the resources they needed. In some of these instances, they were required to rely on their strong sense of community and to make do on their own. In the cases of activities for children and teenagers as well as public safety, the community’s main forms of resistance to planned disinvestment consisted of developing what Kimberly Kinder (2016) refers to as ‘self-provisioning,’ with regards to failed city services.

One of the most important ways of defending the community, particularly its children, from the hardships of disinvestment is the creation of alternatives to typically state-sanctioned amenities. In some ways these practices, and the lack of resources from the city in terms of services, has allowed 48217 to stay insulated from some of the bigger economic shifts in the city. A resident-activist explains the lack of ramifications for the city’s bankruptcy:

“And you drive through certain blocks in our community, and you know, when I take people around and show them, they’re fascinated by the housing stock, the condition of the homes, the vibrancy of the community. With no help from the city. No help from the city. You know, we were talking the other day about what’s changed, since bankruptcy and all this other stuff that’s taken place…We were talking about, what’s different post-bankruptcy in our community?” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

After decades of worsening economic conditions, 48217 has taken matters into their own hands to provide services. The most pronounced issues the community has dealt with on their own involved the lack of youth programming and the lack of police patrols and emergency services that created security concerns for residents.
School closures and the worsening conditions that ultimately led to the closure of the Kemeny Recreation Center concerned residents deeply. Many worried about what opportunities their children had, and some had doubts about whether or not the younger generation would be lured into gang violence and narcotics dealing in the absence of such amenities. As a response, residents have created opportunities for children and teenagers. A 50-year-old institution in the neighborhood, the Rollercade, a roller rink, has served as a place for kids to spend their spare time in place of parks and recreation centers. Owned by a family in the neighborhood, the Rollercade is a trusted establishment, and has acted as a point of certainty among municipal disinvestment and worsening amenities. A resident described to me the importance of the roller rink as a community anchor that has kept young people from becoming involved with gangs or the drug trade (author’s notes). A member of the family that owns the Rollercade agreed, saying:

“It really is one of the only hopes that we have in this neighborhood…I always tell people we’re the neighborhood babysitter. Because we are. It’s the place where you know, all the kids in the neighborhood can come and they can stay from twelve noon on Saturday until possibly nine in the evening, and parents know that they’re safe and cared for in a way most people in communities look for” (phone interview, 2016).

Many recreation opportunities in other areas are available through schools. Residents commented that the devastation of the Detroit Public School system and school closures in the 48217 area in recent years have furthered their concern for their kids.

Now closed, the Kemeny Recreation Center served as an important community hub. The slow decay of the center, that many residents had fond memories of as a place where they could always go to play with other kids and participate in organized sports, was another effect of disinvestment encountered by the community. While the center was still open, residents used a room in the building to double as a library, an amenity that had long been absent from the neighborhood.
Relying on donations, community members set up a ‘Reading Corner,’ where kids could use computers and take books home to keep.

Today, even though the center is closed, the outdoor facilities are still used. As city maintenance of the center decreased, community members stepped in to make sure that the baseball fields were still usable. More than one resident said that they had mowed the grass at the center, when the city was unable to do so. With ever tightening budgets and many broken promises from the city when it comes to programming for children and teenagers, 48217 has reacted by providing these services, in whatever limited way they can, independent of the city.

The lack of police patrols and a feeling of increasing insecurity is another realm that 48217 resolved in part independently of the city. The lack of police patrols was central to the conversations in block club meetings and talks with residents. Some residents recalled the gradual diminishing of law enforcement and first responders in the area over their lifetimes. EMS and firefighters were once dispatched from 48217. Today, first responders dispatch from across the Rouge River. This was formerly complicated by the fact that both bridges providing access to the zip code for first responders were broken for several years, and were only recently restored (as discussed earlier). With the local police precinct across the Rouge River on the other side of Southwest Detroit, residents worried that emergency response times were too slow. Additional concerns arose about inadequate protection when the city lifted a requirement for first responders to reside in the communities they serve.

Built on the premise of strong social fabric of the neighborhood, residents address this lapse by remaining vigilant of their surroundings, knowing that law enforcement is spread thin in the area.
One resident pointed to the knowledge of what is going on in the neighborhood and the strong community ties as important in identifying perpetrators:

“Everybody knows everybody and everybody could look out for each other. If it’s a crime, we’re going to know about it, who did it, by the end of the day. We find out before the police who did it. You know, somebody gets shot, and it would be like, you know who did it. If somebody’s house gets broken into, they’re going to find out before the end of the week who did it. Maybe the same day” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

Others pointed to the importance of remaining vigilant as a protective strategy. Though the police are not on patrol in the area as often as the community would like, residents have notified them when they felt they, or elderly neighbors, were in danger. Some community members took matters directly into their own hands. One resident who is the leader of a block club in the neighborhood answers to calls of concerned residents. He described an incident where a neighbor called for help:

“I could hear in her voice that something was wrong. So I called my son and said hey, if I don’t call you in ten minutes, the bus went sideways. He said where are you going dad? I said, Mrs. [name] called me and I didn’t like what I heard in her voice. So, I grabbed my gun and I go over there, and had the police come and take care of it, because that’s the type of community it is. They know they can call and that I’m going to try and make something happen” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

These instances illustrate ways that the community has developed a vigilant culture as a response to the continued disinvestment of emergency response professionals in the area. Though not directed at the state specifically, these gestures still represent moments of resistance through perseverance and the realization of self-help by utilizing limited means and resolving to subsist in spite of municipal neglect. While these acts can be seen as indicative of the strength and resilience of the community, it is also important to recognize the role such acts play in neoliberalism. In the self-provisioning of services, communities provide amenities for themselves that have been denied due to the logic of austerity; these acts create inadvertent complicity with neoliberalism out of necessity.
Appeals to Morals and Ethics

In direct contrast to what are often the quantitative and technical accounts of experts with regards to economic development or air quality concerns in 48217, the residents’ accounts of personal stories of hardship and health disparity also represent a form of resistance (Polletta, Jasper, and Goodwin 2001). Many residents have told their stories to the media, in public hearings and in community meetings with development experts. A former state representative who represented the community for 6 years, explained that in 48217 there is a:

“…tremendous amount of knowledge and amazing power that they have in activism…my neighbors there, I think, are some of the most effective story tellers and messengers of what’s going on and I’m always completely humbled every time I go to another hearing, they’re still there fighting…I feel so exhausted sometimes, but they get up in the morning and they plan to come to that meeting and sometimes it takes them three hours to get called upon to actually speak and they wait to speak. I mean, it’s their livelihood” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

The community has developed a strong record of showing up in numbers to public hearings, city meetings and demonstrations to share their stories.

As mentioned previously, due to the format of these meetings by experts who often speak technically, residents must respond to the problems on the terms introduced by technical experts that set the scope and frame the issues for the meeting. As a way of resisting the presentation of challenges in the community through only numerical or technical data, residents share stories of illness in their families or firsthand accounts of quality of life issues. This is often done while acknowledging that the presentation of technical rhetoric by professionals is only part of the story, or even irrelevant, representing explicit resistance to technical expertise. In the public comments of a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) hearing, one resident said, “You spoke on January 6th about a pie chart you showed, but I didn’t hear you talk about how Marathon emissions choked my mother to death. She had emphysema, she never smoked. She had chronic
liver disease, she never drank. She had cancer, she had a myriad of things go wrong because we live on Patricia [Street], the first line of fire for all the Marathon stuff” (author’s notes). Resisting the use of statistical data and relying on experience was also a tactic of local politicians. A politician spoke at a permit hearing:

“I won’t speak on statistics, but I will speak on something that I know. As I was running for office this summer, knocking on doors in 48217, I remember being out of breath. I couldn’t breathe, and knocking on doors I remember a lot of residents that came to the door with breathing machines, that they had cancer and respiratory problems… I am willing to work with Marathon if they’re willing to work directly. However, if they are going to be harmful to the citizens of my district I cannot support it” (author’s notes).

While the overwhelmingly emotional appeal of these media and public hearing testimonies is a significant strategy, it should also be noted that sharing scientific data at public hearings was also encouraged by some. Prior to a public hearing for a proposed emissions increase, a resident encouraged the group to consider how their public comments are scientifically admissible. Residents were aware of the previously discussed limitations of considering personal experience or anecdote in that the MDEQ is only able to consider ‘scientific’ information. With this knowledge, some residents planned to write to the department during the comment period with what they felt were more objective claims.

In addition to this, as Polletta et al. (2001) suggest, residents often use emotional appeal to rally other residents and decision makers around their cause by drawing on a common identity. Residents spoke of hardship and disinvestment in 48217 relative to other challenges facing Black communities across the country that have garnered emotional appeal, specifically the Flint water crisis. It is important to note that during the time I conducted fieldwork, the media coverage and state response to the Flint water crisis had reached its peak. In many community meetings and interviews, residents viewed the conditions at Flint, that had prompted widespread and unanimous outrage, as a means to
get the story of environmental justice in their community taken seriously. With regards to attention to the 48217 community’s struggles being well overdue, one resident said, “We are Flint! We have been Flint!” (author’s notes). Drawing from the anger, sadness and myriad other emotions conjured by the shocking unraveling of the sordid details of the Flint crisis, residents felt that the time was ripe to make their demands on behalf of their community. At a public hearing, in reference to the Flint residents holding water bottles and baby bottles full of contaminated water from their homes, residents of 48217 held up their asthma inhalers (see figure 29). A resident at a hearing said:

“We are reliving Flint, Michigan right now. That’s about what’s happening. Because the citizens came before them, to the DEQ and the EPA and everyone and said you’re harming us. You’re hurting us. They used a bottle of water to explain, to show, to illustrate, well I have my asthma inhaler here tonight because I have to use it. We are hurting and this permit should not be allowed” (author’s notes).

In some community meetings, utilizing the momentum of attention on Flint’s infrastructure and health concerns was discussed. It was used as a strategy for potentially getting MDEQ to decide permit requests in 48217’s favor, since the department was already in hot water with the media and the public over the Flint scandal.
Further, residents drew comparisons with other crises faced by predominantly Black communities, shaping resistance through solidarity. Forms of violence towards communities of color, like the recent resurgence in publicity around the killings of unarmed Black men by law enforcement, were at the forefront of some residents’ minds, as well as the outcomes for Black communities during Hurricane Katrina. One resident expressed concern about the lack of an evacuation plan, with a sense of urgency remembering the plight of mostly Black residents in New Orleans under Katrina. Her fear was that in the event of an emergency, they would be trapped in 48217 with government collusion in their isolation from resources and escape routes. Another resident and environmental
activist said, with reference to the murder of Eric Garner\(^7\) by police, “If the police is allowed to kill me for a cigarette or some stupid thing like that, there’s no way in the world that you’re going to tell me that I’ve got a chance to get clear air” (interview, Detroit, 2016). These parallels are significant, as they build on the distrust fostered by disinvestment felt specifically by communities of color. The solidarity with other Black communities facing systematic disenfranchisement from public funding for services and amenities was used to strengthen their message.

*Adaptation to Technical Expertise*

As Bayat (2004) and Roy (2004) suggest, there is a danger that discussions about resistance to marginalization are limited to romanticized notions of poverty that often celebrate the ingenuity or aesthetics of poverty. In the case of Detroit, this can be seen in the highly publicized forms of resistance to disinvestment such as urban agriculture, muraling or street vending. However, this may suggest a bias and marginalization of the work of local communities with regards to the forms of resistance acknowledged, underestimating the sophistication of what can be highly technical responses to expert knowledge. Often framed as a binary, the emotionally driven collective action of residents versus the technocratic expertise of scholars is political in its own right; and is likely a false dichotomy (Polletta, Jasper, and Goodwin 2001; Carr 2010; Abbott 1988; Scott 1998). Indeed, the data points to quite the opposite for the case of 48217. Residents have adapted their strategies for resistance to mirror those of technical experts. They have done so both by offering the data of competing expert sources and by generating data of their own regarding air quality, housing conditions and prevalence of health problems attributed to pollution.

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\(^7\) Eric Garner, a Black man, was unarmed when he was choked to death by the New York Police Department in an arrest for selling cigarettes. Garner’s murderer, Daniel Pantaleo was not charged for the death (Wortham 2016).
Data gathered by the MDEQ and self-reporting from local industries often corroborated in their conclusions that the levels of certain toxins in the air were safe and within legal limits. In some instances, 48217 residents mobilized the findings of experts outside of the government and industry that supported their claims that air quality had been harmful to their community. For example, Dr. Stuart Batterman and Dr. Paul Mohai at the University of Michigan reported that 48217 was the most polluted zip code in Michigan (Milando, Martenies, and Batterman 2016). This conclusion, based on air quality samples collected by the researchers was referenced often and perceived as evidence that MDEQ and industry were corrupt in their measurements and reporting of air quality. Residents also referenced the conclusions of the City of Detroit’s Department of Health director, Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, that under no circumstances should 48217 be subjected to further emissions increases. However, at odds with the expansion of industry, both the researchers’ and the health director’s concerns were consistently overlooked when it came to permit requests, which were normally approved.

In another instance, residents believed that a local industry, the Detroit Salt Company, was producing harmful vibrations through mining operations. Residents were experiencing unexplained shaking that did damage to water mains and personal property, so they hired a seismologist to consult about the source of the vibrations. The seismologist confirmed that the vibrations were in fact caused by explosions used in the mining operations of the company. This information, provided by a seismic expert, was used by residents to halt mining operations temporarily.

Apart from the strategy of presenting the data of a competing expert to impede undesirable development, there were times when residents adapted to technocratic development rationale by gathering their own data. They first relied on community members educating themselves on the
laws, regulations and science used to justify the expansion of industry. When there were already competing data sources making different claims about air quality, including the conclusions of MDEQ, Marathon Oil (and other industries) self-reporting, scholarship from the University of Michigan and statements from the health director, residents partnered with a non-profit to produce their own air quality readings. These readings were taken by collecting air samples from inside of homes that were sent to a lab for testing. An analysis of these samples inside homes where more stagnant air can trap toxins, and overburdened sewer lines sometimes back up with industrial pollutants, differed substantially from the outdoor air quality. The results found that indoor air quality in the area presented an extremely worrisome safety threat for residents. These results were never publicly validated by the Department of Environmental Quality. Some residents claim that this agency’s response was disparaging to their collection methods, despite the prospects of air quality false positives being very unlikely.

In a similar instance, residents aimed to illustrate the prevalence of pollution-related illnesses in the neighborhood, taking inventory of cancer by block. The rates of cancer were found to be alarming to residents, who were already aware from their personal experiences that the rates of the disease were taking a toll on their community. One resident recalled that in this inventory they found that on one block, there were 17 recorded deaths from cancer. Though these high numbers of cases were corroborated by city health officials, they have not been seriously considered as evidence against proposed emissions increases or physical expansion of industry. Industry officials have supported these decisions, mentioning that though the rates are high, this data fails to provide a causal link between industry and cancer.
In another example, before the release of the privately sanctioned Blight Removal Task Force report that was used to inform city policy on where to target funds for blight removal, residents and local politicians collected data about quality of homes in 48217. In cooperation with their County Commissioner who utilized staff resources to inventory the status of homes, residents helped record conditions of homes on each block. This inventory identified unsafe structures and vacant homes that they were confident had been used for prostitution, narcotic sales and other illicit activities. Residents hoped that with the leverage of an elected official (their County Commissioner) this information would be used as compelling evidence to allot blight removal funding to the neighborhood. However, it was difficult to observe that any funds were allocated to the zip code as a result. The County Commissioner explained that after the information was turned over to the city, 48217 was still continually excluded from blight removal funding, to her disappointment.

Litigation also exemplifies the ways that residents not only develop their own data to combat the rhetoric of technocrats but how they assert themselves into expert discourses in the implementation of such data. One resident who worked in a law office was able to utilize her own knowledge and the knowledge of her colleagues to bring a class action lawsuit against Marathon Oil. While ultimately victorious in their class action lawsuit, residents were aware of the practical limitations of suing a corporation for damages other than loss of property. The demonstrable damage done to the outside of their homes, their cars and sometimes landscaping was able to be compensated for. However, residents were unable to definitively make causal claims about health problems, bodily harm and get compensated for. The prospect of bringing additional lawsuits as a form of resistance was a commonplace conversation in block club meetings, and necessitated knowledge of legal discourse and strategy to pursue. In conversations with several residents, the shortcomings and advantages to different legal strategies were talked about as common knowledge. For instance this
knowledge often focused on the challenges of proving causality for health claims or whether bringing individual or class action lawsuits was more appropriate in a given situation. Additionally, the difficulty of attributing damages to a specific polluter was commonly understood as a barrier to litigation. The legal knowledge developed by residents is a significant way that they have transcended the expert-non-expert binary so strongly represented in the literature. In this case, we can view the adoption of litigation as the expert practice of navigating legal frameworks that became necessary for residents of 48217.

These instances illustrate the ability for technocratic rationale to be met with anything other than emotional, anecdotal claims from the community, an assumption that the literature on both experts and social movements tends to convey. Further, this data indicates a double standard with regards to who is able to present technocratic rhetoric credibly and with political leverage. In the case of experts operating in the interest of the expansion of industry as well as the rationale for the continued public disinvestment of 48217, technocratic, scientifically rationalized data was deemed compelling and worthy of acting upon. When the community presented data acquired through similar means, it was not considered in decision-making. This finding points to a significant oversimplification of the role of experts presented in the political economy literature (D. Harvey 2007a; W. Davies 2014). While the role of experts has been linked to the rationalization of public support for private entities, this work adds the perspective that not all experts are created equal in this scenario. Contrary to the expert-non-expert binary presented in much of the literature, the dynamics in 48217 point to the agenda of experts and their relationship to the neoliberal project as holding at least as much stock as their status as experts.
CONCLUSION

Beginning with a summary of detrimental planning and social policies affecting the 48217 zip code, this chapter illustrated a history that paved the way for distrust towards government agencies as well as industry. This discussion began with the legacy of segregation that was followed by a series of fragmenting planning interventions and policies, from the construction of the freeway that bisected the zip code, to the Detroit Future City framework that presents 48217 as defunct and in need of repurposing. As Brenner and Theodore (2005) suggest, the workings of neoliberalism are not monolithic or universal, but instead manifest themselves in relation to history, social stratification and economics of a place. From the contentious history described at the beginning of the chapter, we can understand the specific discursive practices that neoliberal experts and community activists have adopted in 48217 as a continuation of racialized disenfranchisement of the zip code.

This chapter discussed the role of technical expertise relative to its ability to use the status of the expert as an objective problem solver promoting economically rational solutions for urban development (D. Harvey 2007b). Despite the literature on expertise largely understanding expert practices to revolve around technocratic rhetoric to protect the dominant status of experts, this work found that emotional appeal through community engagement processes as well as intimidation tactics are also part of expertise under neoliberalism. Not only did experts exercise control over access to community meetings, as in Marathon CAP gatherings, but the input from the community was centered on areas targeted for reinvestment, like Downtown and Midtown in the case of Detroit Future City outreach. Additionally, the format of the meetings for community engagement allowed experts to control content and frame arguments, with little opportunity for community members to give meaningful input outside of those constraints. This chapter also found that in addition to well-documented technical rhetoric, experts in neoliberal processes maintain their status through state
supported surveillance and intimidation of local communities resisting the expansion of industry and emissions increases.

In contrast to the expert rhetoric largely understood in the political economy literature as technocratic and rationalistic, the literature on social movements largely understands collective action to be informed by the ability to mobilize behind emotion (Polletta, Jasper, and Goodwin 2001). This work found the technocratic and emotional appeals of experts and community members to have a much more fluid dynamic, contrary to the binary presented in the literature on expertise and political economy. My data pointed to the strategies of activists in 48217 and their mobilization against industrial pollution to be much more than that, with residents even employing expert strategies themselves. In addition to using the emotional appeal of presenting their personal stories at hearings, meetings and in the media, community groups went to great length to educate themselves on issues of environmental and planning regulations. In addition, they also employed the support of experts with competing opinions to the expertise enabling unfavorable policies. These experts, like the director of public health and researchers at the University of Michigan, spoke on behalf of the community and believed that the health of the residents was at risk and diminishing at the hands of local industries. This strategy pointed to a lack of nuance in the literature on expertise under neoliberalism, displaying an instance where the status of the academic and medical experts were overshadowed by expertise that was in favor of industrial expansion. A more dramatic example of social movements adapting to technocratic expertise over emotional appeal for support was presented by residents who gathered their own data, mirroring the methods of neoliberal experts. This was done in the case of air quality samples, measuring the presence of cancer among residents, and through an inventory of blighted buildings in the neighborhood. Though highly reminiscent of the procedures of those considered experts in these topics, the data gathered by the community was
dismissed, and not seriously considered as part of decision-making processes affecting the neighborhood. This finding is a significant addition to the literature on expertise, as it showcases a moment in a highly racialized context, where nearly identical data to the materials presented by ‘experts’ is dismissed on the basis of its source. In this instance, we see a case where race and class seem to be the common determinant in terms of who is allowed to be an expert and who isn’t.

Similarly, the implications of this work relative to the development discourses used in Downtown and Midtown suggest biases as to whose perspectives can count as expertise. In the case of the Downtown core, significant resources were used to attract a young, educated class of increasingly White professionals (Mahoney et al. 2015). In the spirit of Richard Florida (2003), these new Detroiters possess skills that are believed to be the key to the creativity and entrepreneurialism needed to ‘revive’ the city. On the other hand, in the context of decades of decline in 48217, even when residents replicate and adapt to the technical expertise being used to economically justify harmful environmental policy and continued disinvestment, they are still disregarded. This points to a double standard in the status of the expert under the goals of neoliberalism, where young and White Detroiters are viewed as integral to the entrepreneurial future of the city, while Black seniors fighting for clean air and basic amenities are viewed as an impediment to progress.
CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVES of SAVIORS and COLLATERAL DAMAGE:
A COMPARISON of MEDIA DEPICTIONS of DOWNTOWN-MIDTOWN and 48217

INTRODUCTION

Media accounts reflect and at times reproduce values surrounding the political and social climate of a city. They reflect the agendas of politicians, state agencies and entrepreneurs. Further, the role of news outlets in mediating stories for the general public indicates that their biases in the ways they are framing the issues potentially play a role in shaping the social imaginary around places and individuals. This chapter traces and analyzes media accounts of development in both Downtown-Midtown and 48217. The chapter does not intend to make arguments about the work of specific journalists or publications, but instead aims to understand the overall landscape of media coverage and treatment of expertise with regards to development in 48217 and Downtown-Midtown. This analysis samples articles from The New York Times, and two major Detroit newspapers—Detroit Free Press and Detroit News—along with articles specifically mentioned by interview participants. These articles were selected using consistent search terms that aimed to locate pieces about development in Downtown-Midtown and 48217. Using these pieces, the following sections make a comparison between development in both Downtown-Midtown, a neighborhood experiencing a revival at the hands of celebrated entrepreneurs, and 48217, a neighborhood under threat of increased pollution and experiencing severe disinvestment.

CELEBRITIES of DOWNTOWN-MIDTOWN DEVELOPMENT

Similar to the acclaim that development professionals gave to developer and investor Dan Gilbert and new planning director Maurice Cox for their expertise (mentioned in chapter 3), media accounts recognize the contributions of a handful of entrepreneurs to the rebound of Downtown and
Midtown. In these media stories, individuals are celebrated for their hand in the turnaround of the Downtown core and are described through the tenacity and savvy they exude as businessmen. These stories exhibit an imaginary of Downtown-Midtown that is often drawn from the charisma of the handful of individuals leading redevelopment, and their contributions to the physical landscape of the city. The importance of individualism and entrepreneurialism endemic to neoliberalism is vividly reflected in the data; the intensity of the portrayal of the charisma of such individuals takes on a degree of celebrity and ultimately credits them with the revival of areas of the city.

**Personality of Developers as Boosterism for Projects**

The most striking of these themes of development discourse in the articles on Downtown-Midtown are the stories that describe both the temperament and appearance of a handful of entrepreneurs in almost mythical terms, with an air of fondness and familiarity (Segal 2013; Williams 2015; Baetens 2015; Applebome 2015; Perman 2014; Gallagher 2016; Binelli 2013). These stories focus almost exclusively on entrepreneurs, and almost never use descriptions that focus on the merits of individuals and their business accomplishments when talking about residents, politicians or the heads of non-profits, for example.

Three individuals figure most prominently into the personal narratives of entrepreneurs portrayed in the media. First, Dan Gilbert, founder of Quicken Loans and investor of millions of dollars in Downtown real estate, is often credited for his vision of revitalization through building rehabilitation and streetscape improvements. Among these improvements are trendy public spaces like Campus Martius, featuring pop-up amenities and public events, along with QLINE, the partially privately funded street-car line servicing Downtown (see figures 30-31) (Detroit Free Press 2015). As mentioned previously, these interventions were part of the branding initiative, Opportunity Detroit, that aimed
to rebrand the Downtown core through placemaking interventions ("A Placemaking Vision for Downtown Detroit" 2013). Tom Kartsotis, the founder of Shinola, a designer watch company and lifestyle brand, also figures prominently in media accounts. Shinola is tied strongly to the idea of the industrial heritage of Detroit, and started by manufacturing watches and other accessories in the city (Klara 2015). Accordingly, the storefront of the Shinola flagship store portray a vintage, industrial feel that has become iconic to its home in the Cass Corridor of Midtown. The company’s location is home to some of the trendiest bars, restaurants and retail in the city, and has been celebrated for a revival of the area (which will be discussed in more depth shortly) (see figures 32-33). Finally, Phillip Cooley, the founder and owner of Slow’s Bar-BQ, a popular restaurant in Corktown, is celebrated in a similar fashion. His restaurant is credited with the revitalization of Corktown\(^8\) that is now central to night life and entertainment in the city (Baetens 2015).

\(^8\) Corktown is a newly redeveloped and trendy district west of Downtown known for its burgeoning bar and restaurant scene.
Figure 31: Temporary beach installed in Downtown.
Figure 32: Pop-up basketball court in Downtown.
Figure 33: Shinola and adjacent businesses in Midtown.
As an example of the fixation on these entrepreneurs as personalities, an article describes the appearance of billionaire and developer Dan Gilbert in depth, where he is, “Dressed in a red-checked button-down shirt and a blue blazer, Mr. Gilbert is 5 feet 5 inches of restless energy. He has slicked-back dark hair, a Hollywood smile and dolorous eyes that give him the look of a man in
need of sleep” (Segal 2013). This same article, called “Motor City Missionary”, depicted Gilbert’s mannerisms, describing him as a calm, dry, and confident entrepreneur, reflective of his success in development (Segal 2013). At times, the article added endearing and charming qualities about the developer’s personality:

“Mr. Gilbert speaks with an accent that is Bill Murray-esque, and his default expression is, too: deadpan, which somehow makes him look perpetually on the verge of saying something wry. An inveterate prankster, he recently had a few dozen farm animals, including goats, chicken and geese, hauled into the office of a neat-freak colleague who was turning 50” (Segal 2013).

The description of the developer’s personality, his underlying confidence in his business endeavors, and admiration of colleagues are echoed in another piece:

“Dave Blaszkiewicz, president and CEO of the civic group Downtown Detroit Partnership [said] ‘He has become, in a very short period of time, a very significant player in downtown Detroit.’ By turns visionary, fun-loving and, at times, hot-tempered, Gilbert envisions a downtown teeming with new retail and hi-tech entrepreneurs. To skeptics who ask how he can make this vision come true, he has often offered a simple response: ‘We’ll figure it out’” (Gallagher 2011a).

Connections made in these stories between Gilbert’s personality, appearance and mannerisms and his business success reflect a sense that he is gifted in both business savvy and temperament that set him apart as an entrepreneur.

Similarly, other entrepreneurs are being celebrated as individuals, often coming across as eccentric or fun-loving, as in the case of Tom Kartsotis, founder of Shinola. The flagship store for the brand is located in Midtown among many other trendy shops and restaurants. Kartsotis, has been covered by the media, emphasizing his unassuming, relatable demeanor:

“‘It’s a little nutty,’ Mr. Kartsotis said of the Shinola concept, hunched over an oversize burger at the Bronx Bar, an old-school tavern near the Shinola flagship. ‘I think that might be part of its charm.’ In Detroit, Mr. Kartsotis gets a lot of ink -- he has been cast as a savior, a carpetbagger -- but you rarely hear him weigh in on the debate. The 56-year-old entrepreneur almost never speaks to the news media, and even though he stands out at 6-foot-7, with his surferish mop of gray hair, he has not posed for a press photo, he said, in 30 years. (Just try an Internet search.) Even that afternoon, dining in this blue-collar bar…Mr. Kartsotis seemed to be wearing a form of camouflage: dressed in jeans, work boots and an untucked plaid shirt that looked more Walmart than Filson -- a chic heritage brand he owns -- he looked as if he had spent the morning hanging Sheetrock” (Williams
Another example, similar to Kartsotis’ portrayal as a casual, relatable entrepreneur, is the media portrayal of Phillip Cooley, restaurateur and owner of the trendy Slow’s Bar-BQ in Corktown. Coverage of Cooley often portrays an image of a bright business mind and community fixture. A Detroit News article entitled “Phillip Cooley: Detroit dreamer before it was cool” begins by saying, “When talking about growth in Detroit, Phillip Cooley’s name was on everybody’s lips long before Dan Gilbert’s” (Baetens 2015). Another article commented on his persona and its enhancement of his business network: “He’s a pretty idiosyncratic character,” said Mr. Barlow, an author and ad agency executive. ‘He’s like a living Venn diagram, he’s got a lot of circles that are colliding around him’” (Ryzik 2010). He is portrayed as a person who is invested in his community, which, it is implied, sets him and his brands apart from other entrepreneurs:

“The former model has lived all over the world, from Marysville, Michigan, to Barcelona, Spain. He’s close with his parents and brother, and together they opened some of the most-talked about restaurants in the city, starting with Slow’s Bar-BQ in Corktown a decade ago. Take a closer look at the 37-year-old, and it’s obvious he’s a different kind of mogul. When walking around Ponyride, his 30,000-square-foot artist and entrepreneur colony in Corktown, he greets everyone by name and asks how they’re doing. In fact, when Ponyride — which offers inexpensive work space to socially conscious creators — started to fill up with tenants, he moved his own work space so someone else could have it” (Baetens 2015).

The media harps on his reputation for being humble, relatable and community minded while at the same time, hosting exclusive events saying:

“Though he is occasionally called the Prince of Detroit, Mr. Cooley still describes things as ‘fancy pants,’ dresses in torn T-shirts, and is quick to rail against chain stores, mass development and other symbols of late-stage gentrification. He plays in a summer soccer league and organizes an underground restaurant, ClandesDine, a secretive, invite-only affair where meals are served in abandoned buildings” (Ryzik 2010).

The media has painted the personas and ambitions of these entrepreneurs as iconic fixtures in the renewal of Downtown-Midtown, unique to individuals taking part in redeveloping and investing in the city. These descriptions evoke an image of celebrity, relating to the core of the individualism.

9 Corktown is a neighborhood of Greater Downtown, adjacent to Downtown to the west.
understood to propel innovation under late capitalism. Even more, they come across almost like tall-tales, portraying these entrepreneurs as remarkable individuals on the basis of their character, marketing their personalities along with their brands as unique, confident and at times quirky and eccentric. Beneath the celebration of the drive and personas of these men is an implication that they are uniquely successful individuals worth celebrating due to their character and business skill. As stand outs, these men are set apart as innovators, and alternatives to a continuation of the decline of the city. On the other hand, many Detroiter confront poverty and racism are often central to the pathologizing of the inner city (Ruben 2001; Wacquant 1997). As Harvey (2007) has explained, this celebration of bootstrap success attributed to individual character and drive ignores the systemic pressures of race and class oppression placed on many, painting them as lacking “work discipline and flexibility” (34).

*Portrayal of Downtown-Midtown Residents*

As an extension of the theme that emerges in the media stories around the celebrity of entrepreneurs working in the Downtown core were the choices that the media made in terms of which residents of the rapidly populating neighborhoods they chose to interview. These residents were usually young professionals who in many cases were quoted making statements about the high demand for housing in the area and the quality of amenities. They are described with introductions like, “a member of the marketing team at Detroit-based Quicken Loans Inc.,” “Public relations professional” and “a 26-year-old systems analyst for Blue Cross” (Henkel and Aguilar 2012; Gallagher 2012a). At times the boosterism for Downtown and Midtown embedded in such statements about new residents is quite pronounced and centered on the development accomplishments of previously mentioned entrepreneurs. One article quotes a Downtown resident saying, “‘Today, if you wanted to live in my building, there’d be a waiting list,’ he said. ‘I have a lot of new neighbors and friends, and you see a lot more activity on the street than you would have seen
a few months ago’” (Gallagher 2012a). Other testimonials from new residents of the Downtown core sound almost like advertisements in their enthusiasm for their new homes. One person said, “It’s a mile from work, a mile from Eastern Market and a mile from Comerica Park,’ he said. ‘You can’t get any better than that’” (Gallagher 2012a). Another resident was quoted saying, “Once I got here to downtown and felt the energy,’ Davenport says, ‘I knew I made the right decision in coming here” (Morris 2012). In an exaggerated example, one resident was quoted along with what almost reads like a real estate listing for his new residence:

“He and two roommates share a two-story 1,270-square-foot apartment on the building’s 27th floor, for which they together pay $2,025 a month. A red spiral metal staircase -- once an elevator shaft -- connects the two floors. They moved in earlier this month. Their unit features magnificent views of downtown and Woodward Avenue and offers a bird’s-eye view of right field in nearby Comerica Park. ‘We came here for the Comerica view,’ Seborowski said, ‘but we fell in love with the Woodward view’” (Gallagher 2012b).

In addition to portraying Downtown and Midtown as hip and newly flourishing areas of the city, the media also harnesses the energy and enthusiasm of a group of young, new arrivals that bolster this image.

Crediting Entrepreneurs with the Revival of the City

The grand portrayal of personality and individual ambition carries through to the description of the brands entrepreneurs have started. The media depiction of these brands is one of optimism and enthusiasm for the future of the city, and as an intuitive business response to the demands of a changing clientele in the neighborhoods of the Downtown core. The New York Times stated, “Adweek recently called Shinola ‘the coolest brand in America.’ In 2014, The Washington Post called it an ‘innovative giant’ in ‘understanding the consumer zeitgeist”’ (Williams 2015). Cooley’s interventions in Corktown were similarly described: “Slow’s was almost a zeitgeist thing,’ said Todd Abrams, a restaurant critic for the Metro Times, a local weekly, and the founder of Gourmet
Underground Detroit, a dining and drinking club. ‘They came into that neighborhood at a time when it really needed it’” (Ryzik 2010).

In addition to the depiction of the personas of entrepreneurs, the media covers the development work of these individuals as pivotal in the renewed optimism of the development scene. A Detroit Free Press article about Dan Gilbert’s work ethic and charisma said, “‘He’s a force of light,’ said Dave Blaszkiewicz, president of the civic group Downtown Detroit Partnership and the organizer of the incentive program for downtown living. ‘He really is a ball of energy. We’re looking forward to using that to accelerate the transformation of downtown’” (Gallagher 2011a). However, the data revealed that these individuals are often portrayed as more than just a beacon of hope; indeed, their vision is credited for the nearly single handed redevelopment of their respective areas of Greater Downtown.

The data shows that the individual most often recognized by the media as a key figure in the revival of Downtown is Dan Gilbert. This is supported by statements regarding Gilbert as a primary actor in redeveloping the Downtown core through his real estate ventures, along with his companies’ ability to draw employees Downtown. The Detroit News reported that, “Detroit’s downtown development momentum began in 2010, when The [Detroit] News counted 48 big, empty buildings in downtown and Dan Gilbert moved his online mortgage lender Quicken Loans, related companies and their 1,700 workers from the suburbs to the Compuware Building in the city’s core” (Aguilar 2017). The New York Times reported a similar depiction of Gilbert’s entrepreneurship:

“Mr. Gilbert, 51, a Detroit native and the fantastically wealthy founder and chairman of Quicken Loans, wants to revive two square miles that were once the thrumming heart of this city. To do so, he has already spent roughly $1 billion acquiring nearly three million square feet of real estate, and is ready to close another deal, for the Greektown Casino-Hotel and nearby parking lots, that will add one million more square feet to his holdings” (Segal 2013).
Indeed, Gilbert’s land holdings Downtown go unmatched by other developers. However, drawing from the image of the entrepreneur in this context as a savior whose business savvy has made for the city’s revival, indicates that the media at times attaches broader implications to this work. Beyond the scope of a real estate venture, Time Magazine for example described a new hope brought to declining cities through this work stating that, “The city’s nascent downtown renaissance, led by local business people like Quicken Loans founder Dan Gilbert as well as quasi-public groups like the Michigan Economic Development Corp., may herald a new era for American cities in which old Rust Belt towns once again become engines of growth” (Foroohar 2014).

Having a longer history of development in the city (spanning decades instead of merely years, as in Dan Gilbert’s case), the Ilitch family and their company Olympia Development is also widely recognized by the media as belonging to the wealthy handful of entrepreneurs that have made Downtown Detroit a “billionaire’s playground” (Binelli 2013). Most recently, a district around the new Red Wings hockey arena that they have developed, which will include hundreds of units of housing and retail, has received a considerable amount of media coverage (Gallagher and Egan 2012; Martines and Livengood 2012; Aguilar 2014a; Gullen and Reindl 2014; Aguilar 2013a). The Ilitch family has played a role in development in Detroit since the 1950s and are also the owners of sports teams. They are often discussed in the same realm of highly influential entrepreneurs as Dan Gilbert. A New York Times piece explained: “People like Dan Gilbert, the owner of Quicken Loans and the Cleveland Cavaliers, and Mike Ilitch, a founder of Little Caesars pizza, have been snatching up shuttered skyscrapers and prewar office buildings -- since December Mr. Gilbert has bought at least five buildings and, reputedly, an entire downtown city block -- as if they’re Monopoly properties” (Binelli 2013).
Most recent coverage on the Ilitch family focuses on their arena district project. Like much of Gilbert’s work, the arena district is described as a transformative project that “would span eight desolate blocks and transform the Cass Corridor, an economic dead zone between downtown and Midtown” (Gullen and Reindl 2014). The media depicted this project as the most current in a long line of development projects that has been an important piece of maintaining the momentum of the revival of Greater Downtown. The *Detroit News* described the Ilitch family’s long-term influence on the area:

“The Ilitches have scored spectacular downtown victories that continue to be vital downtown draws. In 1987 they purchased and restored the historic Fox Theatre and moved the Little Caesars headquarters to the building from the suburbs. Mike Ilitch bought the Tigers and Red Wings and has kept both downtown. He spearheaded the Tigers’ move to Comerica Park. Marian Ilitch’s MotorCity Casino Hotel is an important source of tax revenue for the city” (Aguiar 2014a).

The family has also spoken to the media about the way they envisioned their investments contributing to the Downtown core. In a statement to the Detroit Free Press, a family member seems to take credit for a long-term vision that has spurred a revival of the area:

“‘It’s always been my dream to once again see a vibrant downtown Detroit,’ Mike Ilitch, chairman of Ilitch Holdings, said in a written statement. ‘From the time we bought the Fox Theatre, I could envision a downtown where the streets were bustling and people were energized. It’s been a slow process at times, but we’re getting there now, and a lot of great people are coming together to make it happen. It’s going to happen, and I want to keep us moving toward that vision.’ Mike Ilitch, who also owns the Detroit Tigers, has long wanted to build a new arena as the centerpiece of an entertainment district” (Gallagher and Egan 2012).

On a smaller scale, the founders of both Shinola and Slow’s Bar-BQ were found to represent a similar force of revitalization to the ‘billionaires’. The luxury brand Shinola, and its location on the now trendy Cass Corridor in Midtown is credited in the media for restoring the area from its previous reputation of crime and blight. *Time Magazine* described this transformation:

“In addition to the factory, Shinola has helped revitalize a desolate stretch on the old Cass Corridor, an area better known for prostitutes and drug dealers, by opening a store in an empty factory there last June. Today the spot is thriving with new businesses. ‘This area was our skid row,’ says Jeanette Pierce, director of community relations for D:hive, a nonprofit group that connects Detroit’s resources and businesses. ‘Sixteen months ago, there were maybe four small shops. Today there are 16 and a brewery.’ The multiplier effect is worth watching. Matthew Clayson, director of the Detroit
Slow’s owner Phillip Cooley received similar credit in the media for inspiring redevelopment in Corktown, along with a renewed interest and popularity of the city in general:

“Slows opened in 2005 at the edge of downtown Detroit, in Corktown, across from the long-abandoned central train station, itself a symbol of widespread blight... The restaurant and its sleek decor were dreamed up by one of Slows’ owners, Phillip Cooley, who has emerged as a de facto spokesman for the now-hip revitalization of this city. ‘Before Slows was built, generally speaking people came into the city for hockey games, ball games and to see the ‘Sesame Street Spectacular,’” said Toby Bartow, Detroit’s other de facto spokesperson. Mr. Cooley, he said, has ‘validated the idea that people will come into the city’” (Ryzik 2010).

Shinola was portrayed by media stories in a celebratory light, claiming that it served as a vehicle for revitalizing an area of Midtown attraction of additional businesses along a main corridor, but also as a means to revive the manufacturing base (Perman 2014; Williams 2015; Klara 2015). An article in Adweek displays this theme:

“Two generations ago, nobody would have noticed that a product was made in Detroit—simply because so many were. But the city’s well-publicized fall on hard times... has spelled opportunity for Shinola, giving the company not only a ready source of workers but also a central role in the city’s renaissance. As a new luxury line rising from the ruins, Shinola has become Detroit’s red-caped good guy of entrepreneurship” (Klara 2015).

The notion that these entrepreneurs, through their vision and wherewithal are singlehandedly responsible for the revival of Greater Downtown raises some questions about the assumptions made in media articles, and potentially a broader discourse about development in the city. When Detroit is declared to have “ris[en] from the ruins”, or undergone a “hip revitalization of the city” or a “Downtown renaissance” at the hands of several savvy entrepreneurs, the implication is that lack of ingenuity, work ethic and a certain charisma are at the root of the city’s development troubles (Klara 2015; Ryzik 2010; Foroohar 2014). Further, the implication is that several individuals who possess these things, along with the capital to pursue their ideas, are the missing pieces to the city’s success. This vision of entrepreneurialism as the solution to the lack of public funding in cities coping with the austerity of neoliberal governance, as Harvey (2007) and Peck, Theodore and Brenner (2009)
have argued, undermines the reality of systemic race and class oriented disparities. This logic makes it easier to blame marginalized groups for their circumstances, and place socially oriented policies outside of the realm of urban governance that is limited to rational and economic decisions under neoliberalism (D. Harvey 2007b; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009).

The Contradiction of Public Subsidies towards Entrepreneurial Aspirations

While the dominant narrative in the media is one of charisma, branding and optimism regarding entrepreneurs developing Greater Downtown, there is a contradiction in the coverage of public subsidies used to aid such developments. While celebrating the self-made business minds as gifted, the media also draws attention to the large amounts of public subsidy that their ventures are reliant on. These subsidies are also often contentious with the public. The Detroit Free Press described the development market Downtown saying that, “The tight investment market, and still-modest rental rates for apartments, means new projects come online only with the assurance of tax credits and other city or state incentives” (Gallagher 2012a). The development of Greater Downtown has depended on subsidies like tax abatements and bond measures along with the cooperation of local government. Regarding the development being done by Dan Gilbert Downtown, former mayor David Bing was vocal about the need to assist private enterprises in their development through public assistance:

“[Gilbert] remains just as driven, but now his self-made fortune stands at $3.5 billion, according to Forbes. He has learned from mistakes of previous efforts to reimagine downtown, and he and his staff will apparently have a largely free hand. Government officials have promised to expedite permits for renovations, signs and so on. ‘My job,’ said Dave Bing, the Detroit mayor and former National Basketball Association star, ‘is to knock down as many barriers as possible and get out of the way’” (Segal 2013).

Another piece describes the government support for projects, both politically and financially, saying that, “Despite the gains, Midtown development deals are still dependent on a hodgepodge of tax credits and other government subsidies…Deals for downtown development, where living space is in
high demand, also require tax credits and other government support to fly” (Gallagher 2012b). The friendly business development climate that often surpasses such hurdles in the market is widely covered in the media, often describing the types of public subsidies in dollar amounts allocated to projects (Aguilar 2014a, Aguilar 2013a, Aguilar 2013b, Aguilar 2011, Aguilar 2014b; Martines and Livengood 2012; Aguilar 2013c; Gullen and Reindl 2014; Henderson 2013; Reindl 2016). An example of public subsidy that became particularly contentious, perhaps because it coincided with the municipal bankruptcy of 2013, was the bond measure that was approved to allow for the arena district to be built by the Ilitchs. Many media stories covered the politics of getting such a bond measure approved, including the potential areas for lost revenue that would normally cover other city services:

“Since the late 1980s, Mike Ilitch and his family have invested more than $1 billion downtown. Most projects have benefited from tax write-offs and tax breaks. Of the $650 million ‘district’ project, about $367 million, or 56 percent, of the entire project would come from private investment. About $283 million, or 44 percent, in public investment would come through existing economic development money, requiring no new taxes. Olympia group will pick up 42 percent of the new arena’s construction cost. The rest will come from a financing arrangement using school and local property tax revenue to pay off state-issued bonds” (Aguilar 2014a).

The contradiction between the coverage celebrating individualism and entrepreneurialism in the projected rebound of Downtown-Midtown and the seemingly complete dependence on public subsidy is a reflection of an incongruity endemic to neoliberal governance. Contrary to the neoliberal ideology that relishes the free market and condemns financial regulation, Peck, Theodore and Brenner (2009) argue that, “While neoliberalism aspires to create a utopia of free markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, it has in practice entailed a dramatic intensification of coercive, disciplinary forms of state intervention in order to impose versions of market rule and, subsequently, to manage the consequences and contradictions of such marketization initiatives” (51). While entrepreneurs are credited with the revival of the city and treated as celebrity type figures, this image is at odds with their reliance on public collusion and their ability to leverage public funds in favor of
their development aspirations that are at times prioritized above public services covered by tax revenue.

*The Response from Development Professionals*

In order to gain an understanding of the perception of media coverage, I interviewed development professionals and representatives from organizations reported on in the media for projects they are involved in. Interviews included development experts affiliated with private firms, foundations and city and county departments. In these interviews, I aimed to understand the feelings of these individuals about how their work was being portrayed in the media, and if they felt that the media coverage was helpful or a hindrance to the goals of their organization. These interviews also helped me to gather additional media articles for analysis, as they were mentioned by development experts who found them to be significant.

It should be noted that the development professionals interviewed, who were working on projects for or were tangentially related to Dan Gilbert’s enterprises, in many instances felt that the media coverage was favorable to their work. Although these interviewees largely felt that the media was supportive, in several instances, they noted that details of projects were incorrect. They were also frustrated that the media had focused on the more sensational aspects of their work (author’s notes). One development professional stated that, “there’s always articles that never have the right information, or quite the right information in it” (interview, Detroit, 2015). Another professional complained that the skewed information about the work they do was likely a function of the journalism profession that relies on eye-catching imagery and headlines for their stories. A designer working on several large development projects downtown explained her frustration that boosterist headlines about projects with “sexy images” often sell papers, but felt that these stories
overshadowed other more important aspects of their work, such as facilitating necessary updates to plans and ordinances (interview, Detroit, 2015).

One professional spoke directly to the tendency of the media to use a sense of optimism for the city’s revival to oversell the work of development professionals in the Downtown core. Speaking about the coverage on a particular project he was involved in, a spokesperson for one of Dan Gilbert’s projects explained that there is:

“...this unbridled optimism and continuous narrative that this is the silver bullet in the city’s comeback. That’s something we’re sensitive to, making sure we’re not claiming there is a silver bullet, not even in the sense of transportation...let alone an entire city’s recovery. We think it’s a really important piece of the discourse, but I think there’s a portion of the media that sort of looks at it as the answer” (interview, Detroit, 2015).

For professionals working on projects with the major headliner in development, Dan Gilbert, their testimonies and feelings that their work was in a way sensationalized by the media is significant in the way that the media may report in their favor. This bias points to the ways that the media may be creating a caricature of development and entrepreneurs in the city that lifts neoliberal narratives beyond the actual work of such agencies, further framing individual entrepreneurialism as the path to Detroit’s revival.

AUTHORITY of NUMBERS in PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTISE in 48217

Unlike the development expertise of Downtown-Midtown that was used to justify public subsidy and the attraction of a class of young professionals, expert accounts portrayed in the media reporting on 48217 placed poor air quality and the potential for emission increases at the center of development debates. The authority of both industry and departments responsible for environmental regulation in the media is largely drawn from their statements that utilize metrics and measurements to justify their stances. More specifically, the media often interviewed experts making
arguments about air quality and considering the legal permissibility of the expansion of industry as opposed to social or health effects. Data showed that the media largely represented expert opinions that also justified the health of 48217 residents as a matter of collateral damage. These discussions framed pollution on a localized scale as an acceptable cost for general benefits such as job creation and increased tax base for the city.

There were several themes in the arguments made by such experts who found the air quality acceptable. In many cases, when such experts were interviewed, they made the argument that the level of pollution being emitted by industry was acceptable since it was within the legal limit set forth by the EPA. In essence, these arguments equate permissibility of certain health outcomes to the amounts of pollution allowable by law. In other words, air quality experts treat the legal limits of pollution as an objectively optimal level of pollutants from a public safety standpoint. One article references a claim by the EPA that failed to mention the current cumulative impacts of air pollution locally by arguing that compliance with regulations would save lives in the long term:

“EPA conducted an analysis and found that some emissions increases at very few refineries were expected,’ an agency spokesman told Al Jazeera. On the other hand, by 2030, the new standards will annually prevent at least 770 deaths by reducing air pollution, the spokesman added. When asked about the possible health effects on nearby residents, Kheiry and the DEQ said the emissions levels would continue to meet EPA health standards” (Lewis 2016).

Further, this article made reference to the fact that “Marathon, which monitors its own emissions and reports those results to state and government officials, said it is in compliance with federal regulations” (Lewis 2016). Similarly, Al Jazeera also reported that, “The DEQ ignored numerous complaints about the refinery, saying, it ‘is in compliance with emission release numbers’” (Lockridge 2016).
Another trend in expert arguments in the media were statements that made the case that the current conditions were acceptable by highlighting the overall decrease in toxins over the last several decades, instead of the immediate concerns of the health outcomes for residents currently. For example, an article in Al-Jazeera said that, “The Marathon refinery has reduced its emissions by more than 75 percent since 1999, and its emissions are only a small percentage of the total pollution in the area around Boynton, Marathon communications manager Jamal T. Kheiry told Al Jazeera in an email” (Lewis 2014). Another article from the Detroit News referenced the same statement from Kheiry that Marathon has “reduced its emissions by more than 70 percent since 1999” (Ferretti 2016). Similarly, the Detroit Free Press reported that MDEQ claims that the installation of pollution controls had significant impacts on improving pollution, stating:

“[MDEQ’s chief of air quality] and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments say the state’s air is cleaner now than it has been in decades, because of tougher federal standards and new pollution controls at some plants. There have been significant declines in bad air quality in the state, including a 33% drop during the past three years in pollution from steel plants in Detroit that installed new pollution controls, [Department of Natural Resources and Environment spokesperson] McCann said” (Lam 2010d).

A related argument made by Marathon that diminished the appearance of pollution was the claim that the company emits fewer toxins than surrounding industries (for example, steel and electricity production). The Detroit News reported an argument made by Marathon, “in a fact sheet on its website, [that] notes the refinery’s emissions account for less than 3 percent of emissions from industry in a two-mile radius of the facility” (Ferretti 2016).

The prominence of expert arguments that support the expansion of industry by rationalizing the issue of health for a politically marginalized community is consistent with the criticisms of scholars on political economy and expertise (W. Davies 2014; Carr 2010; Abbott 1988). These accounts represent a clear example of a time when technocratic approaches can be used to advance certain agendas under the guise of objectivity. Use of metrics to make the case that the community is better
off than they have been in previous years, along with the somewhat perplexing argument that small emissions increases across the state will save many lives in the aggregate, serve to advance environmental injustice in this context. In this case the ability to generate data that is considered credible and scientifically valid is a significant aspect of the power structures inherent in expertise as explained by Boyer (2008).

*Expertise Used to Justify the ‘Sacrifice Zone’*

Perhaps the most salient theme in the media accounts depicting the debates surrounding requests for increases in emissions by local industry were conversations weighing the costs and benefits of increased pollution for 48217. Media coverage of local industries making the argument for the importance of energy production on the aggregate at the cost of health and air quality locally were a strong component of negotiations with local officials. Additionally, politicians were quoted by the media justifying potential emissions increases based on the city’s dire need for jobs and the retention of the tax base of industries in 48217. Referring to such trade offs, *Al Jazeera*, reporting on potential emissions increases in the zip code said, “the Sierra Club’s environmental justice program coordinator, Leslie Fields, labeled an area including Boynton ‘a sacrifice zone for energy production’” (Lockridge 2016). Regarding the representation of various stakeholders in articles, perspectives from residents were included in about three quarters of the media pieces, politicians and regulating agencies in about half, and representatives from industry in about one third.

A theme that figured more prominently in the data than the case to increase emissions locally for energy production nationally, was the argument made by industry leadership and city council members that jobs and tax revenue were a higher priority than lowering emissions. This perspective received opposition from local communities, who urged the city to consider a moratorium on emissions increases in Southwest Detroit; one paper reported that, “Neighbors’ attempts to get the
City Council to enact a moratorium on industrial development in the area died because council members said they don’t want to choke off jobs” (Lam 2010a). Other articles reported the perspective that petroleum manufacturing “brings much-needed tax revenue and jobs to the economically troubled state” (Lewis 2014). These arguments played out in the media portraying local politicians as proponents of jobs and the tax base that the companies were thought to contribute.

The *Detroit News* reported that:

“The city’s desperate need for jobs, tax revenue and a better quality of life are colliding in southwest Detroit, where residents fed up with pollution are pushing the City Council to crack down on heavy industry. Some want a moratorium, or at least zoning changes, to restrict industrial companies from coming in or expanding in a corner of southwest Detroit” (MacDonald 2010).

Another article explained that, “Some council members are hesitant to choke off industry, since it creates jobs. ‘There is nothing we need more than jobs,’ Council President Pro Tem Gary Brown said. ‘I’m very cognizant of the environmental and health issues in southwest Detroit, but it’s a balancing act, and we need to weigh that in our decisions’” (Lam 2010b). The argument that the cost-benefit analysis of increased pollution weighs in favor of prioritizing jobs and the local business climate was not limited to Marathon, but also included considerations about allowing Great Lakes Steel to expand their operations:

“(Great Lakes) will be providing jobs in the community; ensuring that a local business has a greater chance of success; will put a currently idle property back into beneficial reuse consistent with its zoning and history and will be remediating the site and installing controls to protect groundwater in the future,” wrote company owner James Jacob in an October letter to [State Representative Rashida] Tlaib. ‘This is all clearly in the public interest’” (MacDonald 2010).

In several instances, the crassness of making a community choose between jobs and their health was highlighted when comments from residents were reported (in about three quarters of the articles focusing on 48217). Community responses to these arguments treating health outcomes as collateral damage for jobs and tax revenue were considered to treat poor communities living near industrial areas as “sacrifice zones” (Lewis 2016). One resident asked, “Why can’t we have both clean air and jobs?” (Lam 2010b). Another resident and activist argued, “You cannot sacrifice people’s lives to
protect the environment…At the end of the day, they’re killing us,’’ she said. ‘‘We already can’t breathe over here, and the thought that pollution could go up and the smell — it’s too much’’” (Lewis 2016). In more than one instance, the media pointed to the irony of the claim that jobs are a reasonable trade-off for increased pollution, when Marathon has yet to create the jobs they claimed would be created by their expansion. One story reported that:

“Marathon Petroleum has failed to deliver on jobs for Detroiters that were promised in exchange for tax breaks for its massive $1.5 billion refinery expansion…About 37 percent, or about 109, of the expansion project’s construction workers were Detroiters as December. About 22 permanent hires in 2008 and 2009 live in the city, about 28 percent… The Detroit City Council demanded the jobs in 2007, when it approved tax credits worth $186 million over 20 years over fierce opposition from neighbors” (MacDonald 2010).

Like the arguments that rationalize compromises to public health using metrics to claim that conditions are safe, the use of 48217 as a sacrifice zone rationalizes health outcomes as collateral damage for job and revenue creation. Instead of framing health and air quality as issues of human rights, these issues are depoliticized and treated as an issue of costs versus benefits. Speaking to Li’s (2007) arguments about the ability of experts to render arguments non-political in order to reproduce their image as objective problem solvers, spokespeople from industry, environmental regulating agencies and politicians viewed the issues of air quality as a matter of trade offs for vulnerable residents of the city.

The conclusion that expertise in the media potentially generates support for 48217 to be treated as collateral damage in terms of pollution and subsequent health effects expands on Yiftachel’s (2009) arguments about gray spaces. Gray spaces, according to Yiftachel, are comprised of spaces occupied by politically marginalized citizens oppressed by the state. These spaces “are neither integrated nor eliminated, forming pseudo-permanent margins of today’s urban regions, which exist partially outside the gaze of state authorities and city plans” (Yiftachel 2009, 249–250). The arguments used by experts that uphold the legal limits for amounts of pollution while downplaying the health effects
for 48217 residents amount to a condition that largely fulfills the description of a gray space, but that isn’t merely “neither integrated nor eliminated” into the urban fabric. In this case, using an argument of collateral damage, 48217 is a gray space that is very publicly deliberated and even insisted upon. Further, such arguments are rationalized by the expertise of politicians and environmental regulatory agencies that are intended to protect the health of marginalized citizens.

Residents of 48217

In contrast to the residents and entrepreneurs in Downtown and Midtown, who are portrayed with a general sense of optimism and enthusiasm, and are associated with an increasingly favorable quality of life, the media portrayal of residents of 48217 is dominated by coverage of their grievances with local industry. Data from both media articles and interviews with community members indicate resident frustration with the fact that they were only shown in light of their relationship to industry. Some community members also felt that the media did not portray the positive aspects of their community or events outside the contentious issues of increased emissions for industrial operations.

Portrayals of residents in the media were largely tied to events where industry was proposing to expand either through infrastructural changes or through requests for increased emissions. The data sample examined found little media coverage of the community outside of these events. When residents were interviewed and quoted, it was overwhelmingly in response to a grievance about health disparity or pollution concerns related to industry. For example, one resident was quoted sharing concerns about her family’s health in the following:

“Four of her six children have asthma, all of whom were born on Liddesdale. Her 54-year-old husband, a truck driver, lifetime neighborhood resident and light smoker, died in November from brain and lung cancer. ‘Look at the price we are paying,’ said Elum, 51. ‘We are risking our lives here. But who has the resources to move?’ (MacDonald 2010).

Other residents were quoted in the news sharing concerns about health coupled with the feeling of
being stuck in such poor air quality conditions in a community with a high poverty rate:

“We’re a scientific experiment out here,” said resident Vincent Martin, 48. Residents say their complaints about air quality and health have been ignored for too long. Barbara Coleman, 78, had breast cancer and now has cancer of the lymphatic system, which she says she believes is the result of living in an area for 40 years where dust often covered the grass like snow. ‘People here are poor and can’t afford to sell and move to an unpolluted area,’ she said. Her husband died of prostate cancer, a disease her 48-year-old son Terrence now has, too. Residents have cataloged cancer and asthma block by block. They want state and federal officials to study their health and carefully monitor air quality” (Lam 2010c).

Several articles mentioned the Oakwood buyout, when Marathon bought homeowners out of their properties so that they could relocate. Again, the perspectives of residents are portrayed in relation to the hardship of living in close proximity to noxious industries:

“In the Oakwood Heights district Wednesday, some residents said they were delighted to hear of the buyout offers. ‘I’m excited. We’ve wanted to get out of here for the longest time,’ said Rita Gutierrez, 43, who lives on the 400 block of Colonial. ‘It’s kind of dangerous here. It’s one of the better blocks, but you still see a lot of stuff, a lot of pit bulls, and the smell at nighttime or in the morning in the summertime, it’s just unbearable. We couldn’t open our windows.’ Her friend and neighbor, Linda Chernowas, 63, agreed. She listed common complaints in the district about ‘the odors, the dust, the chemicals, the salt mines shaking the buildings, and the house is cracking. It’s just hard. You don’t know which way to go’” (Gallagher 2011b).

While this sample of stories is biased towards coverage about industry, it should be said that many of the stories focused on exposing and implicating both industry and environmental regulating agencies. Several articles commented on the insufficiency of MDEQ and EPA limits for acceptable amounts of toxins (Lam 2012; Lockridge 2016; El-Sayed 2016b; Lam 2010b). The role of the media as a watchdog serves as a significant platform for residents hoping to get their story broadcasted to the broader public. In several instances, residents applauded journalists, who took the initiative to share the perspectives from 48217. An article published by the Detroit Free Press that was a contribution from the Health Director stated:

“Constricted lungs, diseased hearts, tumors in the lungs and beyond: these are consequences that the MDEQ wants Detroiters to accept. Ostensibly, these allowances would decrease sulfur dioxide emissions from gasoline refined at their facility in southwest Detroit. While this unquestionable benefit would be borne nationally, Marathon oil and the MDEQ are asking the people of Detroit to bear the brunt of the consequences” (El-Sayed 2016b).
In addition to instances where the media implicated environmental regulatory agencies, a common theme was the culpability assigned to polluting industries. One article wrote that, “Besides Marathon, there are major steelmakers, cement and asphalt manufacturers, metal plating plants and oil recyclers that all emit toxic substances in the area” (Lam 2012).

Overall, the community is painted as the victims of both industrial and state actions. The coverage of the community members themselves is limited to their responses to the actions of industry and environmental regulatory agencies, focusing largely on the health costs of living in the zip code. Additionally, residents are portrayed as being trapped due to their income and in favor of buyouts. The interview data collected for this research reflected an uncomfortable relationship with the media for many residents who indicated that they felt they were portrayed unfairly or not enough. Similar to the sentiment of neglect felt towards development and public services in general, many residents felt that 48217 was underserved by the media when compared to other neighborhoods of the city. One resident said, “we really haven’t had a lot of coverage other than environmental, because, like I said, we’re forgotten” (interview, Detroit, 2016). Others echoed this sentiment, and one resident mentioned that on the rare occasions that 48217 is in the media, they often call the neighborhood by an incorrect name. This same resident also explained, “I’ll say this. If I ever see anything about this area in the media and it isn’t solely regarding the Marathon, I’m surprised” (phone interview, 2016).

Although the media played an important role in exposing environmental injustice, many residents interviewed also felt that the coverage of 48217 is unfair and only highlights negative aspects, like pollution or crime. Other interviews reflected similar opinions of the media in terms of its bias towards negative coverage, one of which was that, “if they’re talking about Marathon, if they’re talking about pollution, you’re talking about disinvestment, if you’re talking about the negative
things then of course people go straight to 48217” (interview, Detroit, 2016). Several residents interviewed felt that their relationship to Marathon Oil specifically overshadowed their identity as a community. One resident said: “Obviously, you know, if there’s something going on with Marathon, then yes, 48217 will receive attention, for that and that only. But other than that, there isn’t much that this area is going to get recognized for in the media. I don’t think that, with that, people even consider or give the community credit for even being a community” (phone interview, 2016).

Overall, the coverage that biases towards negative depictions of the community almost exclusively as it relates to the actions of Marathon and other polluting industries was met with a small degree of ambivalence by residents. Many felt that they were being portrayed negatively, but a few were grateful that the story of their suffering and resistance was being told at all. A representative from an environmental non-profit that works with the community described the complexity of the portrayal of 48217:

“You know, the one thing I don’t like about the media portrayal is, sort of getting into the narrative of the victim and you know, all that…a lot of the people in 48217 are very nice people, they’re very well organized, they’re very passionate about these issues, and they’re the ones working hard to make a real change in a world that is otherwise indifferent. I think that the media only comes in when there’s a problem and I think that to a degree creates a skewed image, only focusing on talking heads and a few spokespeople. The larger picture of years of work is lost, the human dimension of the struggle…But at the same time, I am glad that there is coverage of some of these images now. Like, the Marathon thing where they had all the TV stations out to expose the corruption of the corporations and the state and abdicating their duty. So it’s kind of a double edged sword in a way” (interview, Detroit, 2016).

While coverage of 48217 is largely built around the contentious relationships between community members, industry leadership and environmental regulatory agencies, it would be remiss to paint a picture of residents as passive actors at the whim of the media. Although many residents found their portrayal in the media to be unfavorable, both the interview data and media coverage also revealed times where community members aimed to change the narratives in the media either by developing
relationships with reporters or by contributing pieces and opinions of their own for publication. One resident described a time when they invited several media outlets to be present and report on air quality measurements being done by environmental regulatory agencies (interview, Detroit, 2016). Another resident explained the relationship that the community had developed with a reporter for the *Detroit Free Press*, who attempted to relay their stories through her work (interview, Detroit, 2016). In fact, about a quarter of articles in this sample were written by this reporter working with the community to amplify their voice. Several of the same residents used the media as a way to get their message out and were quoted by many articles in the data; another resident wrote an opinion piece in *Al-Jazeera* explaining the environmental injustice issues in 48217 (Lockridge 2016). The data both from interviews and the articles themselves revealed that residents at times attempted to use the media as an armature of their organizing efforts, and as a tool to tell of the emotional and social justice aspects of their experience, as opposed to being mere objects of media interest.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the main attitudes portrayed in the media about development in the Downtown and Midtown area and 48217 zip code. The data displayed that the media largely serves as a vehicle for reproducing and distributing the values of individualism and capitalism in contexts of significant disinvestment. Beginning with a description of the media fascination with entrepreneurs as individuals both through their work and in-depth descriptions of their personas, this chapter argued that in the context of large scale private investment and scarce public resources, developers and investors have the potential to take on a celebrity-like status. The projects of such entrepreneurs and their vision for the future of the Downtown core are typically portrayed in a light of optimism and enthusiasm. These portrayals draw parallels to the objectives of the branding schemes initiated by private developers and the foundation community described in chapter 3.
A stark contrast from the youthful, optimistic and ingenious developments that have transformed Downtown-Midtown, 48217 is portrayed in a less successful light. The stories that were published about 48217 almost entirely focused on the expansion of noxious industries, and the battles residents fought towards improving air quality. Experts from industry, environmental regulatory agencies and politicians were frequently quoted using metrics to rationalize the poor air quality of the zip code. Rarely addressing the high instances of certain illnesses in the community, experts provided quotes to the media that argued that current or increased emissions were acceptable legally. Weighing jobs against health for residents of 48217 in articles was seen within the consistent theme of treating the local community as collateral damage or as a ‘sacrifice zone’ for benefits on the aggregate, such as job creation, tax revenue or energy production. This chapter displays that on the one hand, subsidies for development by wealthy entrepreneurs are rationalized by government entities as being a key path to urban revitalization. On the other hand, in light of the scarcity of public funds, officials rationalize worsening health outcomes for the marginalized residents of 48217 by framing the issue of emissions increases as one that weighs jobs against health.

When the media coverage of development is compared to the perspectives of individuals involved and portrayed in stories focused on such development, the implications of the disparate images of the two areas become more salient. Development professionals interviewed, who worked with developers like Dan Gilbert, expressed that while they were usually portrayed in a positive light, they felt that their work was taken to a sensational level by the media. Media stories often cherry picked the most visually impressive projects they were working on, and portrayed other stories in a somewhat sensationalist light. Further, they expressed that often times the media portrayed details about their work that weren’t entirely accurate. When compared to how residents of 48217 viewed
their portrayal, some felt that the focus on negative events (mostly conversations around poor air quality and emissions increases) was part of a larger trend of feeling forgotten and undervalued as a community. Some residents revealed moments when they worked with the media to get the stories of their struggles with pollution discussed more publicly. However, most residents felt that their image was unfairly portrayed as a community that is only of interest if the story involves a heavily polluting industry, and is ignored when there is a positive story to be told. While it is perhaps unsurprising that individuals being covered by the media were hesitant to accept their depictions as entirely accurate, the ways in which coverage of Downtown-Midtown and 48217 differed are significant reflections of the uneven development climate of the city.
CHAPTER 6

A CAUTIONARY NOTE: PATHOLOGIZING DETROIT as an OBJECT for POLICY INTERVENTION in the ACADEMIC LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will analyze a significant aspect of planning expertise, namely the ability for academics to frame planning issues and geographies in need of intervention through their work. Using the academic literature on development in Detroit over the last decade (systematically gathered using a keyword search), this chapter relates its theoretical foundations to an evolving body of literature on ‘shrinking cities’. In examining the themes across the literature, the conditions of deficit and pathology delineate shrinking cities from their growing counterparts. This chapter explores the social implications of the objectification of such geographies for expert intervention. Finally, it draws from the history of the planning profession to present a cautionary note on how the pathologizing of cities and neighborhoods, which are home to marginalized communities, has exacerbated wealth and race disparity in American cities.

DEFINING the SHRINKING CITY

A significant part of the literature addressing development in Detroit is framed in the rhetoric and theories of a growing body of scholarship on ‘shrinking cities’. This section looks into this literature cited in the sample of work on Detroit, aiming to understand its implications for development. While there are commonalities among the ways that scholars define the term shrinking cities, there are many ways of defining what constitutes shrinkage (Pallagst, Wiechmann, and Martinez-Fernandez 2013; LaCroix 2010). Cities under this “emerging planning phenomenon” are described by Berkeley’s Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCiRN) as “…densely populated
urban area[s] with a minimum population of ten thousand residents that has faced population losses in large parts for more than two years and is undergoing economic transformations with some symptoms of structural crisis” (Pallagst, Wiechmann, and Martinez-Fernandez 2013, 3;6). Similarly, some scholars focus their definition of shrinking cities on population loss and economic decline, relating them to symptoms of structural crisis; others treat population loss as the main component in their definition (Pallagst 2008; Cunningham-Sabot et al. 2014; Wiechmann 2008; Beyer, Hagemann, and Rieniets 2006). One definition linked the characteristics of shrinking cities more closely to deindustrialization and subsequent undesirable transformations to the built environment in cities, saying: “We identify as shrinking cities a special subset of older industrial cities with significant and sustained population loss (25% or greater over the past 40 years) and increasing levels of vacant and abandoned properties, including blighted residential, commercial, and industrial buildings” (Schilling and Logan 2008a, 452). One author argued that the shrinking city cannot be strictly defined, but should be understood through a broader group of phenomena, stating:

“What is a shrinking city? There is no single definition, but several cities of the American Northeast can tell you they know it when they see it. Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, and Youngstown, to name a few, share similar characteristics: long-term trends of significant population decline, associated with the loss or diminution of the industries that caused the cities to grow in the first place” (LaCroix 2010, 227).

Similarly, another author pointed to a degree of superficiality that might be implied in the term, saying, “‘Shrinking cities’—a problematic term. It seems first to simply point to a phenomenon: the decline of the urban population and economic activity in certain cities. But behind this term are hidden various causes, processes, and effects that the words themselves do not reveal” (Oswalt 2005, 12). Popular geographies of study in this literature are diverse and span the globe, including the American Rust Belt, former industrial corridors of Germany and cities in Japan (Beyer, Hagemann, and Rieniets 2006; Pallagst, Wiechmann, and Martinez-Fernandez 2013; Grant et al.
From these definitions and commentary on the difficulty of defining such a concept, we see that there are a broad variety of parameters considered by scholars, including population loss, deindustrialization, vacancy, blight and economic decline. However, the use of negatively valued terminology to define the parameters of a shrinking city is consistent across definitions that allow shrinkage to be framed as pathology.

A commonality that does exist among several of the definitions is the understanding of shrinkage as the result of what has been termed ‘structural crisis’ by several scholars (Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012; Pallagst 2008; Pallagst, Martinez-Fernandez, and Wiechmann 2014). While only vaguely defined, structural crisis as the cause of shrinkage has been linked to several phenomena in the literature. Shrinking cities scholar Karina Pallagst (2013) explains that the causes of these conditions are myriad, and include economic and population decline due to low birth rates, industrial shifts, dissolution of socialist systems, recent recession and globalization. Some focus on the industrial shifts that often prompt shrinkage in cities that are, “Marked by a loss of employment opportunities and the attendant out-migration of population, many shrinking cities have suffered from the postindustrial shift from manufacturing to service industries” (Pallagst, Wiechmann, and Martinez-Fernandez 2013, 3). Others emphasize the many causes and scales of shrinkage, saying that, “The term ‘urban shrinkage’ is used to stress the fact that this phenomenon is a multidimensional process with multidimensional effects and having economic, demographic, geographic, social and physical dimensions that not only continue to evolve as a result of new global and local realities” (Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012, 214).

In addition to a wide variety of causes and symptoms, the process of shrinkage is discussed in the literature on a broad variety of scales, from the neighborhood level, to the regional, to the global
A theme in the shrinking cities literature is the attribution of shrinkage (however defined) to processes of globalization (Bernt 2009; Grant et al. 2006; Pallagst, Wiechmann, and Martinez-Fernandez 2013; Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012; Cunningham-Sabot et al. 2014). Related to the industrial shifts emblematic of population loss in many cities, scholars understand shrinking cities to be victims of disparity created through the global movement of capital, saying that, “The causes of this urban decline are complex, but in many ways they can be understood as socio-spatial manifestations of the forces of globalization” (Pallagst, Wiechmann, and Martinez-Fernandez 2013, 3). This observation linked several pieces of the literature together, also pointing out that, “Cities whose development was based on a single industry, or on the concentration of an activity in a single sector, have been particularly affected by these globalization processes” (Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012, 214). Though often in agreement that globalization and industrial shifts are at the root of urban shrinkage in many cases, the range of potential causes of shrinkage across the literature is vast. In this broad array of characteristics and differing accounts by authors of what constitutes shrinkage, quite a large number of cities and regions could potentially be considered to be shrinking. The vague definition of shrinking cities and their causes in effect create an umbrella category that may include many places. In fact, several scholars have aimed to quantify the number of cities globally that could be considered shrinking cities. The various parameters of this phenomenon apply so broadly that, “according to different studies, every 6th to 4th large city” could be considered shrinking since the 1990s (“Coping with City Shrinkage: A Global Issue” 2017, 1). A different author said that, “It has been reported that, globally, about 370 cities with more than 100,000 residents have either temporarily or lastingly undergone population losses of more than 10% in the last 50 years” (Bernt 2009, 754). Yet another staggering claim, “Between 1950 and 2000, more than 350 large cities
experienced, at least temporarily, significant declines in population. In the 1990s, more than a quarter of the world’s large cities shrank” (Beyer, Hagemann, and Rieniets 2006, 6). The ability of the term shrinking cities to encompass such a broad set of geographies utilizing a vast array of characteristics and causes raises questions about how easily and usefully such a designation can be used. Further, the assumption that cities experiencing shrinking due to extremely diverse causes (compare the conditions of low birth rate, dissolution of socialist states and deindustrialization for example) should prompt suspicion when scholars attempt to provide uniform solutions across these disparate geographies. The following section describes the main solutions proposed by the body of shrinking cities scholarship examined here.

SMART DECLINE, in the SHRINKING CITIES LITERATURE

Many scholars argue that the assumptions that cities will always grow is rooted in the most recent memories of industrialization, that spurred unprecedented growth patterns in cities around the world (Beyer, Hagemann, and Rieniets 2006; Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012; Grant et al. 2006; Pallagst, Wiechmann, and Martinez-Fernandez 2013). Contrary to a growth-oriented understanding of cities stemming from the expansion during and following industrialization, scholars argue that a new paradigm is needed to understand shrinkage. The questioning of assumptions about urban growth as a result of scholarship on shrinking cities is described in the Atlas of Shrinking Cities (2006), stating that, “This is difficult for us to imagine from the perspective of industrialized nations, because for generations we have experienced all but continuous growth in many areas of society, and from a global perspective, growth processes have dominated thus far” (Beyer, Hagemann, and Rieniets 2006, 6). One author writes that this investigation into urban shrinkage raises questions about our acceptance of growth as the main paradigm for urban development:

“Planning paradigms have long focused on urban growth while governance has consistently relied on cities as ‘growth machines’. Although some cities are happy to remain small (e.g. Oxford in the UK;
Salamanca in Spain) a certain stigma is attached to industrial cities that are growing slowly or declining after losing their former glory” (Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012, 220).

From these observations, authors have suggested various practices by which cities might address the issues of shrinkage, not by encouraging growth, but by planning for a model of urbanization that thrives despite sustained population loss.

Despite being defined in such broad terms and according to a diverse array of causes, the literature aims to provide general planning solutions that might apply across contexts. The realization of the need for an alternative to growth has brought:

“…a new ‘era’ characterized by the spread of ‘shrinking cities’ [that] calls for a new vocabulary to describe the alleged new process and its effects. It also calls for urban research and planning approaches that take into account growth and shrinkage that give way to a paradigm shift from growth at any costs to ‘shrinking smart’” (Cunningham-Sabot et al. 2014, 14).

Further, the realization that the traditional ways of funding urban development are perhaps no longer applicable is also represented in the literature that promotes new ideas for how to plan for shrinking cites. One author explained that, “Conventional market-based redevelopment policies to induce reinvestment are insufficient to reverse this imbalance and the cyclical nature of decay and disinvestment” (Schilling and Logan 2008a, 452).

In response to what are deemed to be deficits in the current paradigm of planning for solely growth, scholars propose solutions for shrinkage. A large number of these solutions fit under what are termed interchangeably as, “smart decline”, “smart shrinkage” or “right sizing” (Schilling and Logan 2008b; Hollander and Németh 2011; Beckman 2010; Pallagst 2014). Hereafter referred to as smart decline, this strategy can be defined as the, “stabilizing [of] dysfunctional markets and distressed neighborhoods by more closely aligning a city’s built environment with the needs of existing and
foreseeable future populations by adjusting the amount of land available for development” (Schilling and Logan 2008a, 453). As an example of how a city might achieve this, some of the strategies emerging from this work include “demolishing underutilized housing, removing redundant streets, and downsizing municipal infrastructure to correspond with the declining population” (Czerniak 2013, 24). Additionally, one piece of scholarship explained that, “A right-sizing initiative should first address the blight and decay caused by vacant properties, aiming to stabilize neighborhoods with significant levels of property abandonment” (Schilling and Logan 2008a, 453). A more drastic approach to smart decline, shrinking the city’s footprint to fit available resources is part of the, “proposal that we shrink central cities that exhibit significant vacancy rates…In cities with significant vacancy problems, shrinking the municipal jurisdiction would conserve public resources by streamlining service delivery and reducing oversized infrastructure systems” (Beckman 2010, 390). Some have also suggested that green uses could occupy the excess land that emerges as cities lose is offered by several scholars (LaCroix 2010; Schilling and Logan 2008a). These uses include, “community garden[s]”, “constructed wetland[s]”, “solar field[s]” or “urban agriculture/commodity farming” (LaCroix 2010, 234).

Of these strategies, the literature cites the implementation of smart decline inspired plans in both Youngstown and Cleveland, Ohio (LaCroix 2010; Beckman 2010; Schilling and Logan 2008a; Pallagst 2014). A municipal plan from Youngstown, Youngstown 2010, is seen as pioneering in its vision to implement smart decline strategies (Pallagst 2014). Main components of this plan aim to, “abandon streets, close down infrastructure, and consolidate its remaining population in selected areas” (LaCroix 2010, 229). This plan also “shrink[s] the urban footprint through voluntary owner relocation and targeted municipal investment” (Beckman 2010, 391). Similarly, several authors point
to Cleveland’s approach to rightsizing in their plan *Re-Imagining a More Sustainable Cleveland* as a best practice for smart decline (LaCroix 2010; Schilling and Logan 2008a). In this plan:

“Cleveland is taking a range of steps of which three are significant here: the State of Ohio has approved legislation establishing a county-wide land bank with the power to acquire and demolish buildings on vacant properties, a coalition of government and non-governmental interests has developed a multi-faceted vision for the future...Cleveland has adopted a specific zoning category for urban gardens, including market gardens” (LaCroix 2010, 229).

These examples of smart decline ideals being adapted to actual plans are seen by some as key moments in the development of alternatives and learning opportunities for shrinking cities (Pallagst 2014; LaCroix 2010; Schilling and Logan 2008a).

This broad survey of the shrinking cities literature that informs the development scholarship on Detroit has shown the varied and at times inconsistent definitions of shrinking cities. Additionally, it has shown the wide array of causes of shrinkage that can result in a city being categorized as such. The staggeringly high proportion of cities that might be considered shrinking under such definitions demonstrate that there is perhaps a problematic level of vagueness at work here. Additionally troublesome is the tendency for these definitions to be framed only in terms of deficits; these definitions are then applied to a group of shrinking cities that are already economically and socially marginalized cities and regions. In projecting this pathology onto areas that are already struggling socioeconomically, this literature may be further marginalizing populations and geographies they claim to be bolstering. Further, in the pathologizing of such cities and the focus on deficits as broadly as they are defined in the literature, shrinking cities in effect become distinct objects of expert planning intervention, as in the case of Youngstown and Cleveland. The urgency of planning intervention in such environments is not a problem in itself, however, the strategies used to mitigate the symptoms of shrinking cities in light of the politically marginalized communities that often call them home deserve further scrutiny.
From Japanese cities to the American Rust Belt, these locales under the broad umbrella of shrinking cities have been discussed in terms of ways to “right-size” infrastructure and urban footprint through smart decline. While population loss and economic decline no doubt have negative impacts on cities around the world, questions can be raised about the productivity of the exercise of prescribing universal solutions to such issues in varied geographical, social and political contexts.

With a few exceptions, the shrinking cities literature surveyed here largely prescribes solutions with little discussion of the political processes that lead to the adoption of such plans, and their potential to exclude the already marginalized populations of shrinking cities. These concerns about treating contexts as apolitical and neglecting the difficult realities of the planning process are echoed by Justin Hollander and Jeremy Nemeth (2011) who make the claim that, “many scholars in the shrinking cities milieu tend to focus on outcome over process – an important aim, but one that draws away attention from issues of representation, inclusion, and deliberation in planning and policy development” (349). By ignoring political processes or existing social inequalities, shrinking cities are treated as a blank slate for planning expertise. Complex social and political environments are rationalized, and “one size fits all” planning practices are prescribed across a diverse field of cities and regions.

FRAMING DETROIT as EXCEPTIONAL AMONG SHRINKING CITIES

Shifting from the broader lens of shrinking cities literature, I will now examine the shrinking literature about Detroit. Utilizing the conceptual premise of shrinking cities, as it is variously defined, scholars often draw on the commonalities between Detroit and other such cities. For example, this scholarship has compared Detroit and other shrinking cities like Youngstown, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Pittsburgh (Ryan 2014; Dewar 2006; Gallagher 2010). Within the larger
literature on shrinking cities, the rust belt of the United States is recognized by its unique causes and
symptoms of shrinkage. Gallagher (2010) explains that cities in the rust belt might understand
shrinkage through the following lens:

“They’ve come to define shrinkage as a post-World War II problem centered on the Great Lakes
industrial region. In that time and place, they have seen once-great cities depopulated rapidly as auto
factories and steel mills shut down and new bedroom communities lured away residents. From their
perspective, shrinkage stems from a witch’s brew of American industrial decline, white flight, and
suburban sprawl” (Gallagher 2010, 5).

However, within the literature on shrinking cities, and the subset of the literature focusing on the
rust belt, the scholarship about development in Detroit often describes conditions in the city that set
it apart from other shrinking cities. This is the perspective of scholars who argue that the city is
uniquely situated among shrinking cities as exceptional in its degree of social and physical distress
(Hollander and Németh 2011; Raleigh and Galster 2014; Sands 2015; Tabb 2015; Thomas and
Bekkering 2015).

The majority of the literature examined in this discourse analysis understands Detroit to be
exceptional in this way. Often drawing on similarities between the challenges in Detroit and other
shrinking cities, authors argue for Detroit as a case worthy of investigation by describing the
exceptional and outlying level of decline experienced there. June Manning Thomas and Thomas
Bekkering (2015) explain:

“Denver, for example, contained vast portions never developed or developed with low-density housing;
but only small portions had experienced the wrenching reversal of fortune of Detroit, where vast
tracts of land once hosting houses or factories now contained empty bulks or, eventually, land cleared
with sporadic government grants. Other cities were not experiencing exodus rates rapidly increasing
as city services rapidly declined, as did Detroit. Their economies had not plummeted” (8).

Connections between this view of exceptionalism and its importance as a case selection in scholarly
work can also be drawn. The ambition of choosing an outlying case like Detroit was discussed by
one scholar:
“…the scale of the problems here are much larger than other places. The problems themselves are no different. The scale is much larger. So if you’re interested in tackling some of the biggest challenges…in your scholarship, this would be a good place to focus on…There probably is as much happening here in terms of a declining, post-industrial, distressed city to tackling these very large challenges as there is anywhere else” (interview, Detroit, 2015).

A common understanding of Detroit among scholars as a “national symbol of depopulation, disinvestment, and crime” adds to its image of exceptionalism among shrinking cities (Raleigh and Galster 2014, 1). However, a much smaller contingent of academics argue that relative to the broader processes of global capital and neoliberal governance, the reality of Detroit’s decline is not significantly different from trends occurring elsewhere (Akers 2013; Hollander and Németh 2011; Tabb 2015; Sugrue 2005a; Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012; Kinder 2016). Counter to the dominance of the literature understanding Detroit as exceptional, Martinez-Fernandez et al. (2012) engage political economy literature discussing globalization as a partial explanation for shrinkage as a phenomenon. Similarly, Joshua Akers (2013) argues that:

“…evidence suggests that we should consider these sites not as exceptions or outliers, but rather as fundamental urban expressions of market-centric policies—in which private-market solutions to market failure reinforce the conditions of vacancy, abandonment, and disuse that have become the essence of the deindustrialized city of decline” (1075).

In an interview, another scholar pointed to the politics that have prioritized economic growth in cities across the country, saying that, “…the things that Detroit is doing are not radically different from things that other American cities do in terms of having a growth machine, and boosterism and all these kinds of dialogue. It’s all happening in all American cities” (phone interview, 2015).

However, literature that specifically links causes of decline to the political histories of cities (even to a minor degree) represents a small portion of scholarship analyzed. Work framing Detroit as exceptional does not tend to engage in this debate, but instead relies on scholarship supporting the further exploration of the shrinking cities phenomenon (rooted in the shrinking cities literature) as background and rationale for scholarship. There is a significant lack of recognition of the notion that perhaps many of the circumstances defining shrinking cities, such as deindustrialization or structural
crisis, can be described through existing theoretical frameworks. In encouraging the investigation of shrinking cities through what is thought to necessitate an entirely new theoretical framework, shrinking cities and the exceptional case of Detroit are potentially further pathologized. They are viewed as ‘special cases’ of decline entirely different from what are deemed more successful cities.

In addition to the argument for a new theoretical framework to understand shrinking cities like Detroit, some believe that there is an emerging need for the expert innovation of new planning tools to correct the ills of the city. Similar to the shrinking cities literature at large, the exceptionalism of Detroit’s circumstances often serves as a foundation for the argument that new planning tools are needed to address issues of shrinkage. For example, Lars Grabner, (2015) an architect and scholar, argues, “Economic challenges and demographic shifts, especially the process of shrinkage and outward migration, have rendered traditional planning tools ineffective, and new tools are only slowly emerging.” (Grabner 2015, 169). The call for scholars and planners to devise new tools to deal with the issues constructed by the broader discussions around shrinking cities is echoed in the call for innovation by June Manning Thomas and Toni Griffin (2015) who state that, “With a clear and innovative vision, and with implementation of that vision shared by collaborative partners, Detroit can rewrite the book on the transformation of post-industrial cities in the United States and possibly abroad” (229). This statement also implies that in Detroit’s exceptionalism, scholars studying it have the potential to blaze a trail by using it as a case to devise solutions for other shrinking cities.

SOLUTIONS for DETROIT in the LITERATURE

While portions of the literature on development in Detroit don’t focus on solutions to shrinkage, a considerable amount focuses on mitigating the issue through smart decline and other strategies. The
literature surveyed generally fell into three main categories: 1) descriptive literature that depicts the
descriptive processes of decline in the city (32%); 2) prescriptive literature that makes suggestions
for how planning practice might be carried out in Detroit (60%) and 3) engaged literature that draws
conclusions about development by directly taking part in processes of development (8%). The work
of engaged scholars required students and faculty to actively engage in the operations of
organizations like community development corporations or other development related non-profits,
and then make theoretical contributions that drew from such collaborations (Griffin and Thomas
2015; Dewar and Linn 2015; Draus, Roddy, and McDuffie 2014). Examples of this are the work of
Margaret Dewar and Robert Linn (2015) who worked with a team of students alongside community
groups to inventory conditions in Brightmoor, a neighborhood of northwest Detroit. Similarly,
Draus, Roddy and McDuffie (2014) drew from a collaboration with leaders of a community-initiated
urban agriculture project. In addition to partaking in development strategies, the data also revealed
times when academics used their role as development experts to weigh in on political debates. For
example, two academics interviewed described times where they had applied their research to
making public comments at hearings when they felt the livelihood of a community they studied was
in jeopardy. Another academic indicated that he was involved in conversations with municipal policy
makers where they sought his advice about ordinances regarding land use, however, no direct
influence was apparent.

Of these three categories above (descriptive, prescriptive and engaged), the prescriptive literature
that offered planning based solutions dominated, accounting for almost two thirds of the writings
reviewed. While in some cases articles were found to fit into more than one of these three
categories, for the most part, scholarship starkly lacked overlap (see figure 34). A main rift that will
be explored in more depth is the lack of communication between literature prescribing solutions and
literature that describes the racialized history of planning interventions in the city. Additionally, this section discusses the implications for the focus on smart decline in the literature on Detroit.

**Figure 35:** Diagram showing little overlap between descriptive and prescriptive focuses of the literature, and a small portion of engaged scholarship.

*Descriptive Literature Implicating the Planning Profession*

The literature that aims to give a historic analysis of the issues facing Detroit represents a distinct category of scholarship. Many of these pieces feature critiques of the history of the planning profession and focus on racialized policies. Authors argue that planners and policymakers have historically exacerbated the climate of wealth disparity and state inflicted violence against people of
June Manning Thomas (2015) describes the historic development climate in Detroit as one that “operated in a metropolitan context of unusually high racial conflict, government support for suburbanization, and deindustrialization” (52). Several authors discuss the role of the racial redlining and a federal taxation structure that encourages homeownership for White families, while discriminating against people of color (Thomas and Bekkering 2015; Sugrue 2005b). Some implicated the planning profession by pointing to segregation caused by land use and spatial configuration promoted through modernist planning, and its encouragement of suburbanization (Fishman 2015). Related to the land use patterns and urban policy, transportation planning and policy are implicated in their role of exacerbating segregation. Joe Grengs (2015) argues that, “mobility-based transportation policy contributes to the sprawl that, researchers have shown, particularly harms people of color and low-income people, who disproportionately live near the urban core because of discrimination in housing markets, and who have fewer resources to adapt to spreading land use patterns” (102).

Binding these arguments is the perspective that historically, the policies used by planners in an era of suburbanization are felt today in the vastly disparate experiences of Black and White residents in terms of wealth and quality of life throughout the metropolitan region.

Another angle used to implicate the planning profession for the troubles of Detroit are critiques of the city government’s attempts at revival. Some criticisms are based on the futile attempts to leverage public private partnerships to revitalize the Downtown area during the austerity of the 1970s and 1980s (Ryan 2014). Others agree, pointing to unequal development patterns and efforts that primarily centered Downtown. Daniel Clement and Miguel Kanai (2015) explain, “Government retrenchment and economic development initiatives favoring elite corporate actors have been the norm in Detroit for decades, and many valuable studies focus on how this situation has aggravated
the city’s predicaments” (Clement and Kanai 2015, 5). Commenting on the centralized and privatized investment strategies supported by the municipal government, neoliberal policy towards redevelopment is a strong theme in the critique of past and present planning efforts in Detroit (Peck and Whiteside 2016; Clement and Kanai 2015). However, in the vast majority of instances, the literature that defines the challenges in Detroit by strongly implicating the planning profession fails to shed light on how development might carry on in the city in a more racially and economically equitable way. Further, it largely fails to provide alternatives for how the planning profession might alter its practice in response to the critiques. On the other hand, literature that provides planning solutions is almost entirely devoid of a historical analysis that aims to understand planning today through racialized policy and capitalistic enterprises.

**Prescriptive Literature and Smart Decline**

While the historically descriptive literature is often critical of planners and policy makers, the literature prescribing planning-based solutions is found to generally frame problems using the current physical and spatial conditions of Detroit, with little consideration for the political or social relations that they precipitated from. In avoiding the discussion of the prospect that planning and policy professions might be at least in part responsible for the hardships faced by Detroiterst today, planning as usual remains a viable and credible option for mitigating these issues. The most common primary challenges addressed through solutions in the prescriptive literature are: vacancy/abandonment, disinvestment, population loss and blight (Amborst, D’Oca, and Theodore 2008; Desimini 2015; Deng 2013; Gallagher 2010; Grabner 2015). The least common themes among the primary challenges addressed in this literature are centered around quality of life issues for marginalized populations, including issues such as lack of affordable housing, poor public schools, poverty, public transportation accessibility and racism (Grengs 2010; Thomas 1997a; Kinder 2016;
Sugrue 2005b) (see table 4 for a list of primary challenges described in the literature and their degrees of occurrence). In general, the scholarship focuses more on providing solutions that mitigate the physical aspects of distress, and less on the day-to-day struggles of residents. Framing the main challenges of the city in terms of issues that planners regularly encounter and can promote physical and spatial remedies for, can be explained as a case of when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Contrary to the framing of decline as something that can be remedied by traditional tools of spatial planning, Ryan (2014), speaking to the case of Detroit, argues that, “Any redevelopment effort in shrinking cities must recognize that they are declining for reasons that are beyond the immediate means of developers, designers, or policy makers to remedy” (204).

Table 4: List of challenges as mentioned in the literature and their occurrences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prominence</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vacancy/abandonment</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Disinvestment</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Population loss</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Blight</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Deindustrialization</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Outdated land use policy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Economic decline</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Access to jobs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Poor food access</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Patchwork development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lack of amenities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Loss of heritage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Market-centric policy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Negative image</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lack of scholarship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lack of transparency</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Poor health</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Segregation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>City owned properties</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lack of affordable housing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Poor public schools</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Public transportation accessibility</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the solutions that aim to address the physical manifestations of shrinkage, many relate closely to the concept of smart decline. About a quarter (8) of the scholarly pieces sampled mention smart decline by name, while others mention other strategies that are conceptually similar in their aim to fit the current built environment to a smaller population’s needs. John Gallagher (2010) begins his book *Re-Imagining Detroit* by setting up smart decline and Detroit’s ability to prosper as a shrinking city as its premise. The rebound of the city will be:

“Mostly in an unqualified acceptance of Detroit as a smaller but potentially better city. This will be harder to achieve than we may think. Detroit most likely will continue to lose population for a time, and too many critics will see that loss as a death sentence. They believe that a shrinking city is a shameful place, a city getting worse. For these critics, population remains the all-important measure of victory: If it’s going up, we win. If it’s going down, we despair. This book challenges that misguided belief on every page” (Gallagher 2010, 2).

The literature also urges for acceptance of Detroit’s shrinking and an “acknowledgment that Detroit’s fate was to become a smaller city. This did not mean smaller in relevance or global impact, but rather smaller in its population and historic tax capture” (Griffin and Thomas 2015, 229). The most common of these strategies aiming to aid in the smart decline of the city in the literature and their instances are urban agriculture or green uses (12), repurposing for vacant lots for the arts\(^\text{10}\) (12), concentration of investment into areas deemed viable (3) and land banking (3).

The conversion of areas of the city to green spaces is widely mentioned in the literature as a smart decline strategy. A large subset of this literature contains suggestions that the tradition of urban agriculture in the city could be formalized, and the municipality should aim to “scale up the benefits of existing urban agriculture operations, especially as it confronts large expanses of vacant land, Detroit should actively promote urban agriculture on a widespread scale” (Mogk, Wiatkowski, and

\(^{10}\) These uses for vacant properties include temporary artistic installations and artist residences.
Utilizing the large swaths of land that lay vacant due to large-scale demolitions in parts of the city, some have suggested a variety of greening approaches beyond urban agriculture. One scholar’s vision is that:

“Another possible large-scale intervention would be to form an urban landscape park to create a variety of cultural and economic opportunities through the integration of existing abandoned and active industrial sites, infrastructure, agriculture and housing in a coordinated landscape as a cultural attraction. Thus the transformation process could be partially aesthetic as well as functional and economic” (Grabner 2015, 175).

Seeking to address the excess and often blighted properties in Detroit, many authors suggest that vacant land should be allocated to the arts and other informal uses in several ways. The “unstructured or semi-structured inhabitation and activity in buildings by artists, entrepreneurs, and local residents” has been promoted as a way of occupying excess lands and industrial areas (Ryan and Campo 2013, 25). In welcoming artist’s who have placed their own unauthorized cultural stamp on the landscape of Detroit, Ryan and Campo explain that:

“Such projects, including a guerrilla (illegal) art installation and garden atop the roof of an abandoned Packard Plant building, typify the city’s emerging creative milieu. Such DIY or insurgent actions, playfully engaging the present semi-abandoned condition of Detroit, suggest the existence of a small, but emerging constituency passionate about the creation of culture within the city’s dilapidated physical fabric” (Ryan and Campo 2013, 28).

These acts, and the attractive qualities of the distressed built environment of Detroit are further described by Andrew Herscher (2013):

“As Detroit has attracted growing attention as an exemplar of North American postindustrial urban decline, it has also attracted growing attention from artists and architects interested in the material, spatial, cultural, and social conditions of a city marked by depopulation, disinvestment, and decay. This latter interest has yielded projects ranging from documentations of ruined buildings and urban grasslands, through installations on vacant properties, to the introduction of participatory art platforms, artists’ residencies and collectives” (64).

While popular in the literature, the idea that vacant lands could be repurposed for the housing and work of an arriving creative class has come across its critics, who caution that revival at the hands of
such individuals ignores the needs of struggling long-time Detroiters (Herscher 2013; Safransky 2014; Gregory 2012).

These straightforward, common sense solutions seem to be a reasonable use for excess land and infrastructure that is oversized for the current population. However, I would apply the same critique here as I have to the literature describing smart decline for shrinking cities in general: it fails to contend with the complex nature of local politics and the history of inequality that these strategies must superimpose themselves upon. The following section will relate the challenges of implementation of smart decline and other strategies to previous chapters that have discussed inequitable outcomes among expert solutions for redevelopment in Detroit.

CITIES as OBJECTS for EXPERT INTERVENTION: A Cautionary Note

The promotion of smart decline throughout the literature on both shrinking cities and Detroit specifically is presented as a primary viable alternative to growth, albeit an approach manifested in many disparate strategies. While lacking a consensus on best practices, the literature on shrinking cities, nevertheless, continues to evolve. In this process, I offer a cautionary note about prescribing solutions to marginalized cities and regions placed in the category of shrinking cities, many of which are home to disproportionately high levels of vulnerable groups. Though shrinking cities are understood in the literature as marginal to the dominant narrative of economic growth, few authors discussing shrinking cities (in Detroit and elsewhere) make a primary focus of the fact that the process of shrinkage itself enhances racial segregation (Sugrue 2005a; Thomas 1997a; Großmann et al. 2013). Further, urban decline necessarily concentrates marginalized groups in such cities and regions with fewer resources (Großmann et al. 2013; Thomas 1997b). The sustained concentration of poverty in shrinking cities is exacerbated by a lack of resources to relocate to areas with higher
quality of life and employment opportunities (Grengs 2010). In the search for planning based solutions to urban shrinkage, the negotiation of “land use difficulties reflect deep social fissures, such as the gap between affluent, mobile people and the isolated disadvantaged left behind in the central city” (Thomas and Bekkering 2015, I).

When we consider shrinking cities to be defined only by various parameters of deficit, such as structural crisis, population loss and economic decline, we define shrinking cities as inherently pathological; this notion becomes problematic once the marginalized populations calling such cities home are taken into account. In effect, in its pathologizing of shrinking cities, the literature also pathologizes consistently marginalized race and class communities. Further, the framing of shrinking cities as objects in need of expert intervention in turn places communities living in such environments at the whim of expertise as well. Some have argued that the history of experts targeting inner cities due to what have been framed as pathological attributes has precipitated problematic labor and housing policies. Due to the nature of expertise and the elevated social status of experts, the targeting of US inner cities for expert intervention is often motivated by race and class disparity (Wacquant 1997; Goode and Maskovsky 2002; O’Connor 2002). In the next section, we will look to the history of the planning profession and development in Detroit for examples of when the treatment of marginalized communities as objects of expert intervention has not worked in favor of social equity.

Blight Removal and Urban Renewal

One such example of the problematic targeting of what were deemed by planning and policy experts as urban pathology is the urban renewal of the 1950s and 1960s. Having experienced a high degree of ‘white flight’ to newly developed suburbs, inner cities, by contrast, were racially pathologized for
their high poverty communities and majority Black neighborhoods (Ruben 2001). Slum clearance and blight removal projects were initiated by the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1956, that “enabled local governments to establish local redevelopment authorities that could purchase and clear blighted land and slums and contract with developers to build office towers, sports stadiums, apartment houses, and other downtown projects” (Beauregard 2002, 110–111). The rhetoric employed by such projects often depicted the residents of declining areas that predominantly housed people of color as being poor, criminal and transient, contrary to the images being propagated of their White counterparts in the newly constructed suburbs (Ruben 2001; Hartman 2002; Fullilove 2009). In the case of Detroit, these policies and the racialized rhetoric that supported them culminated in the demolition of Black neighborhoods such as Paradise Valley and the Lower East Side in the 1960s (Sugrue 2005b). Though the areas demolished under urban renewal were slated for replacement by public housing and upgraded amenities, they “were premised on the destruction of some of the most densely populated black neighborhoods in the city. Plans to relocate blacks displaced by the projects utterly failed” (Sugrue 2005b, 49). In defining inner city neighborhoods as pathological in their social characteristics and the quality of their built environment, local and federal policy experts engineered detrimental and highly racialized urban regeneration strategies.

The rhetoric that was leveraged to justify slum clearance projects was strongly tied to the pathology of ‘blight’. In pathologizing blighted structures as cancerous, threatening to spread their disease to neighboring blocks and communities, their removal was justified at any cost to the communities residing in physically deteriorating neighborhoods (Cahn 2014; Herscher 2015). Further, the loosely defined parameters of blight left it to local officials in cities to use their often highly racialized discretion to determine which areas were in need of demolition (Cahn 2014). In other words, while blight and the necessity for its removal is presented in rational terms, the implementation of slum
clearance and blight removal are part of a highly politicized process, prone to race and class disparate outcomes.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the targeting of blighted structures for demolition continues today, and could be considered an armature of smart decline that is sometimes absent of consideration of the social and political disparities across Detroit. This is exhibited in the roll out of funding for blight removal projects, as directed by the findings of the Blight Removal Task Force Plan. Findings from chapter 4 indicated that though 48217 is home to a considerable amount of blight, and although Southwest Detroit was targeted as a focus area for funding, the neighborhood still received little funding for demolition when compared to neighboring areas. In chapter 3, I argued that the potential for vague and nebulous definition of blight included in the Blight Removal Task Force Plan, though discussed in economically rationalized terms, makes the designation of blight problematic. With such an open-ended definition for blight, the discretion of the Task Force in designating blighted areas was biased towards the Downtown core, that was allegedly free of blight according to maps in the plan. The perception of large presence of blight in the areas outside of Greater Downtown further pathologized such neighborhoods.

*Detroit Future City as a Strategy of Smart Decline*

A main problem with smart decline as a prominent solution in the literature is not with its proposal to reduce services and infrastructure that are not needed by the current population of Detroit. The problem is in proposed solutions that treat the city as a blank slate, failing to engage with the power structures that have historically disenfranchised communities through development processes. Lacking in their analysis of the social and political dimensions of development in Detroit, this troubling disconnect among smart decline strategies has already encountered some criticism from
researchers and residents alike. Previous chapters demonstrated the potential for smart decline policies, when absent of consideration of the existing social inequality, to exacerbate racialized disparities. Chapter 4 found that residents of 48217 felt uncomfortable and excluded by the process of planning for Detroit Future City, a framework that embraces smart decline in its downsizing of public services and residential areas. The proposal of “green residential” land uses for part of the zip, a typology that speaks to the recent trend in utilizing vacant plots for urban agriculture is a clear moment where 48217 is excluded from dominant development discourse and practice; over the course of my fieldwork, residents and technical experts alike advised against eating foods grown in the contaminated soils of the zip code. On the contrary, the focused investments in Greater Downtown promoted both by Detroit Future City and the 7.2 SQ MI Report use the logic of focusing resources on already thriving areas to encourage the attraction of a class of young, predominantly White professionals to revitalize the city. As Clement and Kanai (2015) have demonstrated, smart decline strategies like Detroit Future city, in their economical rationalization of development strategies, have tended to be biased against low-income communities of color. A comparison of demographic data and proposals for smart decline made in Detroit Future City revealed that low income communities and communities of color are increasingly spatially segregated from rebounding areas largely housing wealthier, White communities (Clement and Kanai 2015).

Although the literature largely proposes smart decline type interventions in a social and political vacuum, these examples demonstrate that such factors must be considered when proposing strategies for shrinking cities. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how decisions regarding which areas are to be downsized, and which will receive investment to grow, can be made without reproducing historic class and race disparities. The widespread support for such smart decline strategies among academics writing about Detroit is worth further scrutiny, and in need of a realistic consideration of
race and wealth disparities in the city before it is promoted as a solution of any kind. The literature indicates that scholars prescribing planning solutions for the city participate in a process of what Li (2007) calls “rendering non-political” (7). This has been done through the rationalization of planning challenges and lack of engagement with the social and political relations that many scholars have argued have paved the way for the decline of Detroit. In other words, they manage to add stock to their prescriptions by ignoring problematic planning histories and depoliticizing the realities of practicing planning in Detroit.

CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of the shrinking cities literature in terms of characteristics of shrinking cities and their various causes. I ultimately concluded, with support from scholars within the literature, that the definition of what constitutes a shrinking city is yet to be agreed upon. Further, I suggested that a unified approach to correct such diverse afflictions of shrinking cities and their myriad causes is dubious, and that the prescription of smart decline strategies should proceed with caution. Within the literature on Detroit, a considerable portion draws inspiration from the broader scholarship on shrinking cities. This literature also carries a strong current of smart decline related solutions.

While the literature promoting smart decline on both a local scale in Detroit and within the broader topic of shrinking cities is still rapidly evolving, I argue that in their subtext, these strategies possess some problematic tendencies. In characterizing a set of geographies that house increasingly marginalized populations through only their deficits, a paradigm is created in the literature and potentially in development practice, that operates strictly in the interest of alleviating urban pathologies. Further, the formulation of a group of geographies as pathological and ripe for expert
intervention, the marginalized communities that have been segregated into such environments of concentrated poverty are similarly pathologized. I caution that the agency of the resilient communities residing in shrinking cities with diminishing resources is compromised in their treatment as deficient and in need of expert intervention. The paternalism of objectifying marginalized communities by experts can be seen in the demolitions of the urban renewal area and the discursive practices leveraged towards blight removal; parallels can be drawn between these detrimental policies and the rhetoric of shrinking cities literature and smart decline. As the body of literature and sets of practices that aim to mitigate the quality of life issues and structural crises of shrinking cities evolves, we should remain critical and consult the lessons of planning history, rife with moments of failed expertise.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation investigated the role of expertise and its tendency to leverage the status of experts towards practices of neoliberal governance in the development landscape of Detroit. A central component of neoliberal ideology for these purposes is the reliance on state support for, and often subsidizing of, private investment in development (including public amenities) as a response to fiscal distress on the state and municipal level. In the settings of two diverse contexts in terms of their investment strategies, an investigation of discursive practices pushing development in Downtown-Midtown and 48217 demonstrated the highly politicized nature of expertise. Development experts in both contexts were found to use their status to commit state resources to the advancement of private enterprises. In Downtown-Midtown, expertise encouraged public investment in large scale private development through subsidies and the attraction of the creative class; in 48217 expertise rationalized the expansion of industry by manipulating environmental regulations and threatening a further diminishing tax base.

Chapter 3 established the widely held belief that private developers and foundations were integral parts of what was perceived to be a renaissance centered in Downtown-Midtown. The development boosterism in the Downtown core was enhanced by the faith that the development expertise of celebrated billionaire and investor Dan Gilbert and planning director Maurice Cox would provide vision for the future of the city. The celebrity surrounding these individuals along with their support for the Detroit Future City framework seemed to enhance their image as visionaries and actors that would work to institute what was seen as the first major revision to master plan of the city since the 90s. However, the Detroit Future City framework, along with the 7.2 SQ MI Report sanctioned by the Hudson Webber Foundation were found to bolster existing private development. This was done through the targeting of already rebounding areas for additional investment, and by aiming to attract
young, educated professionals to the city’s core. This work found that the branding of development initiatives and their focus on Downtown-Midtown was a clear moment where development expertise was used to carry advance private enterprises through its rationalization of complex problems of poverty and racism to a matter of economic strategies. In this branding, private developers and philanthropic foundations advanced a narrative that placed Downtown-Midtown at the center of conversations about the city’s future. The use of documents like Detroit Future City, 7.2 SQ MI Report and the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force Plan helped shape a narrative of Downtown-Midtown as being salvageable while painting the rest of the city as pathological and a seemingly unsolvable economic quandary.

Contrary to the concentrated investment rationalized by the city and private entities in Downtown-Midtown, the 48217 zip code found itself battling state sanctioned disinvestment. Chapter 4 found that perceptions about the bias against their community in development strategies lead by the city and local industries was largely colored by a history of problematic and fragmenting planning initiatives. For example, residents of the zip code recalled the demolitions that made way for the I-75 to bisect the neighborhood and the burden that segregation place on them in terms of racialized violence, mobility and economic development for local Black owned businesses. The continuation of disinvestment that left the community with crumbling infrastructure and worsening air quality due to the consistent state support of industrial expansion was viewed in light of this history of environmental injustice. Viewing the disinvestment of the zip code that continues today in light of this history, residents often felt that their community was ‘forgotten’. Disinvestment in terms of lack of amenities like schools and recreation for young people, the gradual shift to increasingly industrial land uses and the approval of emissions increases for noxious industries were consistently resisted by residents. This resistance took on the form of emotional testimonies at public hearings about air
quality permitting that often resulted in increased emissions, despite health and environmental experts outside of industry or state regulatory agencies backing the concerns of residents. While operating on the claim that regulatory agencies could only consider “scientifically valid” data in their permitting process, this research found that air quality experts representing the state and industrial operations took part in highly politicized and coercive discursive practices. These included intimidation of the community by police and security officers, framing narratives in terms of skewed data in public hearings and handpicking cooperative community members to take part in community engagement efforts. On the other hand, though often having their claims at public hearings dismissed on the basis of their lack of scientific validity, residents resisted by adopting technocratic framing strategies in hopes of being taken seriously in development discussions. However, their use of quantitative methods and the support of experts outside of industry had little sway in what was normally the approval of permits to increase emissions. Contrary to the expert-non-expert power dynamic presented in the literature on expertise, this case showed a substantially more nuanced reality. Those thought of as objective ‘experts’ were found to adopt political and emotional strategies in pursuit of an agenda, and community members took on technocratic strategies to resist industrial expansion. Further, the community’s use of a wide range of different tactics, from sharing personal anecdotes at public hearings to class action litigation, were employed strategically based on the circumstances at hand.

Similarly, the media depictions of both of these neighborhoods reflected similar disparities to the explorations of the development landscape found in earlier chapters. Downtown-Midtown was portrayed as a viable and rational area for increased investment, and 48217 was regarded as a sacrifice zone for increased industrial emissions, justified by the alleged increased tax base and employment opportunities that such industry fosters. The frustration about being considered
collateral damage in terms of localized pollution was also revealed by 48217 in my interviews with them, who viewed that mentality as an obstacle in preventing emissions increases. In Downtown-Midtown, the degree of celebrity that business owners and developers took on in the media as visionary entrepreneurs credited for the revival of the Downtown core was similar to the celebration of individualism by development experts in Downtown-Midtown. This individualism, paired with the findings in chapter 3 that development documents and professionals regarded Downtown-Midtown to be the main area of the city experiencing a renaissance, implies that Detroit’s challenges are mainly the result of a lack of entrepreneurial expertise. Positioning wealthy individuals at the forefront of the revival of the city with little regard for the race and class disparity at the heart of the city’s problems, paints the largely low-income Detroiters living in neighborhoods outside of the Downtown core as without agency and irrelevant to the revival of the city. Interviews with residents of 48217 revealed ambivalence towards the coverage of their community in the media. On the one hand, residents were often painted as victims of disinvestment, with little media attention paid to their efforts of resistance. On the other hand, many residents felt that they were unfairly portrayed in a negative light, particularly in the sense that they mostly received coverage relative to pollution in the area.

A significant finding in the strategies of 48217 residents was that as opposed to being mere subjects of the media, they resisted by actively developing relationships with journalists in order to get citywide and sometimes national coverage of the environmental injustice issues they faced. However, often times when issues of emissions increases or industrial expansion were covered in the media, they discussed the community as in terms of costs and benefits, ultimately considering health impacts as collateral damage for the broader economic recovery of the city. The politicized and unequal administration of expert agendas across study areas was evident in the media coverage. In
One neighborhood, entrepreneurs were valued as economic experts and their ideas were considered worthy of state sponsorship through bond measures and other subsidies; in 48217, politicians and regulatory agencies justify the health impacts of industrial expansion citing scarcity of public funds and the need to increase tax bases by allowing industry to expand. The rationale for the funding distribution here seems to be biased in favor of industry and entrepreneurialism.

Finally, chapter 6 provided a discourse analysis of a sample of scholarly work on development in Detroit, and the related literature on shrinking cities. Shrinking cities scholarship focuses on cities losing population and economic base as an emerging paradigm of urbanization, analyzing the causes of and solutions for the challenges associated with these environments. This chapter found that the shrinking cities literature only vaguely defined ‘shrinking cities’ by listing myriad characteristics and causes, and mainly did so by pointing to pathologies of such geographies. Regardless of the vague definition, including causes as disparate as low birth rate and economic crisis, scholars still provided the catchall solution for urban shrinkage, known as ‘rightsizing’. Discussions of rightsizing defined it as a general strategy for retrofitting oversized infrastructure and services to correspond with smaller populations and budgets. This strategy was largely divorced from site-specific politics and the realities of race and class disparity in shrinking cities. Literature on Detroit that promoted development solutions for the city often engaged with the idea of rightsizing a way of slowing decline. A racialized history of urban decline and blight removal, as well as the current practices outlined in the Detroit Future City framework and the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force Plan were cited as cautionary notes for experts. Additionally, the 48217 felt excluded from the Detroit Future City framework both in terms of process and result. Proposing a land use shift to green residential, despite concerns about the safety of urban agriculture in the area is an example of this. The pathologizing of communities and entire cities and framing them as objects ripe for development
interventions has not historically benefited low-income groups or communities of color; in these cases, apolitical and rationalistic expert interventions in marginalized communities have exacerbated inequality.

Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this research are a significant departure from the nature of expertise that has largely been characterized in the literature as a dichotomy between the practices that delineate individuals with expert status from non-experts (Carr 2010; Abbott 1988; Boyer 2008). This literature does not usually discuss cases when expertise is directly resisted by those negatively affected by it; instead, it is presented as a one-directional power relation, where subjects of expertise display little agency or fortitude for resistance. Further, while postcolonial theorists have focused on exclusion of certain race and class profiles from formal development discourse, they do so while mainly presenting informality as a primary result of such exclusion (Roy 2005; Bayat 2004; Perlman 1980; Yiftachel 2009). In 48217, the self-provisioning of services like law enforcement, libraries and maintenance of public space was a key finding that constitutes informality as both the consequence of and resistance to disinvestment rationalized by development experts. Though this work offers insight into the exclusion of communities from development discourse on the basis of non-expert status, it also illuminates moments where this binary is not as clear. In several instances, residents of 48217 appropriated the strategies of development experts through data collection techniques and their understanding of policy frameworks. Regardless of the technocratic approach they took beyond presenting quality of life concerns and personal anecdotes about their lives in the zip code, their opposition to the expansion of industry was not only seen as invalid, but was presented as a necessary form of collateral damage in the efforts to revitalize the local economy. The significance of these findings is that the common thread between the instances of marginalization in
development discourse was not simply based on the skills and knowledge of experts versus non-experts; it was on the basis of a lack of political power, particularly when it comes to battling profit motives of the city and industry. Rejection of information furnished by the community in policy decisions was independent of its scientific merit, and appeared mostly dependent on the agenda of community members in opposing the growth of industry. The validity of concerns voiced by residents is especially salient when we consider that residents utilized the arguments of experts in public health and medical fields, to no avail. In connection to a premise of environmental injustice that finds low-income and communities of color the main groups impacted by industrial pollution, it follows that exclusion from development discourse in this setting is also intimately tied to the race and class identity of Detroiters.

Advancing the literature on political economy, this work provided a more nuanced, empirical perspective of the discursive practices used to advance neoliberal governance (Peck 2005; Peck and Whiteside 2016; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009; Brenner and Theodore 2005; W. Davies 2014). While the political economy literature is rich in explanations of processes of neoliberalization and its implications for urban inequality, it is often incomplete in its analysis of how discursive practices may support agendas associated with neoliberal rationality in actual development projects. In examining the development documents and perspectives of the challenges faced by the city, development experts framed problems in a way that justified the continued concentrated investment in the Downtown core. The ways that experts promoted their ideas through branding schemes and design oriented documents advanced the image of Downtown-Midtown as a haven for an entrepreneurial and creative class of professionals.
Similar to other literature on expertise, the perspectives on expertise within the political economy literature is lacking in terms of its understanding of the dominance of expertise as an undisputed hierarchy, and as a static power structure. In 48217, residents actively resisted such expertise, and at times, adopted the technocratic tactics of experts they mobilized against. Similarly, the experts themselves moved fluidly between strictly utilizing scientific methods and the use of coercion and emotional appeal as tactics. An additional nuance that is not apparent in the literature on neoliberal expertise is the finding that not all expertise is created equal; the role of the expert and their success in pursuing their agenda lies in its relationship to overarching economic structures. In this way, several experts combating the expansion of industry found their words to be inconsequential in development decisions, alongside politically marginalized residents contesting industrial expansion in their desperation for clean air. This finding also makes an adjacent contribution to the scholarship on radical planning practice that understands the role of the planner as an agent that “link[s] their skills to the campaigns of mobilized communities, working as enablers and facilitators” (Sandercock 1997, 205). However, in addition to developing a pluralistic, inclusive practice where historically marginalized groups are brought into discourse, this research suggests that part of this work is combatting the dominant paradigms in the profession itself that enable marginalization. In this case, the marginality of voices of 48217 was in large part due to their defiance of the dominant paradigm of neoliberal rationality and the technocratic practices it produces.

In addition to rationalizing the need to attract entrepreneurs and the “creative class” to Downtown-Midtown (and state investment in private development that was being used to do so), development documents created a clear binary between the gentrifying Greater Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. In depicting neighborhoods outside of Downtown as pathological and too far gone for revival, they continued their lower-risk, state supported investments in the areas already seeing
large scale redevelopments. As the chapters focusing on Downtown-Midtown and the media attention on the city have pointed out, this was also in no small part done through the celebrity of individual developers lauded for their investments and ingenuity in the renaissance of the city. A significant facet of neoliberalism, the understanding of individual responsibility and initiative (particularly the vision and actions of entrepreneurs and experts) is seen as a key to economic vitality in the context fiscal austerity. This ideology is prevalent in the data, overshadowing the state responsibility to provide a social safety net for its most vulnerable citizens, who should instead lift themselves up by their bootstraps, as celebrity entrepreneurs have allegedly done (despite having their projects substantially subsidized by the government).

Limitations and Further Research

There is a degree of hypocrisy in my critique of the exclusionary tendencies of experts, and particularly those in academia, being disconnected from the local politics and social climate they potentially influence. If this work remained in the realm of academia and was published as a dissertation and several academic journal articles, it too would fail to engage with the communities who have shared their stories and made this work possible. To remedy that disconnect, and to provide access to the work that Detroit communities (particularly 48217) helped create, I aim to continue a dialogue with the residents interviewed to determine a way of sharing their stories in a more public forum. This may include publishing in journalistic publications, self publishing an information booklet to easily share their challenges with other Detroiters, or the publication of a book.

While conducting interviews with academics, one scholar commented that the value of studying a phenomenon in Detroit over other locales is the tendency for symptoms of decline to be
exacerbated. For this reason, she said, Detroit can be used as a site to discover a particular aspect or process of decline because of the magnitude of its symptoms; from this discovery, comparison cases can be made to other locales where the same phenomena are likely occurring on a smaller scale that was previously not detectable in the same degree (interview, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2015). While the premise of this dissertation was to investigate expertise and its relationship to neoliberal governance and inequality in the context of extreme decline, this work could be repeated in a more typical urban setting at different scales and degrees of redevelopment, from the city to neighborhood level. In doing this, an accurate representation of the impacts of expertise and the ways it is leveraged could be more precisely understood at large.

*Implications for the Practice of Expertise*

The consideration of the political positionality of experts historically and currently has implications for planning practice. Rightsizing, a popular strategy in discourses on shrinking cities both academic and in practice, has been promoted by development experts in Cleveland, Youngstown and Detroit. An underlying concept in the disinvestment of 48217, and privately sanctioned development documents like the Detroit Future City framework and the Blight Removal Task Force Plan, rightsizing has a tendency to economically rationalize the removal of amenities and services from areas of the city, overlooking local political dynamics and social inequality. An implication for planning practice emerging from this work is the need to look beyond dominant planning paradigms, and appreciate the complexity of the social and political environment in question. Historically, the power of the expert has been leveraged in a way that rationalized racially biased policies like urban renewal in Detroit’s Downtown core, or the demolition of areas of 48217 for highway construction. Both problems and solutions confronted by planners must be defined by the communities they affect, not by the professional sensibilities of experts, who in the case of Detroit’s outlying neighborhoods, are
divorced from the day to day struggles of living in a severely declining and racially disenfranchised community.

This work provides an argument for the need for practitioners to understand the power dynamics at play when implementing expertise in a far more nuanced way. Scholars of radical planning have brought conversations about stakeholder power structures and the role of the planner as an expert to broader planning discourse (Sandercock 1997; Friedmann 1987). Building on this tradition, this work adds a dimension of power imbalance to the discussion. In the case of 48217, the root of the exclusion from planning discourse was about more than residents being unable to voice their concerns (which they frequently did at hearings and in the media); the exclusion was also very much entangled in the agenda of capitalism and industrial expansion they were disputing, and applied to those with expert status speaking on behalf of the community as well.

At times, planners should be aware that inequality is not merely visible in terms of the race or class profile of a stakeholder. While not all socioeconomic groups are treated equally in development, not all agendas are treated equally either, particularly those that question the dominant technocratic rationality of planning discourse. This work showed that in addition to some residents being excluded from development discourse as a result of belonging to a marginalized group, expert opinions became invalid when they disputed neoliberal rationality. In other words, exclusion is not just about building on histories of race and class oppression, it’s about how one’s agenda relates to dominant development paradigms as well.

Along a similar vein to the inequalities imposed by neoliberal governance, planners should be aware of the higher level regulatory frameworks that limit progress and enable unequal treatment for
marginalized communities. For example, residents of 48216 navigated problematic policies like the air quality standards set forth by the EPA that fail to regulate cumulative impacts of pollution over time, or the Emergency Manager Law that allows an emergency manager to replace democratic processes. A tool of expertise, the knowledge of the limitations of legal frames may serve as a way to manipulate processes, rationalizing uneven development through federal or state level policy.

This work, like some of the scholarship on expertise and political economy before it, confirmed the complexity of the inherently political role of experts within academia (Priyadharshini 2003; Wisniewski 2000; Boyer 2008; Nader 1972). Experts on public health at the University of Michigan both published work on the dangers of poor air quality in 48217 and spoke out at public hearings on behalf of the community, backed by the findings of their research (Milando, Martenies, and Batterman 2016). Similarly, the director of public health leveraged his status as a medical expert by publishing articles arguing for no emissions increases and making public statements (El-Sayed 2016a, [b] 2016). Based on historical evidence and empirical data from the current developments in Detroit, this work also offered a word of caution about the paradigm of shrinking cities; developed by academic and practicing experts in development fields, this area of study has a tendency to pathologize communities that call declining cities home. As academics, we should choose to engage with the politics and power dynamics at play in our positionality as experts over the positivist tendency for the work of academics to be viewed as objective reality. While the academy upholds standards in terms of science and systematic investigation of research questions, we should acknowledge and confront the fact that the problems we choose to investigate, the way we measure and collect data, and the forums and styles we write in are political choices at their core. Further, we should also acknowledge that the very nature of expertise and the highly specified and status-driven way it is practiced in academia, necessarily excludes communities of certain race and class profiles. In
light of this disparity, we must also acknowledge that the people historically underrepresented in urban planning scholarship are often the groups we aim to serve through development and policy related work.
APPENDIX A

Interview Instrument: Professionals and Community Members

The following interview instrument was adapted for conversations with both development professionals and community members, but basically retained the same form:

1. How would you describe Detroit/relevant case neighborhood?
2. What are the most positive attributes of Detroit/relevant case neighborhood? Why?
3. What are the most pressing problems facing Detroit/relevant case neighborhood?
4. Why do these challenges exist? How did they come about?
5. Are these problems Detroit/relevant case neighborhood specific, or do other places face these issues?
6. How long have these problems existed?
7. What are people doing to remediate these problems? Is it working? Why or why not?
8. How do you think that planners or city officials should react to or treat this issue?
9. If the issue hasn’t been addressed, why hasn’t it?
10. What are is your vision for the future of Detroit/relevant case neighborhood?
APPENDIX B
Interview Instrument: Planning Academics

1. What scholarly work have you done in Detroit?
2. Why do you choose to research Detroit?
3. What methods have you used in your work? Why do you work this way?
4. How do you describe the city?
5. What are the best things about Detroit?
6. What are the biggest challenges for Detroit?
7. Why do these problems exist, and how did they come about?
8. Are these issues Detroit specific? Do other cities face them?
9. Which thinkers/concepts/philosophies are foundational to your work?
10. What are the biggest obstacles between status quo and the implementation of solutions offered by your work?
11. Who should be the ones to remediate some of these issues?
12. What is the relationship between academic work and what is happening in practice? Who is carrying out your vision, if anyone?
APPENDIX C
Media Articles Analyzed


APPENDIX D
Academic Literature Analyzed

Detroit Specific Literature:


http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/spnhareview/vol9/iss1/6.


Shrinking Cities Literature Reference in Above:


APPENDIX E
Planning and Development Documents and Authoring Institutions

7.2 SQ MI: A Report on Greater Downtown Detroit

*The Hudson-Webber Foundation*

15 x 15 Initiative

*The Hudson-Webber Foundation*

A Placemaking Vision for Downtown Detroit

*Opportunity Detroit*

Detroit Future City Framework

*Initiated by The Kresge Foundation in partnership with other public and private entities*

Greater Downtown TOD Strategy

*Downtown Detroit Partnership and Detroit Economic Growth Corporation*

Live Midtown Initiative

*Midtown Detroit, Inc.*

The Detroit Blight Removal Task Force Plan

*Detroit Blight Removal Task Force (Dr. Glenda Price, Linda Smith and Dan Gilbert)*
APPENDIX F
List of Subcodes by Discourse

Community Groups and Residents:

Description: Geography

Description: Historic development

Description: Social fabric of community

Challenges: Physical degradation

Challenges: Distrust of government

Challenges: Absence of city planning

Challenges: Being forgotten

Challenges: Lack of opportunities for young people

Challenges: Isolation

Challenges: Government collusion with business

Challenges: Violence and crime

Challenges: Blight

Solution: Infrastructure enhancement

Solution: Public hearings

Solution: Removal of amenities

Solution: Placemaking

Solution: Litigation

Actors: Community groups

Actors: Non-profits

Actors: MDEQ

Actors: City of Detroit
Actors: Industry
Actors: Dan Gilbert
Actors: Academics
Actors: Maurice Cox
Vision: Detroit Future City
Vision: Reestablishment of commercial areas
Vision: Opportunities for young people
Vision: Economic development

Planning and Development Professionals:

Description: Development projects
Description: Urban fabric
Challenges: Blight
Challenges: Absence of city planning
Challenges: Low land values
Challenges: Development outside of Downtown core
Solution: Community engagement
Solution: Placemaking
Solution: Private amenities/infrastructure
Solution: Placemaking
Solution: Tactical urbanism
Actors: Dan Gilbert
Actors: Philanthropic foundations
Actors: Maurice Cox
Actors: Planning Department
Vision: Detroit Future City
Vision: Repopulation
Vision: Appreciating real estate market
Vision: Downtown development
Vision: Regional transportation network

*Media and Journalists:*

Coverage implicating developers
Coverage implicating the government
Coverage of city services
Coverage of community as victims
Coverage of gentrification
Coverage of planning strategies
Quote from community member
Quote from environmental regulating agency
Quote from industry spokesperson
Quote from academic
Critique of journalism profession
Actor: creditors
Actor: high profile design firm
Actor: the Ilitchs
Actor: Great Lakes Petroleum
Actor: Dan Gilbert
Actor: David Egner
Actor: Kevyn Orr
Actor: Marathon Petroleum
Actor: Mike Duggan
Actor: local non-profit/CDC
Actor: Rick Snyder
Actor: Severstal Steel
Actor: Abdul El-Sayyad
Event: development initiated by the city
Event: new business venture
Event: crime
Event: corporate philanthropy
Event: added retail
Event: Oakwood buyout
Event: building renovation/purchase
Vision: attracting new residents
Vision: increasing tax base
Vision: job creation
Challenge: disinvestment
Challenge: surplus of development
Challenge: social disparity
Challenge: pollution
Challenge: poverty
Challenge: low land values
Challenge: lack of funding
Challenge: lack of housing
Challenge: lack of vacancy
Challenge: health effects
Solution: public private partnership
Solution: preservation

Academic Literature and Scholars:

Challenge: Expertise
Challenge: Access to jobs
Challenge: City owned properties
Challenge: Crime
Challenge: Deindustrialization
Challenge: Demolition
Challenge: Economic decline
Challenge: Housing loss
Challenge: Lack of affordable housing
Challenge: Lack of connection to planning
Challenge: Lack of public knowledge
Challenge: Lack of tax base
Challenge: Lack of theory
Challenge: Lack of transparency
Challenge: Loss of heritage
Challenge: Misconceptions
Challenge: Negative rhetoric
Challenge: Neoliberal policy
Challenge: Outdated policy
Challenge: Patchwork development
Challenge: Poor food access
Challenge: Population loss
Challenge: Poverty
Challenge: Poor quality of life
Challenge: Racism
Challenge: Segregation
Solution: Access to transportation
Solution: CDCs
Solution: Community involvement
Solution: Concentrating investment
Solution: Demolition
Solution: End tax auctions
Solution: Growth boundary
Solution: Informal uses
Solution: Job creation
Solution: Landscape urbanism
Solution: Policy update
Solution: Poverty reduction
Solution: Reflection
Solution: Repurposing vacant lots
Solution: Resistance
Solution: Smart decline
Solution: Social enterprise
Solution: Talent attraction
Solution: Entrepreneurship
Solution: Tax abatement
Solution: Tax forgiveness
Solution: Theory
Solution: Urban agriculture
Reference to ‘shrinking cities’
Exceptionalism
Anti-exceptionalism
Influence on practice
Blight
Implicating the planning profession
Implicating academia
Inevitability
REFERENCES


Detroit Free Press, December 5, sec. Front Page.


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http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF.


