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Deep in the heart of Texas: analyzing spatial contestation using perspectives on urban farming in Austin

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Deep in the Heart of Texas:
Analyzing Spatial Contestation using Perspectives on Urban Farming in Austin

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April 27, 2018

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies at Vassar College

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To the 6 - for everything, unconditionally, all of the time

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To Stacy

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To Noyes

To Teresa, Antigone, Sophie, & 7:30am

To PFP & the Hudson Valley

To McCallum Place

To the Old Laundry Building

To Austin - my forever home

Introduction: Spatial Frameworks and Contestation

Louis Polanco, a resident of East Austin for over 50 years, called City Services, a government agency of the City of Austin, in November of 2012 to report a foul smell coming from HausBar Farms, the urban farm neighboring his home. The smell was attributed to an outdoor composting system of chicken parts that HausBar's owner, Dorsey Barger, employs during the slaughtering process. His complaint triggered the investigation of her property by three city departments and sparked inquiries into other urban farms' practices. It initiated a widespread conversation about the role of urban farms in Austin and what is deemed an acceptable use of property within city limits and on residentially-zoned land, questioning actions such as slaughtering chickens for market sale. The ensuing debate among farmers, residents, and city officials presents a case study for analyzing how spatial identity is constructed based on historical contexts and patterns of urbanization, and how a place's identity and the place itself are continuously contested based on shifts in material and ideological interests.

After Polanco's complaint, vocal community members of East Austin, the neighborhood that has historically been dominated by the working class and minority groups, banded together in protest against the urban farms because of how they represented commercial enterprises in residential areas. Many residents complained about the smells and the sounds coming from the farms, and the city government began visiting the urban farms to check their permits. After a series of discussions, the City Council proposed an update to the urban farm ordinance, which caused a stark divide

between urban farm supporters and several community members from East Austin neighborhood groups because of varying suggestions and potential outcomes.

The case amplified voices from several community groups in Austin and resulted in the reorganization of the urban farm code, following a year-long process including several City Council meetings and varied proposals. Main topics of concern were how the development of urban farms in the neighborhood of East Austin either align or stray from past patterns of urbanizations, focusing especially on spatial separation based on class and race, and on the historical significance attributed to natural landscapes. This context of environmental thought and land regulation in Austin contributes markedly to why the case evolved in such ways, and it draws on a history of Southern urbanization that informs the character of the city today. Such notions of the environment and land use have been created and are continuously reformed by the population of Austin, producing a dynamic spatial identity.

Austin is a city known for maintaining a strong sense of place, with a powerful sense of pride tied to being an Austinite. As the capital of Texas, it offers residents a strong civic purpose in both administrative and commercial spheres, endowing within its populace a feeling of connection to the city's future. As evidenced by *Time's* ranking of Austin as #49 out of 186 cities and metropolitan areas in the United States based on overall well-being in 2018, its citizens enjoy a stable quality of life that encourages a sense of pleasure with acknowledging their residence there.¹ Based on the criteria used to determine that rating, Austin offers affordable housing, a strong economy, accessible

¹ David Johnson, "These are America's Happiest and Healthiest Cities," *Time*, March 13, 2018.

health care, as well as natural amenities and cultural attractions, such as farmers markets, parks, a stable climate, community centers, theaters, festivals, and arts districts.² Such opportunities create within residents a desire to stay in the city because of the community bonds they foster through those activities and a mutual appreciation for the city's amenities.

Furthermore, urban pride materializes through a sense of ownership of a place. As geographer Philip Morrison notes, urban pride emerges from a sense of stake-holding because being proud of something requires having an investment in its success emotionally, financially, or culturally.³ Such a feeling comes from investment, ownership, or membership in certain groups or places, and it is an emotion that is distinct from other measures of wellbeing.⁴ Pride is based on a belief that an individual has played a significant role in generating a certain event or phenomena.⁵ The evolution of civic pride can be observed through and is connected to the creation of space.

To conceptualize the concept of space requires an understanding that there are various types of space that are continuously re-created and negotiated by changes in interests. Humans are thus the agents that produce and re-produce space according to material and social relations. In this thesis, I employ the spatial theories of sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who classifies the production of space as a continuous process of social development, employing a spatialized trialectic between material space, mental space,

² Livability, "Best Places to Live: Ranking Criteria," *Livability.com*, 2018.

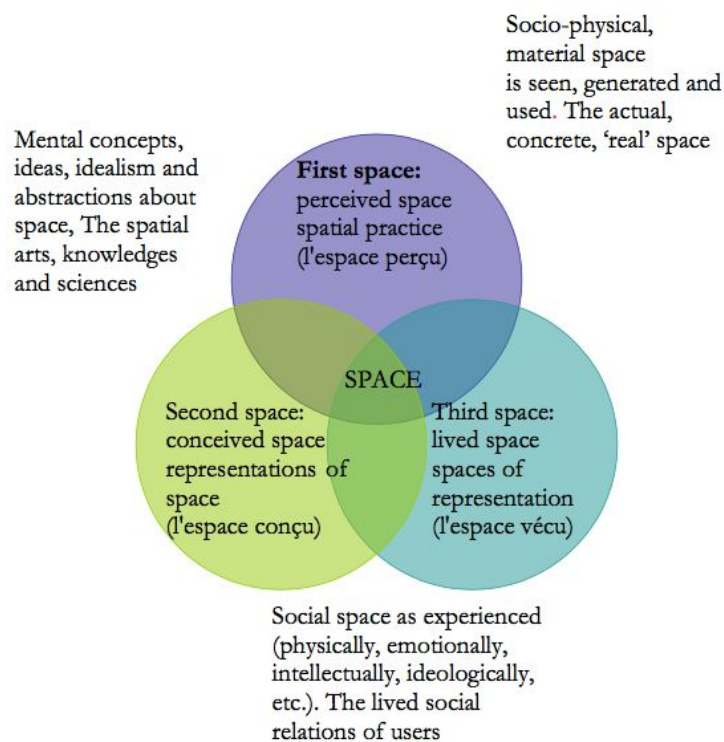
³ Philip S. Morrison, "Pride in the City," *Region 2*, no. 2 (2016): 103.

⁴ *Ibid*, 104.

⁵ *Ibid*, 105.

and social space.⁶ These three spaces interact continuously and in complex ways, and, while they can be distinguished from one another, they cannot be compartmentalized or separated. The interactions that inform one of the spatial elements affect the other two dimensions, explaining how the relations between the three are never stable.

Furthermore, Lefebvre proffers an explanation for understanding spatial practices and representations of space by placing spaces in a dialectical triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived.⁷



Spatialised trialectic, Lee Pugalis, 2009.⁸

⁶ Pugalis, "A Conceptual and Analytical Framework for Interpreting the Spatiality of Social Life," *Forum E-Journal* 9, no. 1 (2009): 79.

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc, 1974), 38-39.

⁸ Pugalis, "A Conceptual and Analytical Framework," 80.

These three elements are the means through which social agents give meaning to spaces and create a social construction of the spatial, which is open to multiple iterations of space that coexist within the same material space.⁹ These meanings are materialized by spatial and social practices, concluding that representations of space not only arise from social experiences and imaginations, but also perform back on those forms, creating a complex dialectic.¹⁰ It is through this conception of spatial awareness that I comprehend why the land use dispute in Austin unfolded as it did.

The actors in the urban farming conflict invoked their understanding of space and sense of place to promote their preferred outcome of the situation. Community groups in East Austin organized against urban farming with arguments hinging on indecent behavior and worries over land use and commercialization of residential space. They also framed the dispute by drawing on the way in which urban farming has developed in Austin in an arguably environmentally racist manner that did not align with the part of Austin's identity that is devoted to being tolerant to and celebrating cultural differences. Austin's self-proclaimed motto is "Keep Austin Weird," a phrase that invokes praise for the amount of difference present between residents, something that is celebrated in Austin because such a diverse populace is one of the very things that makes Austin what it is. Thus, by framing the existence of urban farms in East Austin as an environmentally racist phenomenon, the community groups garnered support for their oppositional stance by invoking Austin's characteristics. This thesis seeks to highlight how discourse has a power to transmit spatialized imaginaries.

⁹ Pugalis, "A Conceptual and Analytical Framework," 81.

¹⁰ Ibid, 81.

Another interest group - urban farmers - emphasizes values of environmental preservation and stewardship of the land, which has also been a historically significant attribute of the city of Austin. During Austin's peak post-war urbanization decades, advertising campaigns focused on natural amenities and how Austin offered large amounts of open space and greenery.¹¹ Austin became known as "the city in a garden," an image that is still very prominent today and creates part of Austin's spatial identity.¹² By appealing to the ideals that Austinites hold dear, farmers promoted their side of the argument. In these ways, sense of place became a political priority that was invoked to gain public endorsement. I will explore these topics in my subsequent chapters.

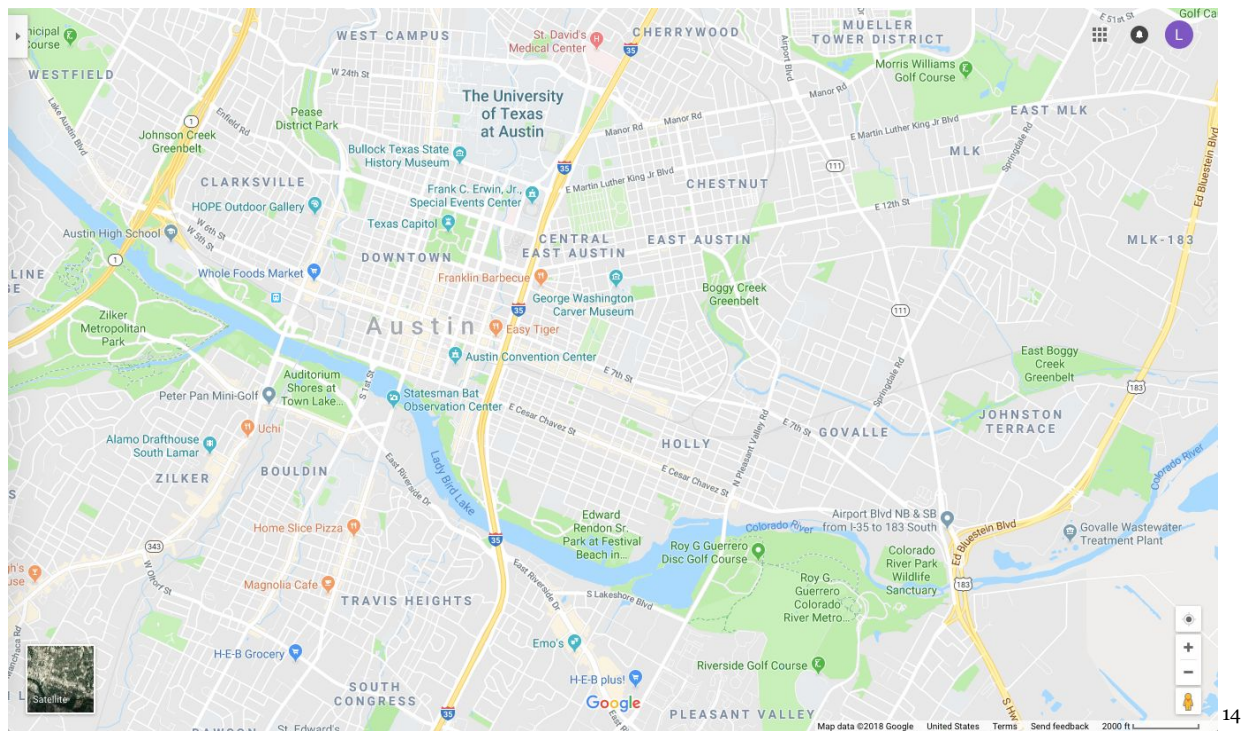
While such a case involves several parties with stakes in the outcome, I will focus primarily on urban farmers and their supporters, as well as the community groups who led the campaign against the urban farms. The four farms that fell under scrutiny were HausBar Farms, Boggy Creek Farm, Springdale Farm, and Rain Lily Farm. The first two farms were established in the Govalle and Johnston Terrace neighborhoods of East Austin in 1992, while the second two started in 2002. All of the people who run the farm are long-term white residents of Austin. The main opposition stems from a community organization called People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources, or PODER. PODER formed in 1991 with goals of increasing Austin's residents' participation in corporate and government decisions related to economic development and environmental impacts on communities of color.¹³ They have staged several campaigns

¹¹ Andrew M. Busch, *City in a Garden: Environmental Transformations and Racial Justice in Twentieth-Century Austin, Texas* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 110.

¹² Ibid, 131.

¹³ PODER, "History," accessed October 2017.

that focus on ameliorating conditions of environmental racism and on deterring the possibility of land dispossession. I also include some insights and opinions from city government officials so as to foreground how city officials were involved in the conflict, and so as to explain the conflict's intersections with zoning and public policy. While these are not the only voices present in this conversation, I emphasize these due to time and space constraints, but also because of their ability to shed light on the tensions involved in this topic.



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Austin's demographics help explain some of the concerns about land dispossession. Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey coupled with estimates from the City of Austin demographer Ryan Robinson, 47.1% of the City of Austin's total population identified as non-Hispanic white, 36.5% as

¹⁴ Google Maps, accessed April 26, 2018.

Hispanic/Latino, 7% as African-American, and 6.8% as Asian.¹⁵ Analyzing the 2000 U.S. Census and the 2010 U.S. Census reveals that the African-American community in Austin dropped from 64,259 people to 60,760; the Hispanic/Latino community grew from 200,579 to 277,707; the Asian population grew from 30,915 to 49,560; and the non-Hispanic white population grew from 347,554 people to 385,271.¹⁶ As is evident, there is a racial elite in the city, adding to tensions of development.

Austin's size and population have grown profoundly in recent decades, and they continue to grow, making land possession a paramount concern. In 2015, Austin was the fastest growing big city in the country, according to U.S. Census figures, and, in 2016, Austin's net gain averaged 159 people per day.¹⁷ Austin offers jobs in the technology and start-up sectors, and it is a desirable place to both spend one's early adulthood and raise children. Robinson, notes that he "keep[s] looking for the crest of this huge wave of growth we're riding and [he] just [doesn't] see it yet."¹⁸ As a result of the growth, homebuilders cannot keep up with the demand, and housing affordability has become a problem.

Land has become highly sought after, especially in East Austin, the home of several urban farms and a site of much of the new development. Susana Almanza, director of PODER, laments the fact that there are no urban farms in other parts of Austin, yet "we have people coming to East Austin to buy land, set up an urban farm, kill

¹⁵ "Race and Ethnicity, 2014," City of Austin Department of Planning and Zoning, last modified 2014.

¹⁶ "Racial and Ethnic Change: 2000 to 2010 -- City of Austin, Travis County and the MSA," City of Austin Department of Planning and Zoning, accessed April 2018.

¹⁷ J. Weissman, "Austin, Texas, is Blowing Away Every Other Big City in Population Growth," *Slate*, May 21, 2015.; M. Theis, "How many people moved to Austin in 2016? Even more than expected - and we expected a lot," *Austin Business Journal*, March 23, 2017.

¹⁸ M. Theis, "How many people."

animals, and it's okay?"¹⁹ Almanza and other PODER members have bemoaned the popularity of urban farms, fearing that outsiders will buy land in East Austin to build more farms rather than constructing housing.²⁰ Compellingly, this case exhibits qualities that go against a historical trend in the United States of natural land being lost to urban development. In this example, city infrastructure is instead being threatened by the preservation of natural amenities and landscapes. The case in Austin creates a curiosity as to how value shifts between capitalist growth and environmental conservation. I will engage a discussion on value judgments around development and landscape as they pertain to how Austinites envision the growth of their city.

Because of both the discussion of space and the various interest groups involved in this case, the conflict can be framed through both geographical and sociological lenses. In a geographical sense, space has its own forces that drive the production and reproduction of space, such as borders and boundaries, which influence networks of social relations and natural practices. Terrain and climate, for example, affect the creation of infrastructure and spatial arrangement. Moreover, ideas of regional identity inform patterns of development and urbanization, as I will explain in depth in my chapter on the urban and rural divide and Southern urbanization. On the other hand, the conflict is sociological because of the agency with which each group interacts. To understand the case by analyzing how human agents discuss and invoke spatial identity

¹⁹ Ricardo Gandara, "Proposed Changes Would Expand Austin's Urban Farm Ordinance," *Austin-American Statesman*, September 23, 2013.

²⁰ Addie Broyles, "A Few Things to Keep in Mind as Urban Farm Code Heads to City Council," *Austin360*, October 16, 2013.

is sociological in nature because it recognizes how groups of people define and characterize themselves and the ways in which they connect with the world.

This thesis uses both the disciplines of geography and sociology to ground its analysis, while also referencing theory from scholars within the fields of environmental studies, political science, and urban studies. The research in this project stems from scholarly texts and newspaper articles, as well as facebook pages, websites, and Austin-based community magazines to garner a sense of identity formation and to analyze how the various players make their cases. Even as it employs theory from a wide range of sources and disciplines, this remains an urban studies case because of the multidisciplinary intersections in the way it foregrounds historical contexts to question social and spatial boundaries and identities. My thesis seeks to complicate notions of land dispossession while explaining what about Austin made the case unfold as it did. I do so by examining the history of land use and the dynamic construction of citizen and place identity.

The first chapter explores a history of Austin's city plans and zoning, highlighting how the development of urban farms in East Austin might be understood as controversial. In it, I engage with methods of city planning that legally enforced spatial and racial separation, and I concretize how urban amenities and green space have been linked to whiteness in Austin. I also follow the development of the University of Texas and the technology sector, which partially led to the intensive development and gentrification of recent decades. Additionally, I tell the story of the case study in explicit detail, grounding the debates of the farmers, PODER and its followers, and city officials.

Using this background, I more adequately explain how a case such as this unfolded as it did.

Following this focus on the city of Austin, I widen the scope to engage with an understanding of the urban and rural dichotomy and how Texas has followed urbanization trends that are characteristic of the Southern United States. I go through a history of Austin's urban development and how distinctions between 'urban' and 'rural' space have been determined and reinforced over time. I question how development is categorized by quality of life or quality of investment while grounding my spatial understanding in urban theory.

Putting Austin residents in dialogue with urban and rural theories demands a discussion of spatial identity and how certain characteristics define places. Thus, in my third chapter, I focus on identity formation within Austin, which stems from spatial understandings and historical attributes. I emphasize how spatial identity is a dynamic process that is contested over and over again. This case study exemplifies that notion by showing how the meaning of being an Austinite can take many different forms and can be invoked in various ways. I outline urban branding techniques that have fostered a sense of civic pride, and I go on to discuss how urban farmers and members of PODER use the branding of Austin to promote their perspectives and arguments. My case shows that places are inherently sites of debates that are informed by socially produced conceptions of what it means to inhabit a certain place.

Throughout my argument, I take a political economic approach in analyzing the dispute. I do so by focusing on the various actors involved in the case and noting how

each group is understood through their social, political, and economic interests. I note the value system that underlies urban amenities and determines their use value, as well as recognizing that this case exhibits people in conflict over material interests, thus representing a fundamentally economic foundation. As sociologist Harvey Molotch asserts, “the political and economic essence of virtually any given locality, in the present American context, is *growth*.”²¹ Since this growth is the result of the seizing of political control by unrepresentative land-based local elites, it is always contested by other marginal groups.²² Such a display of power exemplifies land dispossession and conflict between social groups, and leads to an understanding of how political and economic interests are implicated in city development.

To ground my analysis, I must define the terms ‘urban’ and ‘rural.’

Differentiation between the two can be traced back to industrial development and a shift in settlement from areas of less population density to more densely packed regions. Migration scholar R. B. Bhagat’s characteristics of the urban in India can also be applied to the United States: “concentration of population, predominance of non-agricultural activities and better provision of social amenities including health and education infrastructure.”²³ Bhagat explains the horizontal expansion of systems such as transport, communication, and power supplies into rural areas, which then blurs the distinction between the so-called ‘urban’ and ‘rural.’ He continues with the notion that the major

²¹ Harvey Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 2 (1976): 309-10.

²² John R. Logan, "Logan on Molotch and Molotch on Logan: Notes on the Growth Machine - Toward a Comparative Political Economy of Place," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 2 (1976), 349.

²³ R. B. Bhagat, "Challenges of Rural-Urban Classification for Decentralised Governance," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 25 (June 2002): 2413.

force behind urbanization is industrial activities, “whereas the rural is treated as residual and synonymous with agricultural activities.”²⁴ These notions dominate societal understandings of the urban and the rural and lead to the placement of those spaces into a conceptual dichotomy.

I draw on the theory of transects and the urban-rural continuum as a way of examining boundaries between urban and rural space. The New Urbanism movement uses transects as a way of analyzing the degree of urbanity, or human-made development, that characterizes varying types of human settlement as they range from natural to manufactured.



The transects are divided into six zones: the natural zone, the rural zone, the sub-urban zone, the general urban zone, the urban center zone, and the urban core zone.²⁶ The factors that dictate how landscapes are classified into these zones include anything that reinforces the physical character of that place, such as building types, open spaces,

²⁴ Bhagat, “Challenges,” 2415.

²⁵ C. C. Bohl and E. Plater-Zyberk, “Building Community across the Rural-to-Urban Transect,” *Places* 18, no. 1 (2006): 5.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 10.

streets, landscaping, and proximity to infrastructure. The simplicity of the transect theory has been critiqued in that it implies there must always be a smooth transition from areas of low to high density. When applied to the case in Austin, for example, the transect theory proves too simplistic because it does not account for societal land contestation and zoning conflicts, nor does it allow for intersections of multiple types of landscape, as I will explain in future chapters. However, the theory's goal is to juxtapose certain zones and establish a dialogue for planners; it begs for a discussion between using an overall framework for regional planning or using locally derived design forms. It also calls for the measuring of society's general ideas about rural, suburban, and urban areas, and can portray an understanding of how people categorize those environments.

Additionally, I explore the idea of a natural amenity and the advantages it offers a city, looking at what types of nature Austin's city planners have chosen to maintain over the years. An amenity, as economists Diamond and Tolley explain, is a good that is location-specific and consumed by a population that demands that certain amenity.²⁷ For example, transportation systems and government-built facilities affect the physical environment around them in a way that provides other services that shape the social setting of a place, rendering it either a more or less desirable place to inhabit. Furthermore, there are natural amenities, such as weather, water flows, topography, and vistas, that Diamond and Tolley note are the only exceptions to amenities that have a human agent behind their supply.²⁸ My question regarding these ideas is how Austin's

²⁷ D. B. Diamond, Jr., and G. S. Tolley, *The Economics of Urban Amenities* (New York: Academic Press, 1982).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

residents value natural amenities in the face of city development, and what it means to consider an urban farm as an urban amenity, given the fact that it is surrounded by development and is a piece of natural landscape that has been modified, yet still produces goods that are consumed by residents.

Broadly, this is a case that examines agricultural practices, environmental and racial separations, regional development patterns, and spatial identity. The case study illustrates how these forces function in a dynamic relationship that informs the spatial composition of a city and how its residents respond to social phenomena. My thesis offers an exploration into such concepts with an emphasis on how these notions play out in Texas, and, in particular, in Austin. I seek to determine what it is about the environment, urbanization, land use, and place-making in Austin specifically that made the case develop as it did. By narrowing the scope of these factors to a certain city, I display both how places are constantly contested and how people use place identity to promote certain ideals. I emphasize geographer David Harvey's notion that struggles over representations of space are "as fiercely fought and just as fundamental to the activities of place construction as bricks and mortar."²⁹ Although my research is bounded by location, the broad theoretical findings that it employs and discovers are applicable to the understanding of historical land use and place identity in several cities.

²⁹ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1996), 322.

The History and Contentious Politics of Austin's Land Use

A possible explanation for the intense opposition from some East Austin residents towards the urban farms stems from the complex historical relationship between land use, environmental preservation, and zoning in Austin. The legislative decisions that determined the spatial segregation of people and activities in the city engendered a certain political and cultural mindset around the proposal of new zoning recommendations and the presence of open, natural landscapes within neighborhoods. Austin's characterization as both a garden and a city, and what that means for people of varying racial and socio-economic class status, has influenced current-day protests of natural spaces, such as urban farms, in neighborhoods. The conflict between urban farm owners and residents on Austin's Eastside can be understood by analyzing it through the city's historical context.

A History of Austin's Land Use

In 1928, Austin's government released the first official planning document for the city, which dictated realities that are still evident today. The first city plan was created after the 1927 legalization of zoning by the Texas legislature, a decision which was as much linked to environmental improvements as it was to a new racial geography.³⁰ Businessmen who were in charge of Austin's Chamber of Commerce desired a clean and ordered urban space which incorporated natural space for economic means, as well as the codification of segregation.³¹ They used urban planning as a tool to incorporate

³⁰ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 62.

³¹ *Ibid*, 68.

nature by removing minorities from spaces that were newly officially delineated as white spaces.

City officials proposed new subdivisions in West Austin that adhered to racially restrictive covenants as a way to enhance real estate values in that part of town, while simultaneously zoning industry exclusively among residential areas on the Eastside.³² The 1928 zoning restrictions specified industrial or unrestricted zoning adjacent to both of Austin's only black neighborhood and to the area with the highest Mexican concentration and in-migration rates.³³ While most of the African-American district was zoned residential, the regulations were rarely enforced there, and Koch and Fowler, city developers who had been hired by the City Plan Commission, proposed wide "trafficways" through the neighborhood that would allow workers to access the industrial facilities on the Eastside without entering the central business district.³⁴ Moreover, minority residents were institutionally segregated to such spaces in a way that prohibited their exodus.

The new zoning restrictions complemented the 'separate but equal' regulations that were still legal and customary in Texas at the time. Koch and Fowler suggested that segregation could be achieved by providing public facilities to African Americans in only one part of the city - East Austin, where the population was mostly already black.³⁵ This plan expedited the racial segregation of Austin while at the same time guaranteeing minority presence in the same part of the city that contained industry. Furthermore,

³² Busch, *City in a Garden*, 79.

³³ *Ibid*, 79.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 79.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 78.

Austin's zoning was cumulative, meaning that multiple zoning regulations could exist for the same parcel of land.³⁶ Thus, industrially-zoned spaces could also include residences, so several of the displaced and low-income citizens were led to cheap residential properties among the industrial facilities against which PODER would later protest. By addressing the historical impact of zoning, PODER shed light on the social and economic tensions behind land use, which suggests that their outcry against urban farming in East Austin relates to the historical use of the environment in Austin as an instrument of oppression.

PODER was initially formed as a necessary outlet for community woes around environmentally racist conditions in East Austin. In the 1950s, a gasoline tank farm, which emitted deadly chemicals, sparked fires, and polluted the groundwater and soil, was established in the Govalle neighborhood primarily because exclusionary zoning had filled the area with minority residents who had less political power to oppose the development and also could not afford to move away from it.³⁷ Also in the 1950s and 60s, businesses started dumping industrial waste on vacant land on the Eastside, and the city built Austin's largest power generating facility at the time, the Holly Power Plant, very near a majority Latino residential neighborhood after using eminent domain to claim the land.³⁸ PODER, along with the East Austin Environmental Initiative, founded in 1993, protested against many of these injustices.

East Austin residents have plenty of experience with grassroots organization and action. In response to the gasoline tank farm, PODER staged a "toxic tour" of the area in

³⁶ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 83.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 206-7.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 230.

1992 to demonstrate to politicians, school board members, and neighborhood leaders the hazards and environmental inequities of the facility. As a result, the tank farm was relocated outside of the community in 1993 and the oil companies agreed to participate in remediation.³⁹ In the case of the Holly Power Plant, PODER invited residents who lived within two thousand feet of the plant to fill out questionnaires concerning their health and safety. Reported cases of lymphoma and breast cancer were much higher than the rates among the general public, and PODER used these findings to call on the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission to undertake additional studies, which led to the eventual decision in 1995 to phase the retirement of the plant.⁴⁰ Throughout PODER's protests, leaders drew upon the history of Austin's zoning discrimination to emphasize their arguments.

While residents in East Austin were forced to live in areas with potentially dangerous industrial facilities, West Austin was preserved as a space for white, middle-class neighborhoods that were among and in close proximity to well-preserved "natural" landscapes. The zoning regulations that were put in place in the 1928 master plan maintained the interests of improving property values and quality of life for white citizens by moving industry to the Eastside and thus opening more space on the Westside to be used for natural spaces. Westside homes were marketed with an emphasis on the green spaces available to prospective homeowners, such as suburbs filled with manicured lawns, and proximity to natural amenities like Barton Springs, Bull Creek, Mount Bonnell, Pease Park, Shoal Creek, and Town Lake. Open space was

³⁹ PODER, "Victories/Accomplishments," accessed October 2017.

⁴⁰ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 231-2.

synonymous with a high quality of life, and natural beauty was associated with civic democracy and cultural progressivism. In the eyes of Austin's political elite, these values were directly linked to whiteness.⁴¹

The Chamber of Commerce endeavored to create a “mecca for the cultivated and the wealthy” at the outset of their focused city planning and development, which entailed an advertising campaign that focused on natural amenities. As Austin grew in the 1960s, mostly from an influx of professors and researchers working at the University of Texas, and from professionals in the booming technology start-up business, developers constructed modern subdivisions along Austin's western and northwestern peripheries, where rolling hills characterized the land as the most desirable and picturesque area in the region.⁴² Intellectuals and white-collar workers were drawn to Austin's branding as “the city in a garden,” in which, as one physicist appropriately noted in a 1961 interview, one “could earn a good living for [one's] family while surrounded by trees and lakes instead of dirt and skyscrapers.”⁴³ In 1965, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Austin as one of the fourteen most desirable places to live in the United States due to its natural yet cosmopolitan image, emphasizing the city's access to open space and greenery without sacrificing urban amenities.⁴⁴ Thus, proximity to natural spaces has been tied closely to white, middle-class spaces throughout Austin's history.

⁴¹ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 83.

⁴² *Ibid*, 110.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 131.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 106-7.

The historical trajectory of Austin’s land use informs the circumstances that exist within the city today. As East Austin becomes gentrified, newcomers to the neighborhoods are demanding natural amenities, such as open green space, and celebrating urban farms and upscale restaurants, which have been historically synonymous with a white and middle-class quality of life in Austin, thus both physically and symbolically threatening the land of former residents of the area. Historically, the growth of Austin moved closer to the right end of the transect spectrum, which is categorized as “general urban,” “urban center,” and “urban core.”⁴⁵ Developers and residents embraced growth in the economic and infrastructural sectors that would classify Austin as more urban; yet, the current desires of newcomers to the city interestingly align more with the typologies on the left side of the spectrum, leaning more towards displays of rurality. Austin seems to offer a kind of landscape that was common in the decades before intensive urbanization, while at the same time witnessing a compelling increase in land prices and housing developments.

Gentrification in East Austin began in the 1990s. According to a task force’s findings, the central Eastside lost around 2,300 African-Americans and gained approximately 800 white residents from 1990 to 2000.⁴⁶ In 2002, the Travis County appraiser noted that East Austin property values were increasing faster than anywhere else in the country, averaging a 400% increase within the years of 1998 to 2004.⁴⁷ In 2000 and 2001, 72% of foreclosures in the city occurred on the Eastside, and the data from a 2014 survey shows that when African-Americans were asked why they left

⁴⁵ Bohl and Plater-Zyberk, “Building Community,” 5.

⁴⁶ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 293.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 241.

Austin, 56% of respondents, among whom 63% had lived in East Austin before leaving, selected “unaffordable housing” as their primary reason.⁴⁸ Fifty-four percent of respondents agreed with the statement “I was pushed out of Austin.”⁴⁹ A 2007 memorandum to the mayor from the Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Office declared that, in some neighborhoods in East Austin, the median sale price of single-family homes jumped as much as 125% between 1999 and 2006.⁵⁰ By 2005, the neighborhoods had been largely remade as developers took advantage of the low real estate prices and the economic building incentives. Given these statistics, PODER representatives were eager to fight against urban farms for the ownership of East Austin land.

The Evolution of the Debate

HausBar Farms’ composting system for chicken parts malfunctioned in November of 2012, causing a foul smell along the urban farm’s street in East Austin. The black soldier fly composter is a common device used by urban farms to sustainably and naturally compost chicken parts using bioconversion methods after slaughtering chickens. Black soldier flies are attracted to the leftover heads and intestines of dead chickens and lay their eggs in the matter. The grub eat the meat and crawl through a composter tube, where they are eaten by live chickens. The biological reactions of the grub’s digestion aid in the composting process, and the system also supplies natural

⁴⁸ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 241; Eric Tang and Bisola Falola, “Those Who Left: Austin’s Declining African-American Population,” *The Institute for Urban Policy Policy Research and Analysis* (2016): 3.

⁴⁹ Texas Liberal Arts, “IUPRA Study: African-Americans are Leaving Austin for More Affordable Housing and Better Schools,” *Texas Liberal Arts News Archive: Public Affairs* (May 25, 2016).

⁵⁰ Joshua Long, “Sustaining Creativity in the Creative Archetype: the Case of Austin, Texas,” *Cities* (2009): 215.

food for the chickens. However, on this occasion, Dorsey Barger, co-owner of HausBar Farms, admits that the composting system had become slightly overworked because her farm had slaughtered more chickens than usual.⁵¹ Louis Polanco, a resident of East Austin for over 50 years, called City Services, a government agency of the City of Austin, to report the smell, which was part of a larger complaint against the urban farms in his neighborhood.

Four urban farms are clustered within blocks of each other in the Rosewood and Govalle neighborhoods of East Austin. Dorsey Barger and wife Susan Hausmann bought two acres of land in 2009 that they transformed into HausBar Farms. The land was formerly a dumpsite for neighborhood junk on which stood dilapidated structures, but now it is a sustainable vegetable farm with chickens, donkeys, rabbits, geese, and ducks, and it hosts children's camps and workshops.⁵² It is only open for private tours, restaurant chefs, and visitors to the site's Airbnb guesthouse that also sits on the property. Barger states that prior to their purchase of the land, there were proposals to turn it into a 26-unit condominium complex.⁵³ They renovated the existing uninhabitable structures into a 780 square foot cottage, a hen house, and a barn. They also converted the garage into a commercial kitchen and poultry processing facility.

A mile away sits Rain Lily Farm, founded in 2001 by owners Kim Beal and Stephanie Scherzer. They maintain a half-acre of vegetable farming, as well as chicken,

⁵¹ Ricardo Gandara, "Urban farm, neighbor collide in East Austin," *Austin-American Statesman*, December 12, 2012.

⁵² Irvianne Torremoro, "Dorsey Barger & Susan Hausmann, Owners/HausBar Urban Farm," *Flavor & Bounty*, 2017.

⁵³ Anna Toon, "Communication Breakdown: Does the Closure of HausBar Farm Spell Trouble for the Urban Farming Movement?," *The Austin Chronicle*, April 12, 2013.

goats, and water reclamation and rainwater collection systems. Scherzer also founded Farmhouse Delivery in 2006 to deliver farm-fresh vegetable boxes to consumers who set up membership accounts online. Rain Lily Farm is only open to restaurant chefs, and the couple also manages a landscaping business for private clients. These two farms are the most recent urban farm additions to the East Austin neighborhood.

Two other farms exist a few streets away. The Boggy Creek Farm land has been occupied with a farmhouse since the 1850s, having been passed down through generations and sold to the current owners, Larry Butler and Carol Ann Sayle, in 1992.⁵⁴ They have continued the stewardship of the five-acre plot of land, and they have opened the farm to the public through volunteer opportunities, community events, and the Boggy Creek Farmstand, a small structure next to their vegetable fields where visitors and chefs purchase seasonal produce, sauces, and canned vegetables.

Glenn and Paula Foote purchased the land for Springdale Farm, located a quarter of a mile from Boggy Creek Farm, in 1992. They used the property for their home and their landscaping and lawn maintenance company until 2009, when they transformed the nearly five-acre lot into a farm.⁵⁵ The farm hosts a public farmstand twice a week with vegetables, herbs, handmade soaps, and their chickens' eggs. The space is often rented for private events like weddings and birthday parties, and the property is host to the restaurant Eden East, which serves reservation-based prix fixe meals on the weekends for \$70 per person.⁵⁶ Additionally, the Footes have created a nonprofit organization called the Springdale Center for Urban Agriculture, whose goals are to

⁵⁴ Larry Butler and Carol Ann Sayle, "History," accessed December 2017.

⁵⁵ Springdale Farm, "Our Story," last modified 2016.

⁵⁶ Eden East, "Menu," accessed January 2018.

promote sustainable agriculture in urban areas and foster community through local food systems and sustainable living⁵⁷. Out of the four farms in the area, these two are the only ones that are open to the public on select days.

Land for Boggy Creek Farm and Springdale Farm was purchased through the City of Austin's Economic Redevelopment Program in 1992. The program's goals were to entice small businesses to open in East Austin and hire employees from the Eastside community through the Neighborhood Commercial Management Program and their Job Creation and Retention goals.⁵⁸ These businesses were meant to bolster economic growth in the area while also building community in the face of rapid development of high-tech factories in East Austin in the early 1990s.⁵⁹ Furthermore, incentive programs such as the Economic Redevelopment Program, which offered reasonable land prices to businesses, were developed as a way to counter the 1990s urbanization trends.⁶⁰ Rapid city growth during the decade intensified social and economic inequalities while also contributing to environmental strain. An increase in studio apartments and new businesses increased land value, making it more difficult for residents with lower incomes to hold onto their property. Policy-makers were charged with rethinking current management structures of land, infrastructure, and development, while also hoping to continue facilitation of economic development. They viewed the issues as outcomes of urban sprawl, thus formulating programs that would discourage further

⁵⁷ Springdale Farm, "Springdale Center," last modified 2016.

⁵⁸ Springdale Farm, "Our Story."

⁵⁹ Eliot M. Tretter, "Contesting Sustainability: 'SMART Growth' and the Redevelopment of Austin's Eastside," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 1 (August 2012): 9.

⁶⁰ Eugene J. McCann, "Framing Space and Time in the City: Urban Policy and the Politics of Spatial and Temporal Scale," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 25, no. 2 (2003): 191.

development of the city's suburbs in favor of increased development in the downtown and surrounding core neighborhoods, which included East Austin.⁶¹ They focused on appealing to local developers while also promising opportunities to neighborhood residents. Programs such as these are what catalyzed the hyper-gentrification of East Austin.

So, when Louis Polanco complained to City Services about the smell coming from HausBar one November morning, his concern was rooted in a complex history that incited a charged debate. After explaining the situation to *YNN News* and the *Austin-American Statesman*, Polanco reached out to Susana Almanza and Daniel Llanes of PODER. Almanza and Llanes spoke in front of City Council in February of 2013 and lamented discrepancies within zoning and land-use regulations as tools for environmental racism. They described HausBar Farms' activities as "exceeding the intent" of urban farm land use in a residential area, while voicing opposition to the slaughtering of chickens for commercial sale, which, they argued, characterizes HausBar as a "mass production operation."⁶² Barger disputed those claims, saying she slaughters fewer chickens than Almanza and Llanes contended, and that she had been composting chicken waste for two years without any issue and had secured the proper inspections and permits to sell meat from her farm to customers.⁶³ As the debate continued between Barger and PODER representatives, City Council intervened to address the issue.

Several city officials visited HausBar in March of 2013 for inspections, which led to the temporary shutdown of the farm and revealed inconsistencies in the urban farm

⁶¹ McCann, "Framing Space," 190.

⁶² Toon, "Communication Breakdown."

⁶³ Broyles, "A Few Things to Keep in Mind."

ordinance. The City of Austin defines urban farms as properties that are between one and five acres where landowners can raise produce and chickens that are kept in enclosures at least 50 feet away from neighboring homes.⁶⁴ Officials found that Barger was within her right to operate an urban farm on a residentially-zoned property, but she was in violation of three city regulations regarding the maintenance of her business: the food permit that allowed her to sell slaughtered chickens to restaurant chefs was out of date; she needed a state permit for the possibility of discharged materials into storm sewers; and her animal enclosures were fewer than 50 feet from neighboring properties.⁶⁵ Additionally, city authorities realized her permit to have two dwellings on the property was also out of date. HausBar Farms is zoned under the SF-3 classification, which means it is a single-family residential lot. An urban farm is an approved use of a lot within all residential zoning districts, which includes SF-3, given certain requirements are met. In HausBar's case, though, the requirements were not up to standard mandates.

Barger's renovations to the land she purchased in 2009 were part of the main reasons her property was not up to code. The older structures on the land were repurposed into a hen house and a barn, and the garage was converted into a commercial kitchen and poultry processing facility. This addition, however, went against part of the urban farm code. Austin City Code 25-2-863 allows farmers to raise, slaughter, and process fowl, and to sell the products from the same site, but section E of the code states that only one dwelling is permitted on such a property.⁶⁶ Barger admits

⁶⁴ Gandara, "Urban farm, neighbor collide in East Austin."

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Toon, "Communication Breakdown."

that she thought the inspection of her property by the Texas Department of State Health Services and the subsequent granting of a permit to raise and slaughter rabbits and poultry and to sell those products wholesale to chefs, restaurants, and caterers was sufficient, but city officials explained that Barger failed to obtain a building permit for the processing facility and to have it inspected by the Austin/Travis County Health Department.⁶⁷ Barger filed for a building permit to officially change the use of the garage into a processing facility, but in the interim, HausBar Farms was shut down. Barger disconnected utilities to the old house, and the city allowed her to start selling eggs and produce again, but she was not allowed to resume slaughtering chickens until City Council decided whether that would be allowed in the urban farm ordinance.⁶⁸

The episode prompted a re-examination of the urban farm code, originally published in 2000, including critiques of certain zoning restrictions and permit requirements. City Council tasked the Food Sustainability Policy Board, a sub-committee of the Council that promotes local food sourcing, to study the issue and gather information. The committee hosted public meetings and also attended neighborhood gatherings with invested stakeholders. After six months, the Board, along with the city's Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program, recommended a new urban farm code. Under the proposed code, urban farms could continue to operate in residential neighborhoods as long as the property stays between one and five acres and follows certain production guidelines.⁶⁹ Farmers would be allowed to raise and slaughter chickens, rabbits, and fish in proportion to the size of

⁶⁷ Toon, "Communication Breakdown."

⁶⁸ Gandara, "Proposed Changes."

⁶⁹ Gandara, "Proposed Changes."

their farm (for example, 20 chickens per week on a two-acre farm); farms could host events like weddings, fundraisers, and cooking classes by obtaining a special permit; and farmers could apply for a special permit to have sheep, goats, and pigs.⁷⁰

Additionally, the code increased the maximum number of possible dwellings from one to two, and allowed for the sale of other agricultural products that were not produced on the farm.⁷¹ These new guidelines would allow HausBar to function without issue.

The suggested code passed the City Council vote in November of 2013. The code also proposed a new type of urban farm called the market garden, which would make it even easier for residential property owners to incorporate farming on their land. The market garden would allow people with less than an acre of land to raise chickens and sell their eggs, and to grow and sell produce.⁷² Market gardens would not be allowed to raise goats, sheep, or pigs. The creation of this subset of urban farms goes against the opinions of some East Austin neighborhood groups.

Multiple East Austin community members made proposal suggestions to the committee, but claimed the final decision process was unjust because their suggestions were not approved. Suggestions included barring any new urban farms in neighborhoods under the idea that they should be treated as commercial enterprises rather than residences; prohibiting the slaughtering of animals in residential areas; and demanding that a committee from the University of Texas be formed to create the new code, rather than the City Council's sub-committee, so that it were independent from

⁷⁰ Gandara, "Proposed Changes."

⁷¹ Peter McCrady, "Austin City Council Makes Changes to Urban Farm Code," *Community Impact Newspaper*, December 4, 2013.

⁷² Gandara, "Proposed Changes."

legislation, which they view as discriminatory.⁷³ Daniel Llanes, a leader of both the Govalle/Johnston Terrace neighborhood association and PODER, noted that not one of their recommendations was adopted.⁷⁴ Llanes did admit, however, that he did not attend any of the committee's meetings because he "didn't want to walk into a hostile room."⁷⁵ Paula McDermott, chairwoman of the Food Sustainability Policy Board, said that, in such a case, the committee went to certain neighborhoods to hear concerns from many groups of people, but Llanes contends that "they heard us but didn't listen."⁷⁶ These sentiments echo growing concerns about gentrification in the area.

Analyzing the Concerns over Neighborhood Changes

Several cities in the United States have marketed the success of urban farming in recent decades and have even advocated for more farms. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reports that 800 million people worldwide grow fruit or vegetables or raise animals in cities.⁷⁷ While city dwellers in developing nations farm for subsistence, urban farming in the United States is more often driven by ideology, such as a desire for locally-produced goods, or capitalism, such as the desire to make a profit by using one's land for a commercial use.⁷⁸ These motives might encourage people to create urban farms, changing the landscape of neighborhoods.

PODER's explanation for protesting the urban farms stems from the threat they see facing the land of their communities in East Austin. When asked about the urban

⁷³ Gandara, "Proposed Changes."

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Urban Agriculture," accessed April 2018.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Royte, "Urban Farming is Booming, but What Does it Really Yield?," *Ensi*, April 27, 2015.

farm code, Almanza shared the sentiment, “[w]e’re losing our land,” while Llanes explained the types of gentrification they have seen in East Austin: “[t]here are two types of gentrifiers. The ones who realize they are coming into an area with people of color and a working class - they take a back seat. The other gentrifiers come to conquer: they come to tell us this is what the neighborhood should be like and here are the new rules.”⁷⁹ A feeling of political disenfranchisement continues to characterize residents of East Austin in the face of zoning code revisions, especially given the urban farm code recommendations. PODER has stated that the new urban farm code will make it easier for outsiders to go to East Austin to buy land and set up urban farms. PODER leaders have spoken about the necessity for more affordable housing lots, not lots that are zoned as only residential without the affordability distinction, making them subject to rising land value. Even though the land where the four urban farms in question reside was not slated to be kept aside for affordable housing, the farms’ presence, and the fact that all of the farm owners are white, has incited concerns over zoning in East Austin.

Due to the fact that residents of East Austin, predominantly Mexican-American and African-American, have been historically subjected to environmentally dangerous conditions while West Austin residents, the majority of whom are white, were politically guaranteed open and natural spaces through zoning regulations, the presence of urban farms poses a threat to Eastside residents because of the farms’ association with whiteness and expensive products, which lends itself to an increase in white residency

⁷⁹ Gandara, “Proposed Changes.”

near the farms and a subsequent exodus of former residents due to housing that is no longer affordable.

As the conflict continued, members of PODER bemoaned the changes their neighborhoods have gone through in recent decades, seeing the urban farming conflict as an example of both environmental racism and of renovated spaces that conform to white and middle-class taste. Almanza, PODER's director, cited discrimination in that "there are no urban farms in West Austin. Yet, we have people coming to East Austin to buy land, set up an urban farm, kill animals, and it's okay?"⁸⁰ Her complaint stems from the fact that slaughtering animals is an activity associated with non-urban landscapes and not to be performed near urban family residences. Moreover, what Almanza sees as non-urban practices, such as environmentally damaging and industrial ventures, have historically been moved to land in East Austin so as to evade their proximity to white, middle-class residents, suggesting that the complaints against the farms stem from a deeper place of history rather than a simple distaste for the slaughtering of animals in a residential neighborhood.⁸¹ Additionally, Trinidad Tito Aguirre's comment on a Facebook post by Almanza in a group titled "Hermanos de East Austin" emphasizes the fact that "you won't find chicken parts decomposing on purpose for profit over in Hyde Park," which is a historically wealthier neighborhood.⁸² Such practices characterize the land by assigning it a certain class distinction.

The trendiness of urban farming in some cities might encourage people to purchase land to establish more farms. PODER's litany of complaints against the farms

⁸⁰ Gandara, "Proposed Changes."

⁸¹ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 208.

⁸² Trinidad Tito Aguirre, Comment on Almanza's post "Join us...", Facebook, October 16, 2013.

and the urban farm code, which includes a distaste for the smells, noises, crowds, high prices, and unpleasant actions associated with slaughtering animals, casts the farms as a scapegoat for citizens' larger concerns about gentrification and the loss of land. Evan Stinson, an East Austin resident, commented on a post of Almanza's in the Facebook group "Hermanos de East Austin," analyzing the discourse that PODER used in promoting its concerns: "It's fear mongering[...]Using words like "slaughter" instead of "processing" is a way of psychologically marketing to a misinformed or uninformed audience that something is so horrible and tragic."⁸³ His comment notes how representatives from angered community groups latched onto a series of arguments against the farms in the hopes that one of their efforts might work to deprive the farms of their influence and credibility, while some of the outrage represented a much deeper sentiment - a history of pointedly unjust zoning regulations and a narrative of legislative use of the natural environment either for or against certain residents.

PODER used the rhetoric of gentrification to make a strong political argument given how prevalent such discourses are in the media today. Opponents of the urban farms used the word 'gentrification' as a political strategy to frame the dispossession of land in a light that would catch the eye of socially-conscious citizens. Gentrification has been a buzzword in several cities over the past decade, and to oppose gentrification is represented as the moral thing to do. By using rhetoric to implicate urban farms as gentrification, PODER hoped to motivate other people to oppose the farms. If they were to refer to the conflict as one of environmental racism, they would perhaps have a more

⁸³ Evan Stinson, Comment on Almanza's post "Join us..." Facebook, October 16, 2013.

difficult time proving their case because of Austin's long-standing connection to nature, or because of systemic societal tendencies to ignore demands of marginalized groups. Austinites would likely be less inclined to believe cases of environmental racism exist in their 'garden' of a city, whereas they are aware of the rapid changes that have occurred over the past decade in their city that can be attributed to gentrification.

Thus, the conflict surrounding the urban farms in East Austin is a different form of land dispossession. It is not fully gentrification because the land was not slated for development, and the farms do not have a direct correlation with increasing rents, and it is not fully environmental racism because the farms are not harmful to environmental or human health. I believe that the case evolved as it did because of the city's history with other such environmentally racist circumstances, like legalized spatial segregation and the deliberate location of environmentally toxic industries. I think PODER misbranded the case as gentrification when it is actually a mix of multiple forms of conflict over whether land is being dispossessed or not.

While the reasoning for East Austin residents' concern hinged on Austin's history of zoning and segregation, the argument also touches on Austinites' relationship with nature and urban landscapes. Austin's growth and development can be chronicled by a strong appreciation for and attachment to place both by the city's founders, its residents, and as seen in the city's advertising campaigns. Austin is in a compelling position in that it touts, and thus must hold true to, both its natural landscapes and its image as a successful and bustling capital city. This perception suggests distinct notions of the city and the countryside, making Austin a backdrop suitable for studying the binary and

overlap that is culturally constructed between the 'urban' and the 'rural,' a topic I turn to in my next chapter, paying special attention to how the urban farming conflict demonstrates certain urbanization ideals.

Southern Urbanization Patterns and the Urban/Rural Divide

Urban and rural space have historically been conceptualized in a binary in which they are thought of as distinct spaces with contrasting characteristics, both in terms of the built environment and human activities, that do not overlap spatially. These conceptions are spatially informed and socially constructed, and they are both challenged and reinforced as cities grow and the surrounding landscapes develop through a capitalism-induced demand for expansion.⁸⁴ Certain activities, such as cultivating land or building high-rises, are associated with either space, and it seems culturally inappropriate to perform such actions in the opposite space. Groups of people have different representations of space, which often come into conflict as distinct spaces merge.

Throughout history, rural to urban migration has informed certain mindsets that determine how people behave in space. Intense post-World War II urbanization patterns in the United States incited social debates about acceptable land use and development schemes. Focusing on the U.S. South and Austin in particular, I see that as cities continue to grow and expand, people blur the boundaries between the urban and the rural both in spatial terms and in mental conceptualizations of space because of new geographical delineations, movement of people, and sourcing of resources. The blurring of a distinct urban-rural landscape leads to theoretical contestations because people create meaning through the way in which a space is defined, and when that meaning

⁸⁴ Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, "Planetary Urbanization," in *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, ed. Neil Brenner (Berlin: jovis Verlag GmbH, 2014), 160.

fluctuates, residents' connections to spaces become unstable. While this is a generalization, it serves as a grounding for how the practice of urbanization elucidates the theory behind place-making.

Austin and the South

For the purpose of examining an urban/rural morphology, it is helpful to think of Austin as a Southern city because it adheres to development patterns of other cities in the U.S. South. 'The South' is a multifaceted political entity that is not easily bounded and whose distinct geopolitical sections engender varying social and cultural patterns.⁸⁵ Geographers often face difficulty in classifying Texas as part of the South due to its location on the border and its size.⁸⁶ Texas has often been seen as part of a Southern periphery because of certain socioeconomic patterns that stray from dominant Deep South institutions, yet it is still associated with Southern states because of its history with the institution of slavery.⁸⁷ The slave-based economy significantly impacted the development of settlement space in the South because it was based on portable capital, which led to a weaker connection to land and a lack of infrastructural development.⁸⁸ Southern cities developed based on an economic system of racial servitude, operating according to their own regional logic that separated them from cities in the rest of the country. Later, agricultural industries, such as cotton, drove the urbanization of

⁸⁵ Kevin Phillips, "The South," in *The Emerging Republican Majority* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 204.

⁸⁶ Richard Lloyd, "Urbanization and the Southern United States," *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012): 485.

⁸⁷ Phillips, "The South," 206.

⁸⁸ Lloyd, "Urbanization and the Southern United States," 485.

Southern cities, which remained de-concentrated until the construction of highways and intensive suburbanization post-WWII.⁸⁹

Austin, among some other Southern cities, is a city that digresses from Southern conservative hegemony. Urban sociologist Richard Lloyd calls it “a cultural, economic, and political outlier in oil-rich, deeply conservative Texas,” noting how it has experienced an influx of culturally liberal and technologically innovative young residents - designated as the ‘creative class’ by urban theorist Richard Florida - who have spurred modern forms of urban development to fit their desires.^{90,91} Austin’s population usually votes for Democratic rather than Republican candidates, and its residents favor pedestrian-friendly and environmentally responsible urban growth.^{92,93} However, for the sake of understanding the evolution of urban and rural growth, Austin and Texas follow patterns characteristic of Southern cities.



The Dual South, Kevin Phillips, 2015.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Lloyd, “Urbanization and the Southern United States,” 487.

⁹⁰ Richard Florida, “The Rise of the Creative Class,” *The Washington Monthly*, May 1, 2001, 18.

⁹¹ Lloyd, “Urbanization and the Southern United States,” 494.

⁹² Jasmine C. Lee, Sarah Almkhatar, and Matthew Bloch, “Texas Primary Election Results,” *New York Times*, March 7, 2018.

⁹³ Lloyd, “Urbanization and the Southern United States,” 494.

⁹⁴ Phillips, “The South,” 205.

Southern urbanization adheres to distinctive spatial patterns and political and economic structures that vary from urbanization of the Northern United States. Heavy Southern urbanization occurred later than it did in the North and the Midwest, reflecting trends of post-WWII development rather than development patterns in the North and the Midwest at the turn of the 1900s.⁹⁵ Lloyd contends that “Southern cities take shape in ways not well captured by the standard models of urban culture and morphology generated by the Northern prototype.”⁹⁶ Taking a political economy approach, Lloyd explains that, due to its later urbanization, Southern cities reflect “a new relationship to regional industrialization, new forms of entrepreneurial governance, flexible labor markets, the importance of finance and producer services, and “new destination” immigration.”⁹⁷

The city of Austin was founded on an intriguing blurring of urban and rural spaces and preferences. The location for the city itself was determined primarily because of its natural appeal, where, in 1839, Mirabeau Lamar and his group of commissioners were struck by the beauty of the rolling hills, which he predicted would be an attractive amenity for residents.⁹⁸ The city was formerly a small outpost called Waterloo, and Lamar believed it was close to what would eventually be the center of the growing state, thus making it ideal for the state capital’s administrative purposes. Undeveloped land held “an urban promise” and “an urban imperative” of settlement and investment that

⁹⁵ Lloyd, “Urbanization and the Southern United States,” 483.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 484.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 483.

⁹⁸ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 20.

depended on a symbiotic relationship between cities and their surrounding countrysides.⁹⁹ Locations for large settlements were chosen based on the surrounding landscape and whether there were “natural advantages” that promised profit and prosperity. Early planners believed that nature had designated key locations for urban greatness based on a future metropolis’ ability to be a natural outgrowth of its region because of factors such as climate, soils, vegetation, waterpower sources, and mines, among others.¹⁰⁰ At the outset of the city’s founding, then, Austin’s identity was already mixed between ideals of the natural rural aspects, alongside the necessity of urbanization for effective administration. The land was chosen on the principle that it could be urbanized, thus using the rural to create the urban, guided by the promise of rural features as desirable amenities.

The history and traditions of the South focused on an agricultural economy, which dictated national perceptions of Southern cities as inherently linked to rural landscapes. Southern countrysides offered expansive and fertile lands, employed for the cultivation of crops and the maintenance of livestock. There was a comparatively greater number of rural people who relied heavily on agriculture for their subsistence.¹⁰¹ In the period preceding World War I, Austin resembled many small cities throughout the South in that it was minimally industrialized and was based on an agricultural labor market.¹⁰² As railroad technology advanced, agricultural operations became larger and

⁹⁹ William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1991), 34.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰¹ Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 9.

¹⁰² Busch, *City in a Garden*, 41.

linked the South with the rest of the country through the movement of goods.¹⁰³ Many smaller farmers were forced to leave rural areas and seek employment in cities, and the rural-to-urban migration generated much of the population growth in large central cities.¹⁰⁴ Flat agricultural prairies remained undeveloped by urban growth, but their adjacent populations began to develop into large metropolises as cities became industrialized.

Austin's location provided several natural resources, such as valleys for farming and rivers for water sourcing, yet such environmental features had to be controlled in order to advance an urban image. The Colorado River, for example, flooded often, destroying large parts of the city multiple times during the early decades of its growth.¹⁰⁵ As scientific hydrology advanced, the city became a safer place for habitation, and additional structures for housing and working were built. The river remained part of the landscape, but was constrained by humans who believed that raging waters did not equate to a habitable urban space. With the rolling hills and valleys to the west of Austin and the flat prairies on the east, the topography of the region led to a divide between areas where farming could successfully occur - in the hills and valleys - and areas where farming failed due to a lack of deep top soil, creating spaces of dense settlement.¹⁰⁶ This established the notion that farming existed outside of city limits.

Southern Urbanization

¹⁰³ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 42.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 43.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 22.

Certain characteristics of urbanization in the U.S. South emerged as a response to the conjecture that the South lagged behind the rest of the nation in urban development. Several pieces of print media in the 20th century reported on how the southern city drew its character from the country immediately surrounding it, thus associating it with a rural disposition.¹⁰⁷ The equating of southern cities and rural spaces made them seem less cosmopolitan, less prosperous, less interested in modern urban services and amenities, and without a sense of urban community.¹⁰⁸ Such a rural reputation, some distinct reporters from the early and mid-1900s opined, harmed the South's ability to form large urban metropolises because boosters did not want to invest economically.¹⁰⁹ The South's urbanization patterns were destined to be different from those of the rest of the nation, however, because of its classification as distinctively more rural.

Cities and rural areas are intrinsically tied because the city grows from where the rural once was; yet, as societies form, they become distinctly reshaped through cultural and economic processes. Interestingly, the development of urban areas not only hinged on the existence of rural areas, but also on the ability of that rural space to be transformed into an urban space, thus putting it into a different category of habitation. The binary between the urban and the rural stemmed from the dichotomization of a landscape, and such a division became ingrained in the minds of settlers, largely due to the fact that they were able to assert such dominance over the land and make it into something it was not before.

¹⁰⁷ Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

The built environment became a primary marker of difference between the rolling hills of bluebonnets and the flat plains of cotton and corn. Built structures started to serve as a material representation of a city, creating a complex system of beliefs and attitudes that constituted an urban ethos.¹¹⁰ This urban ethos was circulated through print communication and media, infiltrating the popular imaginary of the people. It was a way for residents to investigate the pulls of centralization away from an agrarian landscape and toward urban economic interests, while also reconciling with the need for growth but the desire for stability. Furthermore, an urban ethos served to hold the urban community together through the determination of so-called ‘acceptable’ norms, values, and institutions.¹¹¹ By cultivating such an ethos, residents assessed the current urban condition and planned for an urban future, seeing such an existence as a decisive separation from a rural way of life, and influencing how they view city character today.

Cities in the North and South both developed strong presences of commerce, economics, and government, while rural areas remained without centers of such activities. Central business districts in Southern cities were composed of department stores, business offices, restaurants, newsstands, and shops, which were usually centered around a courthouse, a state capitol, or other governmental structure, with a park or public square nearby.¹¹² Surrounding the central business district were usually industrial districts, warehouses, and, if near a waterfront, docks. Running through the downtown were typically railroad lines, and residential areas existed as one moved

¹¹⁰ Lewis Mumford, “What is a City?,” *Architectural Record* (November 1937): 95.

¹¹¹ Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South*, 40.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 35.

further out from the center.¹¹³ Rural areas, instead, were dominated by practices of sharecropping and livestock maintenance. Flat plains were ideal for crops, and some continuities remained, such as cotton cultivation and transportation by horses and wagons.¹¹⁴ Railroads, when invented, forever changed life in Texas, and cities soon became very distinct from rural areas.

Early business endeavors in Austin also shaped the divide between farmland and city centers. The region had been used for subsistence farming, so it was common for each family to have their own farm and dairy cow on a few acres that provided food.¹¹⁵ Farmers also continued cultivating cotton, corn, and rice on a larger scale around Austin, such that the community retained a rural feel. However, once government centers and banks were established in the growing central business district, Austin became a more commercial city, and residents paid less attention to farming, which was pushed further from the center.¹¹⁶ Ranches persisted outside of Austin, but urbanization was heavily underway within the city limits. Developers had to focus on building housing now that the city's leadership was drawing larger numbers of people. Since Austin is the capital, the state government brought politicians to the city every year who needed to find temporary housing, and many eventually decided to permanently reside there.¹¹⁷ Lawyers and government officials dominated the workforce, establishing

¹¹³ Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South*, 40.

¹¹⁴ David G. McComb, *The City in Texas: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 146.

¹¹⁵ Anthony A. Orum, *Power, Money and the People: The Making of Modern Austin* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 28.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 29.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 29.

Austin's identity as increasingly more commercial and administrative rather than rural and agrarian.

As the city grew, residents developed an urban image that influenced how people behaved in their environments. The image of the city focused on the social, economic, and temporal elements, like infrastructure, activities of residents, and urban amenities, along with spatial representation.¹¹⁸ While being deeply personal and relative to each citizen's experience within an urban space, the urban image also united a mass of people who shared similar experiences, creating an urban culture that was distinctly different from a rural culture. A rural culture, in contrast, focused on activities that were routine for rural life, such as maintaining livestock or crops. Additionally, residents in rural places inhabited spaces that were more expansive and provided larger space in between one another, thus allowing them to perform certain actions that made more noise, like keeping cattle or using farm machinery. An urban image served as a way to distinguish places from a rural context of former existence. As author Blaine Brownell notes, the formation of an urban identity was rooted in the emotional and psychological needs of individuals and groups to establish a sense of harmony between themselves and their environments.¹¹⁹ This need for unity was born from the lack of spatial proximity in rural landscapes, and it further cemented the notions that differentiated an urban and a rural resident.

Additionally, certain personas began to characterize urban and rural dwellers. Urban life in the South was typified by a fast-paced working environment dictated by

¹¹⁸ Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South*, 42.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 42.

men with briefcases rushing to office buildings, discussing matters of economics and the steel industry.¹²⁰ Rural landscapes remained agrarian, and their inhabitants were portrayed as moving more slowly and dealing with nature rather than sitting in office meetings. Given this distinction among city and countryside residents, a 1937 study found that cities of the North and South resembled each other more closely than they did the rural areas in their own regions.¹²¹ In addition to general demeanor of people, there were countless physical appearances and arrangements that led to this conclusion.

Cities offered amenities that accounted for a large draw in population while also establishing notions about which activities took place in cities rather than in rural areas. Throughout the 1900s, urban life became characterized by the events and opportunities that occurred there that were markedly different than those available in the countryside. For example, city inhabitants could partake in vices such as gambling, prostitution, and drinking, while also enjoying movies, radio, and theater because of the larger pool of individuals that dense urban areas offered, and due to the implementation of electric power.¹²² Additionally, residents had the benefit of city services and infrastructural improvements. Cities touted advancements in water purification and filtration systems, sewage maintenance, and garbage disposal, which all resulted in an increase in health standards and in residents who were more generally pleased with their living conditions.¹²³ Moreover, roads were built and streets were paved, thus allowing trolley systems to be built for faster public transportation alongside rising counts of motor vehicles.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South*, 42.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 34.

¹²² McComb, *The City in Texas*, 192, 200-202.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 194-199.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 208-209.

Furthermore, urban dwellers increasingly found themselves with time for leisure now that they were not constantly tending to farmland. Thus, places for recreation and relaxation were established, such as zoos, libraries, and venues for viewing sports.¹²⁵ These places engendered interest in education and community networks. Rural environments simply lacked the infrastructure for such activities, and rural inhabitants lacked the free time to engage in such pursuits. Thus, cities in the early 1900s became known for these events and venues, cementing the perceived notions of what did and did not occur in both urban and rural places.

Such activities and spaces form part of a growth machine that serves to draw more people to cities and to keep residents there. The theory behind cities as growth machines stems from the perspective that the commodification of places entices people there, which influences economic growth and profit-making off of property.¹²⁶ This commodification functions at the hands of developers and place-dependent industries. Places serve as unique commodities because they are not disposable and they allow access to other values and necessities, like work, friends, and schools.¹²⁷ Cities draw residents because of the amenities they offer. In the case of Austin, the city offered several urban amenities, along with resources that were commonly understood as rural. These services and features characterized Austin as a city that provided a mix of both landscapes, catering to all types of residents.

¹²⁵ McComb, *The City in Texas*, 205, 203.

¹²⁶ John R. Logan and Harvey Luskin Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 54.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 65.

The decision to locate the flagship campus of the University of Texas in Austin in the 1880s created a new sense of urban identity and guaranteed a burgeoning intellectual class that would increase economic growth in the city. The campus, interestingly, was founded with a vision of retaining the region's pastoral connection. It was a symbol of modernity, yet the grounds were manicured and provided large green spaces that evoked the natural qualities of the region.¹²⁸ In doing this, the planners of the campus complicated Austin's urban mindset to create an identity that honored the city's rural beginnings while investing in the city's long-term growth. This echoes a theme within Austin's development of how the urban and the rural have created distinct conceptual principles, while, at the same time, blurring the two in a way that became valuable for residents and enticing to visitors.

Austin's Spatial Development

Austin's urbanization patterns can be seen as a confrontation between civilization and untamed nature in the city's search to develop and formulate an urban identity. The tension in reconciling these two values persisted throughout Austin's history. Developers' efforts to tame nature and curate the city's surroundings lured newcomers, including investors, businesspeople, and growth promoters.¹²⁹ However, while developers retained goals of building a metropolis, residents were hesitant to see growth increase at such a rapid pace, ironically at the expense of the natural landscapes with which boosters advertised the city. While tradesmen and economists promoted the centralization of Austin's governance and commerce, others focused on the city's quality

¹²⁸ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 23.

¹²⁹ William Scott Swearingen, Jr., *Environmental City: People, Place, Politics, and the Meaning of Modern Austin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 42.

of life, especially noting how residents enjoyed the culture and the environment.¹³⁰ The idea of taming nature for urban growth remained prominent in development schemes by those with political power.

Powerful landowners and businesspeople pushed Austin towards the ranks of a big urban area through advertising campaigns that highlighted the region's agrarian past and connection to nature. As early as the 1870s, boosters and advertisers marketed Austin to tourists, prospective businesses, and other investors by highlighting the city's unique natural characteristics that were lacking in other Texas cities, like Houston, which was focused on the oil industry, or Dallas, the prime location for banking.¹³¹ Such advertising campaigns continued throughout the century, and spiked again in the 1960s. Austin residents emphasized an urban vision that integrated their daily lives into natural spaces, and they actively celebrated Austin's natural abundance by hosting events at public parks and natural springs.¹³² Austin's anti-urban motifs, as American Studies scholar Andrew Busch calls them, included the sanctity of nature, open space, and wholesome fun without the loss of amenities, and it was precisely those images that made Austin so attractive.¹³³ It must be noted that the motifs associated with Austin's environmental landscape were and are, as I discussed in the previous chapter, racialized. This type of advertising, then, drew large numbers of people to Austin that created a tension for the city's identity, both from an urban/rural standpoint and in terms of racial pressures.

¹³⁰ Swearingen, *Environmental City*, 42.

¹³¹ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 24.

¹³² *Ibid*, 107.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 107.

Disagreements in Austin's promotion and subsequent development stem from an underlying conflict that pits continued growth against the preservation of natural landscapes, especially with racialized overtones. Whether the city's master plans should prioritize the conservation of green space or formulate an infrastructure that would make real estate investment largely profitable became a tension among two opposing groups of residents.¹³⁴ This disagreement informed the development of the city and influenced reactions to future environmental conflicts, including the urban farming case in Austin, while also setting the stage for issues such as environmental quality of life and environmental racism. To understand such responses to environmental disagreements, I argue that Austin is a city whose development patterns do not follow a distinctly urban or rural character at one particular historical moment then a blurring later on. Instead, Austin's growth pattern suggests that the urban and the rural have always been blurred throughout the city's development, an understanding which foregrounds the reasoning behind why the urban farming case unfolded as it did.

To successfully analyze the case in Austin in terms of a blurring of the urban and the rural, it is useful to contextualize rural and urban studies through a theoretical lens. Geographer Michael Woods presents three theoretical frameworks of rural geography that have shifted throughout the decades. In the 1970s, rural geography was understood based on identifying rural space through distinctive functional characteristics, whereas the 1980s took a political economy perspective and attempted to position the rural as the product of broader social, economic, and political processes.¹³⁵ In the 1990s, rurality

¹³⁴ Swearingen, *Environmental City*, 44.

¹³⁵ Michael Woods, "Rural Geography: Blurring Boundaries and Making Connections," *Progress in Human Geography* 33, no. 6 (2009): 850.

was understood as being socially constructed, meaning that the importance of the rural lay in the social, cultural, and moral values that had become associated with rural spaces and rural life.¹³⁶ This approach does not constrain the rural to a spatial dimension, yet conceptualizes rurality as a networked space that is multifaceted and co-constituted, presenting it as a hybrid of urban and rural characteristics. Woods suggests that the flows and dependencies that link the city and the countryside can either be seen as a collapse of the urban-rural dichotomy, or they can be understood as producing a hybrid socio-spatial form that blurs the urban and rural in a new and distinctive order and identity.¹³⁷ Using Woods' reasoning, Austin's development can be seen as a hybrid of spatial forms because of how the city's growth was always contingent on the region's rural past, and how the city's identity emphasizes the rural aspects surrounded by urban growth.

Another way to conceptualize the supposed urban-rural binary is to introduce the idea of the transect. The New Urbanism movement uses transects to analyze the degree of urbanity, or manmade development, that certain human settlements exhibit.¹³⁸ The transects are divided into six zones: the natural zone, the rural zone, the sub-urban zone, the general urban zone, the urban center zone, and the urban core zone.¹³⁹ Landscapes are classified into these zones based on building types, open spaces, streets, landscaping, and proximity to infrastructure. The transect theory offers an engaging perspective of urban growth on a continuum while suggesting smooth transitions from

¹³⁶ Woods, "Rural Geography," 850.

¹³⁷ Woods, "Rural Geography," 853.

¹³⁸ Bohl and Plater-Zyberk, "Building Community," 10.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

one area to another. Austin's growth manifests some of the transect ideals around classification of space, yet Austin's layout suggests an even more overlapped version of rural and urban space.

Reacting to New Urbanism and echoing Woods' logic, urban theorists Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid recognize that, since the 1990s, there have been several worldwide socio-spatial transformations that re-conceptualize urban and rural space. Pertinent to the development in Austin are the phenomena of the disintegration of the "hinterland" and the end of the "wilderness." The less-urbanized areas surrounding cities are being reconfigured because they are being functionalized to provide use value for cities.¹⁴⁰ Rural spaces are increasingly penetrated by the urban to facilitate the continued expansion of industrial urbanization, transforming spaces previously thought of as 'wild' and 'untouched by urban life.' By proffering these ideas, Brenner and Schmid call for a change in the assumptions of urban studies, starting with the idea that there is no longer a binary between the urban and the rural because the urban seeps into every aspect of space.¹⁴¹ Today, as they state, "the urban represents an increasingly worldwide condition in which political-economic relations are enmeshed."¹⁴² This blurring of boundaries underscores how the urban and rural are vague and contested entities that are produced through citizen interactions and conflicts, explaining how the conflict in Austin highlights these socio-spatial understandings.

In my interpretation, I believe that the East Austin residents who were opposed to urban farms felt the way they did because urban farms represented a novelty to

¹⁴⁰ Brenner and Schmid, "Planetary Urbanization," 161-2.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 162.

¹⁴² Ibid, 162.

outsiders, yet offered nothing particularly distinctive for long-time Austin residents. Furthermore, urban farms threatened an identity of the city that residents were proud to invoke. Aligned with national patterns of urban farms as trendy ways to create a sense of place, urban farms are also seen as harbingers of economic investment. This means that a neighborhood with urban farms is assumed to be more attractive to newcomers and to investors who will purchase property there, most likely raising the average land prices. Since Austin's landscape has always blurred urban and rural aspects, the urban farms on the Eastside were not anything particularly special to residents. The arguments from the East Austin community groups draw on how rural amenities have been commonplace in Austin's landscape, so there is not a desire for more of such amenities when they will most likely be used for economic gain by city boosters, echoing what has occurred in the past.

A similar argument can be made for protesting a new upscale housing development because of the potential for raising land values, and I believe PODER and other opponents would have resisted such a construction as well. If the land were used to construct new and upscale housing units or expensive single-family homes, rather than urban farms, vocal East Austin community members would likely challenge that development as well. Their preference is to have the land used for affordable housing, so any deviance would draw protest. Such a protest to upscale development, however, would be born out of a different set of culturally-informed principles, instead of those associated with Austin's natural history.

Urban farms can be used to advertise a place's connection with nature, and, as Austin's history suggests, the promotion of Austin as an environmentally-inclined city has formed the city's identity, yet this is at the price of increased development and subsequent displacement or intense change within neighborhoods. Thus, residents felt threatened by the fact that the newly established urban farms could be used to catalyze a similar pattern of growth, and their case against them hinged on these fears.

Placing the case of Austin's urban farms into dialogue with the theories behind a conceived urban/rural binary suggests a larger analysis of how people understand these two landscapes to either exist simultaneously or mutually exclusively. These understandings put the urban farming case into a context that draws on Austin's connection to the environment as both a way to boost the city's image to investors and newcomers, and as a way to create an identity for the city and produce a nationally-recognized characterization of its residents. Such identity formation exercises are not without struggle, however, and a residents' connection to place is dependent on how ownership of and belonging to a certain place are dynamic and contested processes that question the idea of who gets to characterize a city, a notion I turn to in my final chapter.

Persuasive Framing of Austin's Spatial Identity

Dorsey Barger's HausBar Farms serves as a test case for what an urban farm should be in Austin and who gets to determine those standards. The re-writing of the city's urban farm code, which revolved around the dispute over Barger's land use, was an outcome produced by a struggle over spatial identity and characterization of Austin through urban branding tactics. The case highlights the debate over who gets to enact certain place-making activities and rhetoric to distinguish a place in a particular way, which also helps form a place's identity. Each side of the quarreling parties involved in the urban farm case utilized place-making strategies to promote their perspectives on what should and should not be allowed on Austin's land and, thus, part of the city's identity.

The situation begged a larger question about the future of urban farming in Austin and the very definition of an urban farm in the context of Austin's identity - an identity created by its residents which faced potential change in the wake of the urban farm dispute. HausBar Farms functioned as a scapegoat for these larger societal questions, whose responses served to concretize citizens' opinions on the matter. Paula Foore, a co-owner of Springdale Farm, suggested that citizens unofficially appreciate the impact that urban farms have on the city's prosperity, but she called for official support through the adjustment of the urban farm code and by expressions of support from city departments and residents.¹⁴³ Her assumption that Austin residents value urban farms

¹⁴³ Shelley Seale, "Austin's HausBar Farms Struggles to Stay Alive while the City of Austin Considers Urban Farming," *CultureMap*, April 12, 2013.

stems largely from the curation of Austin's image as a place that would probably hold urban farming in high regard.

Urban farms combine a respect for local businesses, face-to-face interaction, and a connection to nature that has been central in Austin's urban branding efforts. Many Austinites feel they must preserve the city's unique personality in the face of rapid growth, which has homogenized businesses and encouraged the development of large-scale luxury apartment and outdoor mall complexes, such as the Domain and the Seaholm Power Plant Redevelopment.¹⁴⁴ The Domain is in North Austin, while the Seaholm Redevelopment sits downtown, and both locations house chain restaurants and stores, many of which reach expensive price points. Author Lawrence Wright notes that "[t]he very places that made Austin so hip are being demolished to make room for the hotels and office spaces needed to accommodate the flood of tourists and newcomers who have come to enjoy what no longer exists."¹⁴⁵ In response, devout Austinites emphasize what they see as the city's core characteristics - eccentricity, nonconformity, and environmental preservation.¹⁴⁶ Citizens who are most concerned with the loss of a unique character are vocal in seeking to cultivate a citywide attitude of environmental advocacy, creative participation and resistance, and landscape preservation.¹⁴⁷

The slogan "Keep Austin Weird" has become the unofficial motto for the city, catalyzing an increased love of place, or topophilia, among many residents. Bars,

¹⁴⁴ Brittani Sonnenberg, "Build It and They Will Come: What it's Like to Live, Work, and Play at the Domain," *Tribeza*, June 2017, 78; Micah Mills, "Seaholm Power Plant Re-Development," *Architect Magazine*, April 27, 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Lawrence Wright, "God Save Austin," *Austin Monthly*, April 2, 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Joshua Long, *Weird City: Sense of Place and Creative Resistance in Austin, Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

restaurants, music venues, and festivals advertise their alleged authenticity, contributing to a sense of place, which Geographer Joshua Long defines as the meanings, attitudes, and perceptions that people ascribe to a place.¹⁴⁸ These place-making techniques foster human attachment and a sense of belonging to a geographically-bound area. Long argues that Austin's particular sense of place is revealed through creative resistance to contemporary patterns of urbanization, a phenomenon that can be seen in the urban farming case.

The urban branding of Austin informs the urban farm debate because of dominant narratives about whether urban farming aligns with the city's identity. Urban branding strategies and campaigns employ images, rhetoric, and symbols to manage perceptions of cities and thus form their identities.¹⁴⁹ Austinites are known for a deep connection to place, so much so that its popularity led to its ranking as the best place to live in the United States in both 2017 and 2018.¹⁵⁰ In a geographical sense, place is typically understood as a distinctive and bounded location that is defined by the lived experiences of people.¹⁵¹ As Lefebvre explained, place emerges as a particular form of space that is created through acts of naming, distinctive activities, and imaginings associated with social spaces.¹⁵² People imbue places with meaning and nostalgia, making them fundamental in providing a sense of belonging for those who live in them.

¹⁴⁸ Long, *Weird City*, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg, *Crisis Cities: Disaster and Redevelopment in New York and New Orleans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 221.

¹⁵⁰ Amanda O'Donnell, "Austin Named Best Place to Live in America for Second Year in a Row," *Austin-American Statesman*, April 11, 2018.

¹⁵¹ Phil Hubbard, "Space/Place," in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Discovery of Key Concepts*, ed. David Atkinson et. al. 2010, 1.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 2.

These formations exist in the theoretical realm of cultural geography, which engages questions about social processes and also challenges our understandings about core geographical categories.¹⁵³ By questioning the symbolism that landscape holds in Austin, we can more fully understand the systems of meaning that have been established and influence current conflicts.

Austin's sense of place stems from certain characteristics that were distinct from other Texas cities and therefore cherished and maintained by residents. For example, Dallas' financial sector did not reach Austin, and Austin missed Houston's oil boom. While many North American cities were experiencing rapid growth and industrialization, Austin remained a small and quiet city.¹⁵⁴ There were no traditional modes of industry, such as an auto industry, steel production, or heavy manufacturing. By not having to deal with industrial pollutants in comparison with other cities, Austin residents established a widespread reverence for the environment and began establishing greenbelts and nature preserves while also instituting environmental laws and programs.¹⁵⁵ Austin did not experience racial conflict to such an extreme as other mid-century cities that witnessed violent riots, which cast Austin in a light of relative calmness. The city was continuously dedicated to environmental protection, promotion of the local music scene, and recreational amenities that often took place outdoors. Since Austin was not dominated by large industry, many small businesses emerged,

¹⁵³ David Atkinson et al., "Editors' Preface - On Cultural and Critical Geographies," in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Discovery of Key Concepts*, ed. David Atkinson et. al. 2010, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Long, *Weird City*, 48.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 49.

especially in the creative sector, giving Austin a certain cultural character distinct from other regional areas.

Of significance is the fact that the urban farming conflict highlights how sense of place can be contradictory based on perceived conceptions of space. Sense of place is driven by conflicting interests and values, and these ideas change as cities grow and develop. Political geographer Edward Soja suggests that the analytical readings of physical space and the representations of conceptual space produce a lived space that symbolizes an epistemological standpoint of spatial relations.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, Lefebvre's trialectical framework, as explained in the introductory chapter, proffers that social agents create a construction of space, which takes on different forms because of the varied interests involved.¹⁵⁷ It is probable that many of these interests will conflict, causing contestation about the the characterization of a place and the physical manifestation of that spatial interpretation. This draws the analysis back to a political economy methodology by focusing on the various actors involved and their particular concerns.

Lefebvre's analysis, coupled with a political economy framework, can be used to explain the discourse surrounding environmentalism in Austin. Austin's "city in a garden" reputation was not historically tied to the ideas of environmentalism that circulate in popular culture today. After WWII, advertisers promoted Austin's environmentalism in a way that focused on the amount of open green space the city had.

¹⁵⁶ Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places* (Cambridge: Blackwell Press, 1996), 81.

¹⁵⁷ Pugalís, "A Conceptual and Analytical Framework," 81.

¹⁵⁸ The movement in the 1970s was commonly connoted with white suburbanites who wanted to preserve their own amenities without thinking of the sustainability of neighborhoods of the urban poor.¹⁵⁹ In recent years, environmentalism has broadened its focus to include not only the appreciation and preservation of the natural world, but also the sustainability of communities and jobs.¹⁶⁰ These ideals are noticeable in Austin, where the contradictory and dynamic sense of place have evolved to suit the interests of the population.

The ideas surrounding environmental identity, among others, form part of Austin's cultural identity. Many Austinites feel a certain sense of pride for their city, which stems from how Austin's sense of place has been created by continuously invoking certain mindsets and characteristics. Historian, planner, and longtime resident Ted Eubanks states, "we hear a lot about keeping Austin weird and how different Austin is from the rest of Texas, but...it's pretty much been that way from the start," agreeing with how Austin has been described by *Tribeza*, Austin's leading locally-owned arts and culture magazine, as an "independent thinking" city with "an affinity for pushing boundaries."¹⁶¹ Such ideals form the culture of a city, which is always contested, and geographer Don Mitchell suggests that this contestation of culture within cities displays the workings of power in systems of social reproduction.¹⁶² Understanding the cultural identity of Austin allows for an analysis of how people might invoke certain frameworks

¹⁵⁸ Busch, *City in a Garden*, 131.

¹⁵⁹ Martin W. Lewis, "Environmental Politics," *Issues in Science and Technology* 17, no. 1 (2000): 75.

¹⁶⁰ Lewis, "Environmental Politics," 75.

¹⁶¹ Anne Bruno, "Our Austin Story," *Tribeza*, June 2017, 60.

¹⁶² Don Mitchell, "There's No Such Thing as Culture: Towards a Reconceptualization of the Idea of Culture in Geography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20, no. 1 (1995): 103.

that draw on Austin's character so as to assert a level of power over the social production of certain ideas.

Influential Use of Austin's Sense of Place

Both proponents and opponents of the urban farms in East Austin use Austin's sense of place to promote their side of the argument. Urban farmers and supporters of the farm draw on ideals of environmental preservation and a strong connection to landscape in the way that they promote farms' right to exist. As was made evident in the previous chapter, Austin has a long history of cherishing environmental conservation and natural landscapes. Farmers stress the importance of local agricultural processes by using the history of how residents and city promoters blurred the urban/rural divide in Austin to align with the value of city growth in a way that is mindful of environmental concerns. The rhetoric that surrounds urban farming focuses on the importance of farms in the local food system and on their commitment to sustainability, drawing on long-standing notions that such features are valued in Austin.¹⁶³ Urban farms contribute to the character of urban places, changing the local attitude and identity.

Testimonies of residents who support urban farms espouse farms' ability to become gathering places that keep local business at their core. Katherine Avalos Nicely, chair of the Urban Farms Process and Code Coordination working group, a subset of the Austin City Council's Sustainable Food Policy Board, states that food has historically been embraced by cultures as part of their community development and history.¹⁶⁴ The culture in Austin, she says, follows this logic; as a planner, Nicely views urban farms as

¹⁶³ Seale, "Austin's HausBar Farms Struggles."

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 2013.

community institutions that define neighborhoods and districts within a city.¹⁶⁵ Nicely cites studies that such urban places become spaces for community interaction, another characteristic that is highly valued by many Austinites, especially when supporting local business.

Supporters of urban farms promote them also because of the positive effect they have on the local economy. The support stems from the long-standing emphasis on endorsing local businesses. A City Council report on the economic impact of urban agriculture and local food systems echoes such sentiments, finding that a substantial part of the appeal of urban farming is the sense that the food that people are consuming is grown, processed, or provided by a local source.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the report draws on conversations with chefs, retailers, and institutional buyers who all emphasize the value of an ‘Austin food’ brand, which reinforces a consumer desire for local products. Urban farms are hyper-local in comparison to Austin-based grocery stores due to the fact that visitors can interact with the food production team and farm owners. The report concludes with a prediction that increasing demand for local food will necessitate an expansion of urban farms that will yield greater overall economic activity.¹⁶⁷ Local production and manufacturing enables more money to stay in the region than if the businesses were not local, which creates a larger overall local economic impact. Thus, the importance of local businesses is two-fold for residents; they value the personal interactions with vendors and the fact that their food is produced so close to home, and they take part in supporting the locality economically.

¹⁶⁵ Seale, “Austin’s HausBar Farms Struggles.”

¹⁶⁶ TXP, Inc., “The Economic Impact of Austin’s Food Sector,” *AustinTexas.Gov*, 2013, 5.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

Besides environmental sustainability concerns, the aspect of supporting urban farms based on sustaining local businesses is perhaps the most influential to some Austin residents. An increase in the city's population has led to large-scale development and homogenization, such as the Domain and the Seaholm Development, inciting a feeling of urgency among some residents to protect local businesses. Higher land values have signaled a loss of iconic Austin landmarks in the name of housing and office developments. Advocates for urban farms recognize this insecurity and accentuate the need to preserve the natural land and the character of Austin as a city that admires independent businesses and local agricultural systems.

Furthermore, they disagree with PODER's suggestion that the urban farms' land would be better suited for housing developments because they identify such construction as straying from the characterization of Austin as a small town with natural landscapes and small businesses. Hans Dietrich, a neighbor of the farms, is quoted saying "I'm grateful for the farm that is bringing an awareness of where food comes from. I have two kids who are making a connection to that experience. If you're asking me if I'd rather have a farm that invites *New York Times* bestseller Michael Pollan to a party or on the other hand have a place that would have possibly been developed into a bunch of houses, I'll take the farm, and I can put up with the smell that comes with it."¹⁶⁸ The preservation of both natural spaces and local businesses appeals to many Austinites' desire to embody the convictions connoted with the phrase 'Keep Austin Weird.'

¹⁶⁸ Gandara, "Urban farm, neighbor collide in East Austin."

The city's iconic slogan has served as a rallying cry for political protests and cultural resistance, as well as appealing to a sense of community ownership and collectivity. In 2000, an Austin Community College librarian used the phrase on a radio show and was struck by its potential to be a meaningful slogan. He handed out bumper stickers with the phrase, and it caught on quickly. Many residents latched on to the slogan because it illustrates the underlying alternative nature of the city, as evidenced by eccentric people, oddly decorated yards, intriguing protest signs, and lively festivals and arts venues. Additionally, many Austinites yearn for a way to distinguish themselves from the rest of Texas due to discrepancies in political and cultural practices, and the slogan represents this formation of a distinct community. It reminds many Austinites of their city's nonconforming nature, but it has evolved to also become a marketing logo and a tool for local business promotion.¹⁶⁹ Although it was intended to invoke a sense of attachment, the slogan has been appropriated by local businesses who want to capitalize on residents' eagerness to support the local economy and independent businesses.¹⁷⁰ The commercialization of the slogan and the rhetoric it induces are used by urban farmers to advertise their "community-based" "family businesses" that are devoted to serving "[their] community" and "[their] city."¹⁷¹ Urban farmers and their supporters appeal to values of place by using a dominant discourse of community ownership and empowerment.

¹⁶⁹ Long, *Weird City*, 16.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 93.

¹⁷¹ Facebook, "Austin Citizens in Support of Urban Farms," last modified July 30, 2015.; Springdale Farm, "Our Story."

In interviews, urban farm advocates highlight the advantages of farms in the name of community engagement and local business. John Dromgoole, an East Austin organic gardener who refers to the urban farms as “family farms,” said the community benefits from the farms’ support of other businesses including restaurants and co-ops.¹⁷² He claims that more neighborhoods need urban farms. Springdale Farm’s co-owner Paula Foore champions the fact that urban farmers all know their neighbors, and other supporters said the farms help build cohesive communities and offer educational experiences. Councilman Mike Martinez offered a quote that aligns strikingly with how people use the city’s branding to promote their side of the argument: “[a]fter this is said and done, the sun is going to come up tomorrow and we’re still going to be neighbors, we’re going to be Austinites...we don’t want to be like Washington D. C. We don’t want to be like Dallas. We want to be Austin.”¹⁷³ By engaging a discourse of strong attachment to place, Martinez hopes to persuade others that urban farms are part of the city’s identity and deserve to stay.

Both sides of the urban farming conflict use Austin’s city identity to promote their side of the debate. Urban farmers in Austin emphasize the long-standing values of natural preservation and small businesses, as evidenced by how they advertise themselves. Dorsey Barger, for example, calls her life “idyllic” and says her work is part of her “moral obligation to decrease the problem of global warming.”¹⁷⁴ She recognizes that the smells and sounds that come from her farm are just “part of the circle of life,” and stresses the need for more farms, rather than fewer. PODER, on the other hand,

¹⁷² McCrady, “Austin City Council Makes Changes to Urban Farm Code.”

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Gandara, “Urban farm, neighbor collide in East Austin.”

stresses Austin's characteristics of tolerance and acceptance in their efforts to promote their argument.

In conflict with Austin's image of a town tolerant to all identities, PODER views urban farms as a racist zoning structure. When Llanes and Almanza spoke in front of City Council in 2012, they portrayed land-use planning and zoning as a powerful tool employed in racist gestures. They claimed the process of creating the new urban farm ordinance was "discriminatory to East Austin residents, who are primarily Hispanic and live in poor neighborhoods," and they urged people to realize that "they are coming into an area with people of color and a working class."¹⁷⁵ By framing the case in this way, they presented urban farms as a hindrance to a tolerant city that has every citizen's best interest at heart, not just the interests of wealthier and whiter residents.

Furthermore, they presented HausBar Farms as an unsustainable business that strays from local business ideals. PODER representatives said HausBar was a "mass production" operation because of the amount of chickens it slaughters daily, claiming that to process and sell chickens and rabbits for wholesale is "a full-fledged business in an improperly zoned area."¹⁷⁶ At the City Council open meeting in November of 2013, those opposing the recommendations wore small signs on their clothing that read "No Commercial Slaughtering in Residential Areas."¹⁷⁷ This perspective hoped to influence people to view the farm as an unsustainable large-scale endeavor, rather than a unique local business.

¹⁷⁵ Gandara, "Urban farm, neighbor collide in East Austin."

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ricardo Gandara, "Austin Council Bans Slaughtering, Animal Composting on Urban Farms," *Austin-American Statesman*, November 21, 2013.

In my analysis, urban farms served as a scapegoat for a broader fear of increased development and a loss of another value of many Austin residents - a resistance to the bustle of large cities and a maintenance of a family-oriented vision. Susana Almanza and other vocal East Austin residents posted their opinions about urban farms several times throughout 2012 and 2013 in a still-active Facebook group titled “Hermanos de East Austin.” Almanza’s main concern focused on the fact that the proposed urban farm ordinance would commercialize single-family homes, along with the distaste for slaughtering animals in a residential space.¹⁷⁸ A comment from Rosalie Ip calls the urban farm ordinance “another form of hegemonic manifest destiny,” underscoring that, beyond the aversion to slaughtering, the proposal attempts to rezone single-family homes into commercial mixed-use zoning, which “would allow anyone to come and develop like crazy (not JUST the urban farms.)”¹⁷⁹ In an additional comment, Ip notes that “urban farms can commercialize the land of single family zoning because there are little to no regulations of what they cannot do in what is supposed to be single family zoning.”¹⁸⁰ Paul Saldaña, in another comment, emphasizes that, when the Govalle Johnston Terrace community created a Neighborhood Plan and Future Land Use Map in the late 1990s, then formally adopted it in 2003, “the farms and/or land in question were deemed as an opportunity to sustain the existing single family uses.”¹⁸¹ This discrepancy confirms the fact several community members value the kind of neighborhood that single family units create, and their rhetoric against large-scale

¹⁷⁸ Susana Almanza, “Join us Thursday...,” Facebook, October 16, 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Rosalie Ip, Comment on Almanza’s post “Join us...,” Facebook, October 16, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Paul Saldaña, Comment on Almanza’s post “Join us...,” Facebook, October 16, 2013.

commercialization through zoning emphasizes a shared desire to resist business endeavors that would take away the residential feel. As evidenced, each side of the dispute employed treasured characteristics of the city to their advantage when promoting their opinions on the argument.

Characterization of the City

While these groups used Austin's spatial identity to persuade others to support their argument, they chose and framed differing parts of Austin's characteristics to make their case. This begs the question of who, then, gets to decide the character of the city. If certain forms of urban branding are highlighted and promoted by various groups, which narrative becomes dominant in shaping the city's identity at large, and how can this dominance be gauged? Because the urban farm code was revised, giving urban farmers updated abilities, urban farmers might claim that their perspective of focusing on local businesses and natural landscapes as key elements of Austin's identity emerged dominant. It is intriguing to consider that both sides are simultaneously using and re-creating Austin's spatial identity through this conflict. The city is, then, created through the struggle of place-making and the right to certain ownership of the city.

Urban farms are a place-making mechanism that draw on theoretical notions of landscape to advertise their contributions to Austin. Landscapes are not only the arrangement or pattern of things on land, but also the social and cultural significance that is aligned with those orderings. Any meaning that a landscape holds is the result and reflection of the cultural imperatives of those who make and represent the

landscape.¹⁸² The built environment is created by humans in a way that caters to use values, usually along the lines of production, exchange, and consumption, as well as exchange values, given the disposition of a capitalist economy. Thus, curated nature expresses the social relations that exist in an area.¹⁸³ While such relations are often embedded in capitalism, landscape can also represent a specific way of looking at land that determines what is 'natural' or 'right' in a particular place.¹⁸⁴ Landscapes thus become intertwined with local identity in both representative and performative ways. So, by way of advertising urban farms as a treasured connection to land that is essential in urbanized areas, Austin's urban farmers capitalize on and help construct a common desire to preserve natural landscape within the city.

Interviews from certain Austinites exhibit how nature is a valued resource in their city. In interviews for a *Tribeza* article about neighborhoods, Michael Portman, co-founder of a local barbershop, states that the best thing about his neighborhood is the proximity to Zilker Park, Barton Springs, and the hike and bike trail, a sentiment echoed by Anna Fagan, a category analyst.¹⁸⁵ Eighty percent of the interviewed residents specified trees, walkability, and proximity to lakes and the greenbelt as features they either loved most about their neighborhood or that are main selling points for a locality.¹⁸⁶ These insights encourage the understanding that urban farms were supported because they add to the natural landscape that draws people to certain places and

¹⁸² Don Mitchell, "Landscape," in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Discovery of Key Concepts*, ed. David Atkinson et. al. 2010, 1.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 1.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 2.

¹⁸⁵ Anna Andersen, "Neighborhood Perspectives," *Tribeza*, June 2017, 70.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 70-75.

fosters a strong relationship to the location. Furthermore, it seems that these natural amenities inspire aesthetic choices, like developing in a way that incorporates nature or is even built to make productive use of the nature, such as creating an urban farm rather than a housing development. Thus, it seems that this quality drives a large amount of the support that some people feel for urban farms.

HausBar Farms is simultaneously cherished and scorned, calling into question the power that urban identities hold over residents. Based on the fact that the case evolved as it did shows the level of attachment that Austin residents feel to their ideas of place and their conceptions of what types of venues and activities should be accepted in certain spaces. The fact that several of the players involved in the dispute drew upon Austin's identity to promote their ideals speaks to the multifaceted vision of city character that exists in Austin. I believe the dispute emerged because conflicting value judgements were placed in opposition with each other on the *same* pieces of land. Thus, the case encapsulates residents' preoccupation with how their land will be identified, produced, and construed by various actors. HausBar Farms served as a model of what an urban farm should or could be in Austin, as well as providing the grounds on which a decisive land use conflict revealed how residents confront differing views of urban identity and contested claims of city characterization.

Conclusion: The Continuous Re-Production of Space

The case in Austin reveals the profound degree to which places are negotiated, produced, and re-produced through ongoing political, social, ideological, and territorial struggles. Space is dynamic, and it evolves based on the socio-political conceptions and boundaries that are created by the societies existing within it. These notions are constantly changing based on who inhabits a space, what kind of development they value, the history of land use within the space, and the interactions that unfold between various groups, including the government and various community groups. When these ideologies and values come into conflict, land can play host to inspired debates concerning issues such as conservation of natural landscapes, environmentally racist separation, gentrification and dispossession of land, and new property legislation, among others. As such conflicts arise and unfold, places are re-characterized, encouraging alternative feelings of connection to spaces, as well as different understandings of spatial identity.

The evolution of the dispute over urban farming in Austin exhibits the extent to which the history of natural environments and land use planning influences contemporary struggles, yet also points to larger understandings of spatial identity, land dispossession and contestation, and the boundaries between agricultural and urban areas. Vocal residents representing multiple sides of the debate informed their arguments by drawing on the city's past and the city's simultaneously ever-shifting yet long-standing characteristics. These characteristics inform a city identity that is not

stable and does not carry the same meaning for every resident. These distinctions influence how people react to widespread urbanization patterns and developments.

The responses to recently-established urban farms on Austin's Eastside suggest that a historical context of deliberate environmental land use planning overlapped with gentrification trends in a distinct way to create a fear of urban land dispossession and a fear of unwanted changes to the established uses of certain land. Drawing on the history of Austin's urbanization, zoning, and spatial separation, residents in Austin defined city characteristics and invoked images of the city that they employed in promoting ideals either against commercialization and animal slaughtering within residential areas, or in defense of natural landscapes and small businesses. By analyzing the arguments made by urban farmers, their supporters, the municipal government, PODER, and other vocal residents, it becomes clear that disputes within Austin draw on several ways of framing the city's connection to nature and the conceptual divide between the urban and the rural. The way in which residents spoke about the conflict reveals how people use certain frameworks to promote their causes within urban environments.

The urban farming dispute presents a myriad of expressions of spatial identity, opinions on acceptable land use, and interpretations of historical and future growth trajectories. My thesis does not adequately represent every perspective and every voice in the conflict because of time and space constraints, yet further research into the subject would reveal even more layers of contestation. Compellingly, disagreements about the use of urban farms continue to unfold in Austin, highlighting how space is constantly negotiated and re-produced.

A 2015 dispute centered Springdale Farm yet again against PODER in a disagreement that was taken to City Council to reach a final resolution. Springdale Farm applied for a permit that would allow the farm to host a limitless number of small events (defined as accommodating 50 people or fewer) annually, 22 events with attendance between 51 and 150 people annually, and two events of more than 150 people each year.¹⁸⁷ At the medium-scale events, the owners of the farm would also be authorized to have sound amplifiers, and the permit would allow for off-site parking at a nearby former Austin Independent School District parking lot.¹⁸⁸ The current urban farm ordinance does not allow for such large-scale and consistent events, so Springdale Farm sought a conditional use permit from the City of Austin Planning Commission. PODER members were quick to react, voicing concerns similar to the ones they expressed at the height of the urban farm conflict in 2013.

The theme of their worries centered around the commercialization of residential spaces while also drawing on historically racialized decisions. A mother of three young boys in the neighborhood is quoted saying she feels like she lives near an event center rather than an urban farm, and she doesn't like the fact that she sees "trash or people parking that disrupts [her] street."¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, PODER's representative, Bill Aleshire of Riggs Aleshire & Ray, P.C., harped on discrimination in East Austin, asking "where else in Austin would outdoor entertainment be allowed so often and so close to homes?"¹⁹⁰ He continued, "I am really concerned that in this largely Hispanic

¹⁸⁷ Audrey McGlinchy, "Springdale Farm loses event fight," *Austin Monitor*, June 12, 2015.

¹⁸⁸ McGlinchy, "Springdale Farm."

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

neighborhood that is allowed. It reminds me of Austin's really nasty past on the way it treats people of color."¹⁹¹ PODER's sentiments echoed many arguments that they made during the original urban farm dispute.

On the other side, Springdale Farm's arguments focused on the economic advantages that more events would offer. Michele Lynch with Metcalfe Wolff Stuart and Williams, LLP, representing Paula and Glen Foore of Springdale Farm, focused on use and exchange values of the farm and its offerings. She stated that the economic advantage of being permitted to host more than six events is essential to keeping the farm viable."¹⁹² This argument frames the farm's interests differently than the angle they took in 2013, which was more focused on supporting local businesses that fostered a sense of community engagement. The disparity between these concerns shows how land contestation can be informed by many varying explanations. Further research could examine how the perspectives of both groups have evolved and what has influenced the changes in their mindsets within the few years in between the two debates. Ultimately, the Planning Commission voted to grant the permit, but the decision failed because the Commission could not reach the quorum necessary to make the meeting valid.

Furthermore, Austin is currently in the process of rewriting the Land Development Code that has not been revised since the 1980s. The code, titled CodeNEXT, dictates the rules and processes that regulate where and what type of development may occur in Austin. The City created the new code with intents to "effectively respond to growth pressures and opportunities," citing how the former code

¹⁹¹ McGlinchy, "Springdale Farm."

¹⁹² Ibid.

lacks clarity and consistency, contains incomplete and complicated administrative procedures, and leads to unpredictable outcomes.¹⁹³ The government website lists a litany of grievances that stem from the current code, including ineffective base zone districts; competing layers of regulations; a complicated opt-in/opt-out system; a lack of household affordability options and housing choices; and an automobile-centric outlook.¹⁹⁴ The proposed code would create new zoning maps, significantly altering certain neighborhoods in Austin. The first draft of the code was released in January of 2017, and public meetings have occurred several times since then so as to receive input on the suggestions and the maps.¹⁹⁵ Additional revisions have been released, and both the Planning Commission and the Zoning and Platting Commission have hosted work sessions with various communities. The City Council is in the process of reviewing CodeNEXT and will make a final vote within the upcoming months. The plan is expected to be implemented in December of 2018.

The exact effect that CodeNEXT will have on neighborhoods in East Austin is still unclear, but many members of PODER have vocalized objections. Susana Almanza implored members of her neighborhood to protest CodeNEXT because of possible negative effects it would have in East Austin. In a Facebook post, she stated that CodeNEXT would “exacerbate Austin’s historic displacement of people of color, seniors, & lower-income families” by “bulldozing the housing of [those] people to build new housing for wealthier people,” which would “inevitably increase property values and

¹⁹³ “CodeNEXT Basics,” Austin Land Development Code, City of Austin Department of Planning and Zoning, accessed April 2018.

¹⁹⁴ “Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan,” City of Austin Department of Planning and Zoning, last modified 2016.

¹⁹⁵ “Timeline,” City of Austin Planning and Zoning, last modified 2018.

rents.”¹⁹⁶ In an additional post, she wrote that “CodeNEXT fails to comply with the City's comprehensive [plan], Imagine Austin, by ignoring its requirements to preserve neighborhood character & to respect neighborhood plans & their Future Land Use Maps. CodeNEXT has been written in a non-transparent process without meaningful input from the people most affected by it.”¹⁹⁷ These grievances relate back to some of the issues Almanza and PODER raised in the urban farm conflict of 2013, such as land dispossession, legislation informed by the exploitation of minority communities, and gentrification. After City Council makes a final decision on the code and the implementation process begins, it will be compelling to follow the changes that might occur and to see how some residents might take action to continue fighting against the code.

The outcome will inevitably highlight similar themes to the urban farming case, proving the significance of analyzing the way it transpired. My thesis offers an explanation for the results of one certain conflict, yet the theoretical frameworks and historical baselines that informed that outcome undeniably serve as partial explanations for both the dispute over Springdale Farm’s permit proposal and the forthcoming outcome of the CodeNEXT decision. The arguments and explanations I have suggested in my thesis focus specifically on Austin, yet they are applicable to wider understandings of spatial contestations and fears surrounding land dispossession. Additionally, my thesis offers a deconstruction of both spatial identity and sense of place that serves urban studies literature because of its social, political, and economic relevance.

¹⁹⁶ Susana Almanza, “Speak Out Against CodeNEXT on Saturday, April 28th...,” Facebook, April 27, 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Susana Almanza, “Public Hearing on CodeNEXT-Saturday, April 28th at 10 am...,” Facebook, April 27, 2018.

Sense of place is a contemporary subject for the field of urban studies because of the need to understand how and why it is increasingly invoked as a political priority. Sense of place not only pertains to ideological and social contexts, but also concerns of stakeholders, investors, and those executing political interests. It is becoming increasingly pertinent to study and analyze the attachments and ownerships that residents in certain places feel to their localities so as to understand how conflicts arise and unfold. While spatial identity can be used as a form of urban branding and marketing, it also establishes a way of connecting to others and forming community relationships. In an age of intensive urbanization, seemingly nonstop development, and extreme political and social inequities, a comprehension of how residents engage with one another and with the spaces they inhabit is pertinent to interpreting spatial manifestations of social phenomena.

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