

**PART III**  
**CZĘŚĆ III**

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**WORKSHOP – NEIGHBORHOOD’S MARKET PLACE**  
**WARSZTAT – RYNEK SĄSIEDZKI**

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**THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC MARKETS IN THE UNITED STATES**

**Keywords:** American marketplace, public marketplace, public space, farmer’s market.

**EWOLUCJA PUBLICZNEGO TARGOWISKA W STANACH**  
**ZJEDNOCZONYCH**

**Słowa kluczowe:** amerykański rynek, rynek, przestrzeń publiczna, targ rolniczy.

**Introduction**

During Spring 2015, Gdansk University of Technology, located in Gdansk, Poland, hosted an international planning studio that focused on the role and importance of the urban marketplace. Student participants broke into several groups and worked on projects that aimed to reintegrate various aspects of the public marketplace in Orunia, a district in the larger city of Gdansk. Many of the students hailed from European countries and brought a perspective of the public marketplace that was deeply rooted in centuries of tradition and functionality. In the United States, however, the role of the public marketplace has not been as long-standing, prominent, or steeped in citizen-engagement as has its European counterparts. Therefore, the American perspective on the public marketplace is somewhat different. This paper provides an overview of how the role of the public marketplace has changed over time in the United States.

**1. Historical overview**

During the settlement, colonization, and early history of the United States, public marketplaces were similar in form and function to the European marketplaces they were modeled after (Pyle 1971). The marketplace served an important role as a center of trade and commerce. Equally important, however,

is that these markets provided a venue for social interaction and civic engagement. Men, women, and children, from mixed socioeconomic backgrounds, gathered at the public marketplace in order share and discuss local happenings, current events, and politics. Thus, the early American marketplace served as an important arena for economic, social, and cultural interaction.

The fabric of the American public marketplace began to quickly unravel with the concurrent proliferation of mass industrialization practices and the advent of the automobile. After WWII, America experienced an unprecedented economic boom, and unlike Europe, had plenty of space to expand. The result of this newly acquired wealth was an enormous expansion of road and highway systems, coupled with the development of vast suburban communities offering spacious residential and commercial opportunities. From 1947 to 1953, the suburban population grew by an astounding 43% in the United States (Cohen 1996). As Americans flocked to the suburbs in droves, the central marketplaces that were a hallmark feature of compact, walkable, and livable urban communities were largely abandoned.

## **2. Shopping malls and regress of the idea of traditional marketplace**

Paired with suburbanization, zoning also played a significant role in the diminishment of public marketplaces in the United States. A German innovation, the original intent of zoning was to separate residential areas from centers of noxious and unpleasant economic production (Talen 2012). However, in the United States, zoning patterns developed differently than in Europe. As a result of both the vast expanses of open and undeveloped land, the grid system, and the American emphasis on property values, communities were zoned into large swaths of single-use-only developments. Lost were compact and functional communities where the corner store, neighborhood pub, and market square were all within a short walk from residential areas. The resulting urban form instead consisted of sprawled and segregated communities that were heavily automobile dependent (Talen 2012; Ross 2014).

The confluence of single-use zoning practices, economic prosperity, and the growing popularity of the automobile resulted in mass consumption practices that were previously unheard of (Cohen 2004). People no longer walked to the public marketplace on a regular basis to purchase the items they would need for supper and meet with neighbors. Instead, they could drive their automobile to the shopping mall or superstore and fill it with inexpensive mass-produced items and food products, which were later brought home and stored in spacious closets and refrigerators. Even drive-in restaurants became popular, where people could be served and eat from inside their vehicles. By all appearances, it seemed that the golden age of materialism had arrived and that the public marketplace was outdated and no longer desirable. However, there were several downfalls to modern mass consumption practices.

First, there was an exclusionary aspect to the new suburban environment (Boudreaux 2011; Ross 2014). Suburban developments were built to accommodate an affluent and white middle class (Cohen 2004). In some residential developments, restrictive covenants were put in place that outright banned specific racial and ethnic groups, such as African Americans and Jews (Ross 2014; Silver 2015). Other methods of exclusion were less obvious. Access to the suburban landscape, including the mall and superstore, was highly automobile dependent. Therefore, those who lacked access to a vehicle, such as the poor and elderly, were not privy to the new suburban marketplace. The suburban mall was far less equitable than the traditional public marketplace.

Furthermore, the mall and superstore were lacking in fulfilling important social and civic functions (Banerjee 2001; Cohen 2004). Private developers built these spaces for the sole purpose of facilitating capitalist ventures. The suburban mall contains no public space for autonomous gathering, demonstration, or debate. Suburban residents also recognized that their new built environment was lacking an integral social component. Research on suburban housewives of that era, for instance, revealed that many women felt socially isolated in the new suburban environment (Cohen 2004). Housewives felt disconnected from social networks as they spent increasing amounts of time in the car performing everyday tasks such as getting groceries, bringing children to school, and running errands. No sooner had the prosperous suburban landscape been created that people began to recognize a discontent that was a direct result of their new segregated, disjointed, and often lonely, environment.

As the decades passed, policies that encouraged suburban sprawl and mass consumption practices continued to gain traction in the United States, making it increasingly difficult to accommodate public market holdouts, such as Pike Place Market in Seattle, Washington. Food safety regulations swept the country that facilitated and benefited large corporate methods of production, and discouraged the efforts of small farmers and vendors (McMichael 2000). In many instances, it became outright illegal to sell foodstuffs that weren't produced in a large-scale industrial environment. In the name of food safety, market vendors were shut down for selling such items as eggs and baked goods.

Furthermore, in pursuit of economic prosperity, many municipalities encouraged commerce in new shopping centers, rather than in the public marketplace. In order to encourage further commercial activity in the suburbs rather than in disinvested urban cores, municipalities increasingly required cost-prohibitive vendor permits and passed local ordinances that banned commercial activity in public spaces. As a result of the encouragement of economic activity in malls and shopping centers, these places did take on some of the social functions previously accommodated by the public marketplace. For instance, suburban malls in the 1980s and 90s were frequented by teenagers seeking a place for social interaction. They were also utilized by retirees as indoor walking/exercise spaces. However, by and large, the mall and super-

store did not offer the same level of citizen and social engagement as did the historic town marketplace. As a result of policies that encouraged commercial interests in privatized suburban developments, downtowns and public marketplaces were left dilapidated and abandoned throughout the country.

**Figure 1. Pike Place Market, in Seattle, Washington, is one of the oldest continually operating public markets in the United States**



Source: Krista Evans

### 3. The return of the marketplace

However, shortly after the turn of the last century, several factors have led to a renewed interest and resurgence in the public marketplace, often termed farmers' markets, throughout the United States (Brown 2001; Brown 2002; Payne 2002). First, the turn of the century brought with it increased concerns about the natural environment and public health. People began to acknowledge that environmental impacts could be lessened by supporting organic and local foods (Alkon 2008). They also recognized that eating more farm-fresh and fewer processed foods contributed to improved health outcomes. As a result, Americans became increasingly interested in purchasing healthy and locally grown food from farmers' markets. In 1994 there were only 1,755 farmers' markets in the United States, however, by 2013, this number had increased to 8,144 (Esri 2014).

Secondly, economic prosperity has declined dramatically since such affluent decades as the 1950s and 1980s. As a result, many communities are now encouraging small business ventures that foster local spending. Community economic resilience is facilitated by small, local, and independently-owned businesses, rather than large corporate franchises (Project for Public Spaces,

Inc. 2003). Therefore, municipalities are now adopting policies that promote the return of the public marketplace.

Finally, there has been a renewed interest in public spaces in the United States. Such spaces provide integral social and civic functions (Cohen 2004, 236-239). Public spaces also facilitate diversity through the provision of an inclusionary social environment.

### Conclusions

Because of the several important factors mentioned in section 3, the public marketplace seems to be increasingly attractive in the United States (Payne 2002). It is predicated that the American public marketplace will regain its position as an integral component of urban life.

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### Streszczenie

Artykuł opisuje ogólnie rolę publicznego targowiska i jej ewolucję w Stanach Zjednoczonych w świetle różnic w porównaniu z tradycją europejską. Wiosną 2015 roku Politechnika Gdańska była gospodarzem międzynarodowego projektu publicznego, który skupiał się na roli i znaczeniu miejskiego rynku. Uczestnicy, studenci podzielili się na kilka grup i pracowali nad projektami, których celem była reintegracja rozmaitych aspektów rynku na Oruni, dzielnicy Gdańska. Wielu studentów pochodzących z krajów europejskich wniosło percepcję rynku jako idei głęboko zakorzenionej w stuleciach tradycji i funkcjonalności. W Stanach Zjednoczonych jednak, rola publicznego targowiska nie była jednako wiekowa, prominentna czy też wnikięta głęboko w zaangażowanie obywatelskie, jak to miało miejsce w Europie. Z tego też względu amerykańskie spojrzenie na ideę rynku jest nieco odmienne od europejskiego. Artykuł skupia się na doświadczeniach amerykańskich w tej materii.

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