

Foodification and neighbourhood change in Hazelwood, Pretoria

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the phenomenon of foodification as a catalyst for consumption-driven urban transformation in Hazelwood, a suburban neighbourhood in Pretoria, South Africa. Hazelwood has undergone a visible shift from a quiet residential area to a vibrant culinary hub, reflecting broader global trends in urban change driven by food and consumption. This study explores how the proliferation of upscale restaurants and cafes has redefined Hazelwood's spatial identity, creating a walkable, European-inspired enclave within a city dominated by shopping malls and chain eateries. The paper situates Hazelwood's transformation within the context of post-apartheid urban dynamics, where neo-liberal economic policies intersect with efforts to redress spatial injustices, resulting in complex patterns of social and economic change. Methodologically, this study employs content analysis, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and participant observation to capture the nuances of Hazelwood's transformation. The findings highlight the cyclical relationship between consumption and the production of space, demonstrating how these processes drive rapid urban change and contribute to the commodification of urban neighbourhoods. Hazelwood's evolution serves as a lens through which to explore the broader implications of consumption-driven urban change on social dynamics and spatial identity in South African cities.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary advanced economies, cities increasingly revolve around consumerism and consumer culture (Jayne, 2006). Therefore, an understanding of the urban process necessitates an examination of consumption patterns and behaviours (Alkon et al., 2020). In the urban context, consumption is, amongst others, frequently expressed through foodie culture and culinary experiences (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). Beyond the basic function of sustenance, food has social and symbolic value that has seen it intertwine with the economic forces driving urban change processes such as gentrification. This has led to what Loda et al. (2020) refers to as foodification.

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Hazelwood, a suburban neighbourhood in Pretoria, located in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa, exemplifies these international trends within the unique context of post-apartheid urban dynamics. Over the past decade, Hazelwood has become widely recognized as a culinary hub in Pretoria. The rapid proliferation of restaurants and cafes has shaped this neighbourhood's character. The once quiet, residential suburb is now synonymous with trendy, street-side dining where restaurants spill out onto the sidewalks, promoting a walkable neighbourhood with a distinctly European atmosphere. These features are a rarity in a city dominated by shopping malls and chain eateries. When looking at areas that have undergone this kind of change, it is typically portrayed as a case of gentrification (Aalbers, 2019). Hazelwood's transformation reveals a case where strategic property investment has capitalized on an existing affluent consumer base concentrated in the prime location of Pretoria's wealthy Old East suburbs, resulting in consumption-driven and property development-led urban change.

The methods of content analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observation were utilized to establish a triangulated dataset. This was achieved through comparisons and supplementation with various sources and means of investigation. A content analysis of grey literature, news reports and social media was conducted. Social media content analysis targeted Instagram and TikTok due to their broad user base and visual emphasis, relevant for culinary and lifestyle-related content. Instagram is particularly significant as over 70% of South African social media users aged 16–64 actively use the platform and TikTok is currently the second-most downloaded mobile application nationally (Kemp, 2021). The analysis considered the top 20 posts tagged with Hazelwood's location on each platform between March and August 2023, noting visual content, captions and user types. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted (May – September 2023) with various stakeholders including a town planner, ward councillor, restaurant owners/managers or waiting staff, residents and patrons. In addition, a six-month period of participant observation (March – August 2023) entailed walking through the neighbourhood, visiting the various food and retail establishments, and noting the design, layout and social practices of the neighbourhood. The data were transcribed and analysed thematically using Atlas.ti, with systematic coding used to identify recurring themes across interviews, social media content and fieldnotes. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Pretoria to conduct research involving human participants.

Hazelwood presents an exemplary case study for examining the spatial dynamics of consumption-driven urban change in South African cities. Hazelwood's transformation has been driven and sustained by promoting not only consumption in the space but also consumption of the space itself (Landman, 2016). Dining out in Hazelwood entails a physical and financial consumption, one which further promotes the spectacle of the neighbourhood as a product to be consumed. This paper aims to analyse the transformation of Hazelwood into a 'foodified' urban space. It investigates the cyclical relationship between consumption and the production of space, revealing how these processes drive rapid urban change and reshape neighbourhood identity in the post-apartheid South African city.

Following this introduction, the paper will first examine the literature related to gentrification, foodification and consumption-driven urban change. These concepts will then be nested in a South African context, to derive a locally informed framework

for understanding the foodification observed in Hazelwood. It will then present a case study of Hazelwood, detailing its history, recent developments and the social and cultural dynamics that have shaped its transformation. Finally, the paper discusses the implications of these findings for understanding urban change in post-apartheid South African cities.

2. Gentrification, foodification and consumption-driven urban change

Gentrification is a form of urban change that reflects broader political economic processes, resulting in the unequal and uneven production of urban(ising) space (Shin & López-Morales, 2017). Since the inception of this term in 1960s London (Glass, 1964), gentrification has become an increasingly global phenomenon driven by global capital, transnational corporations and globalized financial markets (Lees et al., 2016). Indeed, the concept of planetary gentrification details the globalization of the process linked to large-scale and capital-driven transformation of urban spaces. Unlike early forms of gentrification, which were often led by middle-class ‘pioneers’ in disinvested urban areas, gentrification is increasingly driven by corporate real estate investment and private investment (Lees et al., 2016).

Recently, scholarly attention on gentrification has expanded to include the role of food and consumption experiences as agents of urban change (see Bonotti & Barnhill, 2022; Bourlessas et al., 2022, Joassart-Marcelli & Bosco, 2024; Lütke & Jäger, 2021). The appropriation of food as a tool for spatial development and urban change has resulted in what Loda et al. (2020) refer to as foodification. Indeed, examinations of gentrified areas frequently reveal a change in their food environment, seen in the proliferation of upmarket cafes or restaurants (Gie & Borthwick, 2023). The gentrifying effects of food consumption – or foodification – see the transformation of residential neighbourhoods into food-dominant retail spaces. Often closely linked to touristification (Sequera & Nofre, 2018), the upgrading and rebranding of an area through food and foodie experiences has been observed in cities and regions across the globe (see Bourlessas et al., 2022, Herzer et al., 2015; Hyde, 2014; Loda et al., 2020; C. M. Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021).

Urban spaces that have undergone foodification are often described as foodie destinations, suggesting that the curation of culinary experiences may confer a unique sense of place in a city. When curated as an experience, place-based food consumption allows urbanites to convey a sense of social distinction. There is, however, the risk of appropriating and commodifying ‘authentic’ and ‘exotic’ food cultures for the benefit of a majority white, affluent urban demographic (Joassart-Marcelli & Bosco, 2024). The symbolic and material value of these consumption experiences may create a displacement atmosphere for existing residents, which serves as a vehicle for the furthering of the gentrification frontier (Bourlessas et al., 2022). The intersection of food, culture and capital thus becomes a productive lens through which to examine broader patterns of urban restructuring in cities.

The relationship between consumption and urban change becomes particularly visible through food. Food and food choices are representations of individual and collective identity (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). As a focal point within a social space, food creates a site of consumption that is experiential in nature, offering patrons physical sustenance as well as temporal embodiment within the space and its social dimensions. Food consumption

is distinctly spatial, as the value and enjoyment derived from food often depends significantly on the places where it is consumed. Likewise, specific places acquire their distinctive nature and appeal from the food produced, sold or consumed within them (Bonotti & Barnhill, 2022). Food is a vehicle through which the social becomes profitable, giving way to the curation of a 'foodie' culture, in which the intersection of eating, wider cultural politics and identity dynamics all work together to mark class distinction (Bourlessas et al., 2022, p. 1333).

The conception of food as a vehicle for class distinction introduces a consumption that is laden with social and cultural capital. Food experiences are 'located consumptive experiences': the spatiality of food experiences contributes to their perceived value, whilst feeding back into the perceived value of the space in which it occurs (Bonotti & Barnhill, 2022). In urban spaces that have been foodified non-consumption is a form of deviance (Atkinson, 2003). Under the regime of late capitalism, consumption is a predicate for the production and maintenance of urban social spaces. The consumption landscape of an area that has been affected by the process of gentrification will reflect the 'health and body consciousness of the pioneers and gentrifiers, but also their strong focus on aesthetics and the authenticity of goods and services' (Lütke & Jäger, 2021, p. 4). The tastes that are catered to typically oppose dominant urban models of mass-consumption.

At a larger scale, the politics of urban change are driven by the demands of late capitalism. The politics and processes of capitalism are underpinned by a perpetual seeking out of profitable terrains for capital surplus production and absorption (Harvey, 2011). Indeed, Harvey (2018) defines 'the urban' as inextricable from a capitalist framework, making capital accumulation fundamental to the urban process. Combining this with the assertion that, in an urban context, the act of consumption begets value creation as opposed to value detracting, we can accept that 'consuming the city is nothing but the most subtle form of its production' (Borch & Kornberger, 2015, p. 7). Under this system, urban processes become characterized by dispossession and displacement, as the redevelopment of an area serves as a breeding ground for capital absorption (Lees, 2019). In this context, retail capital becomes both an agent and a product of these socio-spatial processes (Guimarães, 2022). The city has therefore emerged as a site for new claims by global capital, with neighbourhoods as the new frontiers for capital accumulation. Lees et al's (2016) concept of planetary gentrification suggests that the process of gentrification has surpassed its grassroots origin, becoming increasingly state-driven or privately driven by global capital, transnational corporations and globalized financial markets. This paints a picture of 'super-gentrification', whereby an area is not just commodified; it becomes a luxury commodity, unobtainable for all but an elite upper-class (Lees, 2003).

3. Urban change in the post-apartheid South African city

The South African city is characterized by polarity, with the legacy of apartheid evident in urban spatial planning across the country. Both colonialism and apartheid engendered socio-spatial injustice and patterns of segregated urban development (Lemon, 2021). Historically, access to the city centre as a hub of social and economic activity was racially determined in a bid to restrict the mobility of people of colour. As the cornerstone of apartheid spatial planning, the Group Areas Act of 1950/1966 strictly enforced racial

segregation, further manipulating urban areas into racially homogeneous and artificial spaces (Horn, 2019).

Despite wide-spread desegregation in inner-city and working-class areas, as well as in some middle-class suburbs (Sekonyela et al., 2024), there has been little evidence of meaningful socio-spatial integration in urban South Africa since the end of apartheid (Murray, 2011). Efforts towards urban integration have been predominantly informed by neoliberal, market-oriented policies as the post-apartheid government sought to re-establish South Africa as a competitive global figure (Fourie, 2024). While these policies aimed to re-establish South Africa as a competitive global figure, they have inadvertently contributed to a system of ‘class apartheid’ characterized by socio-economic segregation that operates along class lines (Bond, 2013).

This social restructuring has seen mass white and capital flight, with businesses and residents alike abandoning inner cities in favour of peripheral suburban spaces (Beavon, 2004; J. M. Rogerson, 1996). An inverse of what is typically seen in Global North cities, South African inner cities – perhaps, with the exception of Cape Town – have come to be associated with violence, danger and decay (Turok et al., 2021). As such, evidence of widespread gentrification and the return of capital to inner cities has been limited in South Africa (Donaldson et al., 2013; Garside, 1993; Visser, 2019; Visser & Kotze, 2008).

The disinvestment of inner cities following apartheid has seen private capital investment concentrate in suburban and already affluent urban spaces (Didier et al., 2012; Landman, 2016; Schultz, 2024). Cases of pro-growth urban renewal are concentrated in already wealthy areas and funded by private corporations rather than government intervention (Massey, 2020). Whereas gentrification in Global North cities typically occurs in an inner-city, post-industrial context, consumption-driven urban change in South Africa occurs in tandem with suburbanization and urban sprawl. This trend has been observed in the gentrification of Parkhurst, Johannesburg. The commercial upgrading of this already wealthy suburb suggests a growing demand of the South African elite for their own elite urban space (Monare et al., 2014). Three decades after the end of the apartheid regime, the South African city remains typified by extremes (Lemon, 2021), with stark wealth gaps evident in cosmopolitan nodes such as Johannesburg and Cape Town (Robinson, 2008).

Within this landscape of urban sprawl and inner-city disinvestment, the development of shopping malls has become a key feature in both suburban and township contexts in South Africa (Venema et al., 2020). The widespread expansion of malls forms part of financial capital investment in retail property development. Real estate investment trusts (REITs) for retail are seen as a lucrative and stable property investment segment in South Africa (Kenny, 2019; Swilling, 2021). The ubiquity of shopping malls in the South African urban landscape makes it a familiar social location to a growing middle and aspiring middle class urban population (Chevalier, 2015; Landman, 2016). Somewhat counter-intuitively, shopping malls are widely considered quasi-public spaces for South African urbanites, illustrating the pervasive culture of consumption that pervades our cities (Heer, 2017).

Outside of the urban context, Donaldson (2009, 2018) explores the impact of tourism gentrification in small towns in South Africa. Similarly, through the lens of tourism gentrification, Kambule et al. (2024) also recognizes the role of food and alcohol-based establishments in the re-imagining of Vilakazi street in Soweto, one of South Africa’s

largest townships. While some of these studies recognize the role of food consumption, there are no studies that explore the phenomenon of foodification in the South African context. The paper will now turn to the case study of Hazelwood to examine how these concepts manifest in a specific urban context.

4. The making of Hazelwood as a foodie hub

Today, Hazelwood is widely recognized as a foodie destination in Pretoria. According to news media and press coverage of the area, it is ‘unlike any other Pretoria based restaurants’, offering the ‘ultimate dining experience’ in a ‘blend of the best of urban and suburban life’ (Atterbury, 2019; Cochrane, 2019). To situate these descriptions, an understanding of Hazelwood’s history and development trajectory is necessary.

Originally part of Garsfontein farm, the suburb known as Hazelwood was formally established in the 1950s as a white group area under apartheid. Located next to the Pretoria Country Club and with proximity to affluent suburbs such as Waterkloof, Brooklyn and Menlo Park, Hazelwood lies at the centre of a collection of suburbs that is colloquially known as the Old East. This residential area saw small-scale retail activity as early as the 1970s, laying the groundwork for its future development. Described as ‘quietly wealthy’, Hazelwood still has a predominantly white demographic makeup and enjoys relative household-economic stability (Interview, Ward Councillor, 8 May 2023). Residential properties in Hazelwood are mostly under the full financial ownership of their occupants (Interview, Residents Association Spokesperson, 6 August 2023). In this well-established and socially stable suburb, renting culture is not as evident as in the nearby student hub of Hatfield. These qualities suggest a neighbourhood character that is insular, affluent and constitutive of the broader identity of Pretoria’s Old East. The Old East is characterized by comfortable, single detached houses set in a gently sloping, wooded landscape. Predominantly inhabited by a demographic of well-educated, high-income white residents, the area is also attracting affluent black residents. High walls, security systems and boomed off areas are common due to the prevalent crime and new developments often take the form of security villages (Badenhorst, 2002; Breetzke et al., 2014; Horn, 2021).

In 2007, Atterbury Property, a prominent real estate development, investment and management company based in South Africa, obtained ownership of 30 000 m² worth of land in Hazelwood (Atterbury, 2018). Drawing on the design principles of new urbanism, Atterbury Property commenced construction of the Club Precinct, an ambitious, mixed-use, commercial development project in Hazelwood. The naming of the Club Precinct links with its location next to the Pretoria Country Club. This project included the construction of advocate’s chambers, a surgical centre, a residential block, retail spaces, a gym and an undercover parkade (Atterbury, 2018). In this way, Hazelwood bears a resemblance to Melrose Arch, a mixed-use gated precinct in Johannesburg (albeit on a much smaller scale), which is marketed as ‘a safe and secure place that exhibits the ostensible benefits of a genuine and authentic urbanity – the contagious energy of crowds, choice and variety, visual stimulation, entertainment opportunities and a delightful experience’ (Murray, 2013, p. 133).

While the development in Hazelwood has consistently been described by Atterbury Property as mixed-use, it is undoubtedly the culinary offerings for

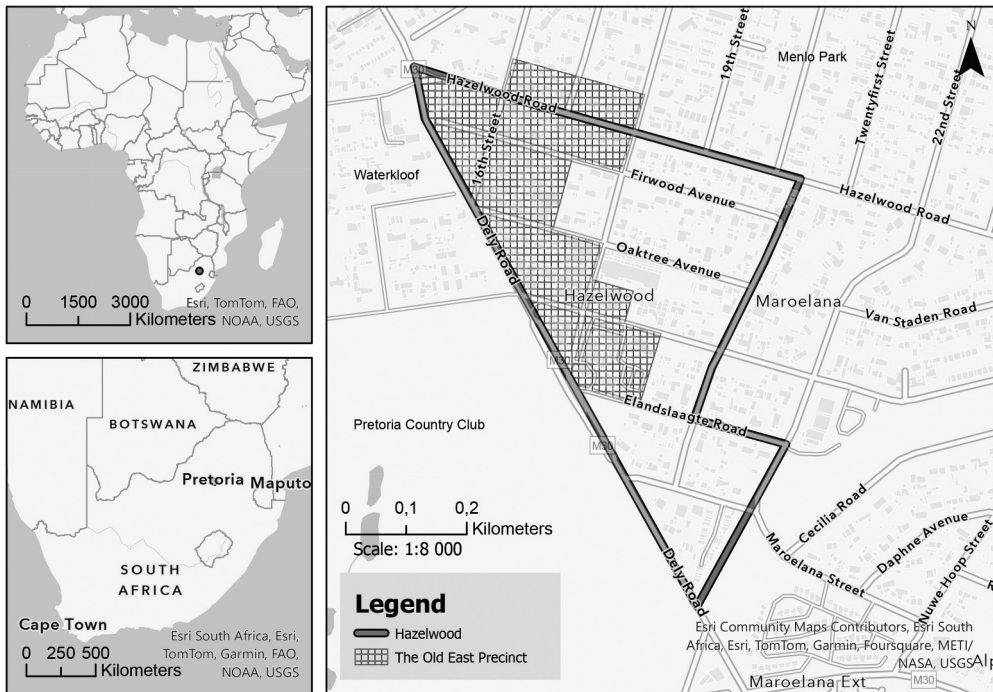


Figure 1. Map of the Old East Precinct in Hazelwood, Pretoria (Source: Authors).

which it has become so well-known. In fact, it was not solely Atterbury's initiative that propelled Hazelwood into the limelight. In 2010, a few blocks from Atterbury's Club Precinct development, the Boston Bistro opened on 16th Street (Refer to Figure 1), pioneering the street-side dining model in the area and quickly gaining popularity among residents. Capitalizing on this successful model, in 2013, a South African businessman initiated what is now known as The Village, curating a selection of independent restaurants along 16th Street (Refer to Figure 1). This initiative spurred competition between Atterbury Property and The Village, resulting in legal disputes over zoning regulations, noise disruption and business practices (Rheeder, 2017).

Despite these tensions, the popularity of The Village was undeniable. By 2019, Atterbury had acquired full control of The Village properties, consolidating the area into the Old East Precinct (Refer to Figure 1). Described by Atterbury as a 'surban' development (Atterbury, 2018), the intent of the project is to create a cosmopolitan lifestyle-zone, with all the feel of an intimate suburb. However, while Atterbury dictates zoning regulations, noise control and infrastructure upkeep, the eateries themselves remain independently owned businesses. This creates a paradox: while The Village retains the appearance of an organically evolving culinary hub, its strategic curation under a singular development entity blurs the lines between independent entrepreneurship and corporate urban design. As such, while the number of eateries in Hazelwood has increased since the creation of Old East Precinct, their selection has been shaped by a broader agenda of commercial curation.

The establishment of the Old East Precinct renewed interest in Hazelwood as a culinary hotspot. Reviews and mentions of The Village on food blogs, TripAdvisor and social media highlight its appeal. Hazelwood's success was attributed to its unique combination of suburban charm and cosmopolitan dining experiences, contrasting with Pretoria's typical mall-based dining venues. A food blog observes similarities between Hazelwood and 'the leafy-sidewalk suburban dining associated with Stellenbosch and Franschhoek' in the Western Cape (Bernatsky, 2016). To further extrapolate that comparison, Hazelwood's design and atmosphere are frequently described as European (Emond, 2022). Currently, the Old East Precinct is home to 28 eateries along with a selection of other shops and amenities. This urban lifestyle zone spans the corner of Dely Road and 18th Street up to Firwood Avenue (Refer to [Figure 1](#)), dominating the perceived character of Hazelwood both spatially and socially.

Following the account of Atterbury Property, these developments were pursued with the express support of residents in Hazelwood and surrounding areas. However, complaints regarding the disruptive nature of their development were well recorded (Ngobeni, 2017). There is limited quantitative data tracking shifts in Hazelwood's residential demographics over the last five years. However, in an interview with a former resident, it was suggested that older residents who left Hazelwood due to the disruptions of the development were not financially pressured, but rather experienced displacement pressure or indirect displacement from the shifting functional use of the suburb (Interview, 5 September 2024). Rising property values, fuelled by Hazelwood's commercial transformation, encouraged many older homeowners to sell their properties to secure a comfortable return on investment used towards their retirement (Interview, Ward Councillor, 8 May 2023; Interview, Town Planner, 16 May 2024). While this displacement is voluntary in financial terms, it reflects a deeper socio-spatial restructuring, where the functional use of Hazelwood has shifted from a residential suburb to a high-end consumption district. This transformation has subtly redefined the area's demographic composition, reinforcing patterns of socio-economic exclusivity rather than outright eviction.

Hazelwood thus demonstrates characteristics of super gentrification, 'the transformation of already gentrified, prosperous and solidly upper-middle-class neighbourhoods into much more exclusive and expensive enclaves' (Lees, 2003, p. 2487). Hazelwood presents the ideal conditions for capital investment, preserving and subsequently bolstering the pre-existing value of the space and closure of the rent-gap. Drawing on methods of content analysis, participant observation and semi-structured interviews, the following section identifies the effects of foodification and consumption-driven urban change evidenced in Hazelwood.

5. Foodification and consumption driven urban change in Hazelwood

Extensive marketing by Atterbury Property, articles and reviews in the popular press, blogs and travel websites, as well as the role of social media, must be underscored for reinforcing and reproducing the image of Hazelwood as a foodie destination. Indeed, many individuals who share images and videos of their visit to Hazelwood on social media take the opportunity to adopt the role of foodie-critic and influencer. Pictures and videos of these place-based food experiences are

accompanied by rating the establishment's food, drinks, prices, service and ambience, for example:

Visiting the Burger Joint in Hazelwood Pretoria: Food 10/10 Drinks 9/10 Ambience 10/10.
The double bacon cheeseburger! Even though it's now R175 without fries . . . (2023)

As would be expected for a neighbourhood so widely advertised online, cell phones bleed into the social fabric of Hazelwood's foodscape. The persistent presence of smart devices was noted during observations, as the focus on Hazelwood's visual aesthetic produces an expected image. This image differs throughout the beats and rhythms of a week. Hazelwood is at its busiest over the weekend, which begins during happy hour on a Friday. Online, people frequently share their experience with the caveat that booking a table in advance is necessary to avoid disappointment, further highlighting the social appeal and exclusivity of the location.

The language used to describe Hazelwood in news articles and social media posts implies the area's transformative quality. Eating out becomes 'a memorable experience' and shopping becomes 'supporting local businesses'. These descriptions hinge on the curated culinary landscape of Hazelwood. If a chain restaurant were to open in the Old East Precinct, not only would it disrupt the unique experiential factor, but it might introduce 'the wrong sorts of people' (Interview, Town Planner, 16 May 2023).

To those with the means to engage in this boutique experience, Hazelwood boasts choice, options and range. Along 16th street, one can find authentic Portuguese *pastel de nata* at Bakehouse, visit a Spanish-inspired tapas bar at Culture Club, or enjoy Italian gelato from Aroma – feeding into the image of curated cosmopolitanism. The typical Hazelwood patron was described as a more conscious spender than the average consumer. A restaurant owner in the Village observed that 'people are willing to pay extra for quality – it's conscious eating' (Interview, Restaurant Owner, 28 August 2023). The focal attraction of food immediately homogenizes social encounters, as there is an assured familiarity in that everyone coming to Hazelwood is there for the same reason. In contemplating the collective appeal of Hazelwood's diverse culinary offerings, a participant suggested the following:

Pretorians are not cosmopolitan, not like the Johannesburg crowd in Parkhurst with all their shops and boutiques . . . Pretoria loves to eat — we all love food, so we all love Hazelwood (Interview, Residents Association Spokesperson, 6 August 2023)

The demographic profile of patrons who frequent the area is diverse, including a mix of people from a variety of racial backgrounds. One distinguishing factor, however, is the class dynamics at play in the area, which cater to a predominantly middle to upper-middle class and affluent consumer. Distinct groups of consumers are present in the area. The experience of being a solo customer was highly dependent on the establishment and time of day. Sitting alone at a coffee shop in the morning for over an hour was tolerated, even welcomed. This is an ideal performance of the 'cafe culture' that has become increasingly common as more people begin working remotely. Mornings (between 07:00 am and 11:00 am) were dominated by the sight of laptops, headsets, casual meetings and people in athleisure. The 'live, work, play' model was in full effect during this time of day. On weekend mornings, Hazelwood is a popular breakfast spot for runners and cyclists. By the late afternoon, the atmosphere would be more festive and light-hearted, typified by larger groups of visitors. Patrons would frequently take pictures and

waiters appeared eager to offer their assistance to anyone looking to capture a well-situated group shot. During the evenings, several establishments shift their focus to dining and alcohol-based consumption, signalling the growth of a night-time economy in the area.

Hazelwood's sustained commercial success is particularly intriguing when accounting for the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdown measures dealt a heavy blow to the economy and the restaurant sector was hit especially hard (Interview, Restaurant Owner, 28 August 2023). With social distancing, dining out came to a standstill in the 'bland wasteland of chain restaurants in the mall eatery landscape' (Renso, 2016, para. 1). Indoor dining establishments became, if not only temporarily, increasingly unfavourable amongst those with disposable incomes. Hazelwood's claim to trendiness, its 'open-air street cafe ambiance' (Loock Van der Merwe, 2019), thus served as more than an aesthetic during the pandemic. Having observed the area throughout the various stages of lockdown, a ward councillor suggested that Hazelwood offered a conscientious option for those still looking to enjoy the benefits of socializing and conspicuous consumption (Interview, Ward Councillor 8 May 2023).

Hazelwood defines itself in opposition to the typical mall, but its geographic location tells another story. The advantageous position of Hazelwood within the surrounding network of Old East neighbourhoods has been a determining factor in the success of its retail and commercial success. This was echoed by a restaurant owner in The Village, who did not mince words when stating that such a wide range of independent dining options operating outside of the typical mall setting was only financially sustainable through proximity to chain retail establishments (Interview, Former Restaurant Owner, 28 August 2023). Within a 10 km radius, one has easy access to three different shopping malls, one of which is the second biggest in the country. Although malls may have lost some of their 'status', they remain a necessity for the everyday consumer. It could be argued that the independent and small-scale eateries in Hazelwood are sustained by their proximity to more reliably profitable mass-retail spaces and by the more commercial offerings in the neighbouring Club Precinct.

As Loda et al. (2020) suggest, foodification is not a neutral process; it is an active mechanism through which urban space is rebranded, revalued and made selectively accessible. In Hazelwood, this process is particularly evident, as the neighbourhood's transformation into a food-dominant consumption hub functions as a gentrifying force, replacing previous spatial uses with a highly curated and exclusive culinary economy. The popularity of Hazelwood's vibrant high-street design (Refer to [Figure 2](#)) highlights a shift in the middle to high income consumer preferences and desire for more personalized, socially engaging retail experiences. The anonymity of shopping malls is countered by the visibility of Hazelwood:

You drive past Menlyn [Mall], you see big walls. Drive through Hazelwood, and you see the vibe. (Interview, Former Restaurant Owner, 28 August 2023)

The 'vibe' of Hazelwood is sustained by Atterbury's monopoly over the area's development, promoting new urbanism and mixed-use design principles. This includes and places a strong emphasis on creating a walkable and pedestrian friendly neighbourhood (Murray, 2013). Traditional shopping malls depend on private vehicles or utilization of limited public transportation to access spaces of consumption (Landman, 2016). In terms



Figure 2. Sidewalk view in The Village Hazelwood, Pretoria (Source: Aaron Day).

of mobility, South African cities cater to cars, not people. In theory, Hazelwood's suburban setting and café culture encourage people to embrace the idea of a walkable suburb. However, despite being promoted as a walkable neighbourhood, the majority of patrons drive private vehicles to visit Hazelwood. Interviews and first-hand experience soon revealed walking, cars and parking as long-standing concerns in the area (Interview, Town Planner, 16 May 2023; Interview, Residents Association Spokesperson, 6 August 2023; Interview, Car Guard, 20 August 2023).

On-street parking in the Village is limited, supposedly to preserve the suburb's walkability. However, as Hazelwood grows, so does the traffic in the area (Refer to [Figure 3](#)). Atterbury's construction of three underground parking lots highlights a citywide dependence on cars. Most people using walking as a means of transportation were service industry or construction workers. In the late afternoon, workers were observed leaving the neighbourhood on foot to access public transportation outside of the precinct. In contrast, leisure visitors will drive, park and walk a few hundred metres to enjoy easy access to the various food and retail offerings.

Further contradicting the claims of walkability, Hazelwood hosts a luxury car club every weekend, attracting visitors who park their Aston Martins, Ferraris, Porsches and McLarens on 16th street. These cars avoid the underground parking provided by Atterbury two blocks down and enhance the visual value of the space. Those with the social and financial capacity to invest in Hazelwood's image are not bound by the collective push towards walking and public transport. The juxtaposition of walking for leisure versus necessity in Hazelwood underscores the broader challenges of creating accessible urban spaces in South Africa, where car culture remains deeply entrenched. As Borch and Kornberger (2015) argue, the commodification of public space under neoliberal urbanism transforms accessibility into a privilege rather than a right. Hazelwood mirrors this trend, where access is mediated through consumption and non-consumers are subtly excluded from participating in the urban experience.



Figure 3. Traffic congestion in The Village Hazelwood, Pretoria (Source: Aaron Day).

Given the price point of participating in Hazelwood, observation was found to be a cumulatively expensive exercise. Between the Village and the Club Centre, Hazelwood boasts a meagre 5 public benches. Each of these benches is situated within at least two metres of the nearest restaurant, office, or shop. Upon attempting to use one of these public seating spaces as the vantage point for observations, it was found to be unsustainable. Being on a corner, the bulk of social activity on the main street was out of view. Within minutes, a waiter from a nearby restaurant stepped outside and asked whether I was waiting for a table, becoming wary of my presence when I responded in the negative. Without sitting in a legitimate site of consumption, simply being in Hazelwood is viewed as loitering. To spend a meaningful amount of time in the space, spending money was unavoidable. Failure to participate in Hazelwood's quintessential consumptive act – eating – resulted in internal and external social exclusion.

The regulation of space within Hazelwood highlights its similarities to gated communities and security parks, which have become an increasingly prevalent feature of South Africa's urban landscape (Murray, 2011). As public and private space become increasingly distinct from one another, 'gating' can be executed through spatial, social, cultural and economic barriers. Hook and Vrdoljak (2002) assert that security parks can obliterate public space from the urban realm. Hazelwood, although not physically enclosed, has leveraged its foodie image as a form of gating. As capital accumulation seeks out new urban frontiers, wealth is increasingly concentrated in socially insulated enclaves (Lütke & Jäger, 2021).

Atterbury has consolidated control of the Old East Precinct, giving them a disproportionate capacity to shape the neighbourhood's character. Hand-selected small businesses, independent restaurants and boutique-type stores all communicate that the Hazelwood experience cannot be replicated elsewhere. Every element in Hazelwood demands consumption, thus reproducing its carefully constructed image of social exclusivity and bespoke 'surban' experience (Refer to Figure 4).



Figure 4. Peaches restaurant in The Village Hazelwood, Pretoria (Source: Aaron Day).

In denouncing the failures of modernist city building, the new urbanism movement has sometimes embraced an idyllic image of premodernity which rests on a nostalgic vision of traditional small-town living (Saab, 2007). This logic is exemplified by Hazelwood, from its casual streetside retail and dining design to its nostalgic naming (The Village Hazelwood, the Village Walk). It is an attempt to [re]create an imagined past, one that is not bound by the uncomfortable truths of a post-apartheid city. The vision for Hazelwood reveals a utopian desire for diverse space that is secure, accessible and walkable. While these desires are tenable in a car-centric and still segregated city, their validity is undermined when safety is contingent on the exclusion of groups defined as non-consumers (Atkinson, 2003). When considered within its broader urban context rather than as an isolated enclave, the majority of urban dwellers in Pretoria lack the necessary capital – be it wealth, social or cultural – to engage in the consumption of Hazelwood. When the social amenities of a space cater to the ‘desires and preferences of a free-floating and unattached community of affluent consumers . . .

high-sounding invocations of community, inclusiveness and diversity ring hollow' (Murray, 2013, p. 139).

Hazelwood's foodification aligns with broader changes where urban redevelopment is increasingly structured around the logic of elite consumption. As cities become increasingly commodified, public life is redefined by economic participation, reinforcing spatial divisions and producing exclusionary urban enclaves (Lees et al., 2016).

6. Conclusion

Hazelwood's transformation into a vibrant social and foodie hub exemplifies the shifting dynamics of urban change in South Africa. While on the surface, its rise as a 'foodie hub' appears to be an organic shift towards a more vibrant urban experience, this study has demonstrated that Hazelwood's redevelopment aligns with global patterns of urban change. Far from a localized or incidental transformation, Hazelwood's trajectory reflects the increasing role of large-scale private property investment in shaping urban space, reinforcing patterns of exclusion and socio-spatial inequality.

Shopping malls, once symbols of investment and prosperity, have become impersonal spaces, prompting urbanites to seek new modes of consumption. Hazelwood's appeal lies in its open-air, walkable design, although this is paradoxical given South Africa's car-centric urban planning. The neighbourhood not only attracts a privileged demographic, but it also encloses the existing wealth of Pretoria's Old East, allowing patrons to experience the city within a socially homogeneous and thus unrealistic space. Consolidated private control over the area's selection of tenants reinforces a consumptive and exclusive environment.

Hazelwood's foodification illustrates how urban change can be shaped by consumer culture. Understanding these patterns is crucial for addressing the challenges of urban development in South Africa, where equitable access to public space remains a pressing issue. Here, the 'improvement' of space is pursued through an expansion of consumption sites as well as enhanced securitization. Much like Hazelwood, the social and cultural value of the space cannot be fully appreciated without participation in its consumption. This raises the question as to whether the value of space in the post-apartheid South African city can be perceived beyond the value of its retail and commercial offerings. Increasingly, features that communicate a visual and social appeal are contingent on private investment.

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