

# Development as Deception

## Aesthetics of Gentrification in the Carbon Public Market

*Dan Ian Niño B. Jaducana*



Local Regional Studies Network

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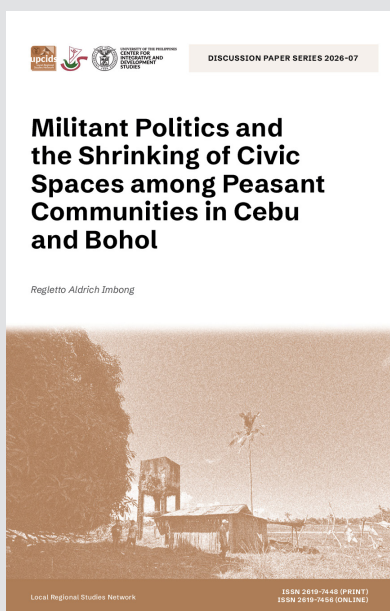
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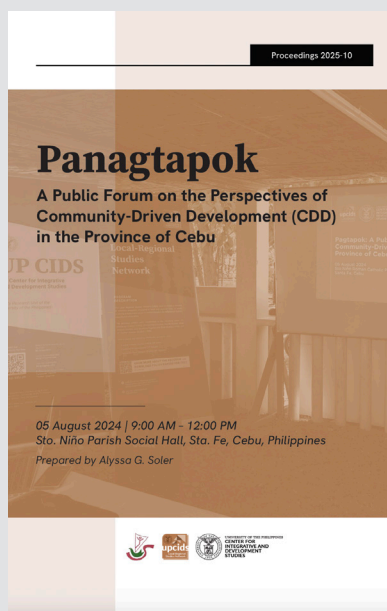
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# Development as Deception

## Aesthetics of Gentrification in the Carbon Public Market

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### Key Highlights

- **Policy Landscape**

Despite the existence of the Cebu City Market Code that aims to protect the Carbon Public Market, the vendors and workers are faced with threats of displacement through the Comprehensive Land Use Program (CLUP) and the Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) between the city government and the Megawide Construction Corporation. This privatization, in the guise of modernization and development, is detrimental, not only to the workers and vendors but most especially to the consumers. This policy initiative, for the marginalized sector, is not intended for everyone's development; rather, this policy is merely a gentrification in the guise of aestheticization. Further, they see that the agents of policymaking involved in this case failed to consult the broad masses, particularly the market vendors and market workers.

## ■ **Main Argument**

Policies should undergo public consultations to promote development beneficial to all sectors, most especially the marginalized. In the case of Carbon Public Market, the vendors and the workers. Policymakers should consider that development should not be limited to aestheticization, but rather a development that improves the welfare of ordinary people. Privatization is not the solution to developing infrastructure and market systems.

## ■ **Methodology**

This paper utilized a focus group discussion (FGD) with vendors under the organization Carbonhanong Alyansa along sa Reporma ug Bahandianong Ogma sa mga Nanginabuhí (CARBON), an organization that collectivizes the plight of market vendors and workers amidst the threat of privatization. It also employed a Key Informant Interview (KII) with the organization's president. The FGD and KII took place during the activities, Panagtapok: Gathering Women's Voices and Perspectives of Community-Driven Development, and LRSN Kulokabildo: Central Visayas Conference on Nongovernmental CDD Initiatives. These activities were funded through the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Developmental Studies – Local Regional Studies Network (UPCIDS-LRSN).

## ■ **Findings**

The Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) between the Cebu City Government and the Megawide Construction Company posed a threat to ordinary market vendors and workers in Carbon Public Market. CARBON expressed that none from the vendors and workers sectors were consulted during the implementation of the JVA. They see this initiative as one-sided, a privatization in the guise of development and aesthetics of gentrification. While pushing for development, the organization presented an alternative plan to renovate the market. In this plan, no sector is disadvantaged, and the city government can serve its purpose for the masses.

## ■ **Policy Recommendations**

This paper recommends that policymakers should be consultative in their decision-making. Their initiatives should be beneficial not only to private construction companies but also to the marginalized sectors. Those who are rooted in the market itself, the vendors and the workers, should define the development that is good for the public market. In this case, more public consultations should be considered before implementing policies that disadvantage the marginalized sectors.

## Executive Summary

Carvajal (2021) described development as “equitably improving the quality of people’s lives, starting naturally with the marginalized.” He further stated that it is “about developing facilities small people can use as pathways towards self-reliant progress” (Carvajal 2021). Following this description, development should therefore prioritize the least advantaged sector of society. That is, whenever there is social progress, everyone, especially the marginalized, should be included in these improvements. Indeed, we are surrounded by social changes that may signify development and progress, such as high-rise condominiums, economic zones, warehouses, factories, and other developments. However, these establishments and infrastructures cannot deny that some sectors in societies are set aside in making way for this development. Among the examples of this phenomenon is the privatization of the Carbon Public Market. Despite the promise of modernization through renovation and improved facilities and structures, small-scale vendors face various threats concerning their livelihood security and welfare. On a global scale, this phenomenon has been observed by the sociologist Ruth Glass (1964), referring to the term “gentrification”—the displacement of the lower-class residents to accommodate middle- and higher-class motives. Further, Lindner and Sandoval (2021) developed the notion of “aesthetics of gentrification,” stating that the dispossession entails the disguise of beautification. Gentrification and the privatization of the Carbon Public Market clearly stand in contradiction with Carvajal’s description of development. This paper aims to mainstream the development that Carbon Market vendors and workers desire. I will argue that this modernization is a development not intended for their welfare, but that of the dominating class: the business sector primarily, hence, privatization. I will also include the alternative development design that the market vendors and workers themselves, through their organization, devised.

This paper is divided into four parts. First, I will introduce the case of Carbon Market Privatization; second, I will elaborate on the notion of Glass’ gentrification and Lindner & Sandoval’s aesthetics of gentrification; third, I will situate Carbon Public Market Modernization as a form of seductive space and a development as deception; fourth, I will present concrete suggestions to achieve development from the perspective of the displaced sector. This way, a new definition of development will surface from the narratives of the marginalized class. A development that is not gentrified, an aestheticization that does not displace.

## Methodology

The data used in this paper were gathered from a focus group discussion (FGD) with market vendors who are members of Carbon-hanong Alyansa alang sa Reporma ug Bahandianong Ogma sa mga Nanginabuhi (CARBON), and a key informant interview (KII) with the president of the organization. The interview and discussion questions are centered on the topic of this paper. Their responses comprise the narratives from the perspective of the market vendors and workers in this paper. The study also utilized legal documents accessible through the internet. The market vendors also provided the researcher with a copy of the alternative plan for the public market.

The activities, Panagtapok: Gathering Women’s Voices and Perspectives of Community Driven Development and LRSN Cebu 2025 Kulokabildo: Central Visayas Conference on Nongovernmental CDD Initiatives, served as the platforms for the exchange of ideas that contributed much to this paper. These are funded by the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies–Local-Regional Studies Network.

## Introduction: The Case of Carbon Public Market

Carbon Public Market is known to be “the heart that pumps financial lifeblood to poor Cebuanos, buyers and sellers both, who must make every centavo count to survive the country’s elitist system” (Carvajal 2022). Even before sunrise, the busy streets of Carbon will be filled with people from different places to buy fresh, yet affordable produce from the market, all with their respective agendas for the day: from supplies for the eatery businesses to household essentials. It is also where farmers from Cebu’s rural areas pile loads of their harvested fruits, vegetables, and root crops. Indeed, it has witnessed the growth of Cebuanos as it supplies them with their daily needs. Carbon Public Market serves as a platform for the sale and purchase of affordable basic commodities by small entrepreneurs and less fortunate Cebuanos (Carvajal 2021). Unfortunately, some do not see the Carbon Market this way. For them, its physical structure is outdated, and so it needs renovation, hence modernization. Although modernization may seem appealing, it poses a threat to the livelihoods of market vendors and workers (Obejas 2021). Behind the promise of modernization lies privatization, which undoubtedly benefits only the business sector, not the marginalized.

On 24 March 2021, the Cebu City government, together with the Megawide Construction Corporation, held the groundbreaking ceremony for the redevelopment and modernization of Carbon Public Market (Cordova 2021) from a “warren of cramped alleys and halls” into a “swanky, multi-use commercial district” (Sitchon 2022a). In front of the ceremony, vendors and their supporters gathered for a protest rally, expressing their complaints and opposition to the project. They claimed that the joint venture agreement (JVA) between the two parties, the Megawide Construction Corporation and the Cebu City government, is very controversial and threatening. However, despite the protest, units of the market are said to have already been subject to demolition and clearing, which the Cebu City Legal Office claimed was a valid exercise of the city government’s rights and power of ownership and administration (Malinao 2021). Cause-oriented groups composed of the alliance of vendors, residents, stakeholders, and supporters filed a petition to the Regional Trial Court (RTC) to nullify the JVA. They seek a temporary restraining order (TRO) as they describe the JVA as illegal, invalid, and void. They argue that it also contains provisions that they consider arbitrary, oppressive, unfair, prohibitive, unreasonable, and repugnant to the general welfare, public policy, and good customs (Cordova 2021).

What would happen to vendors once the JVA pushes through? It is expected that at least 8,000 vendors will be affected by the Market Modernization Project (Sitchon 2022b). They would lose their means of livelihood, as the prices of rent would rise, making it inaccessible to small-scale vendors (Carvajal 2022). It is also said that vendors are forced to choose between complying with the expensive rent rate of the modernized market or being relegated to a closed-off section of the market with the fewest customers (Sitchon 2022b).

The project may appear to be a manifestation of progress and development when viewed from a distance. However, with the Megawide Construction Company interfering in these developments, vendors perceive this as a form of privatization, which, for them, is exploitative and burdensome. Through the JVA, the company is granted the authority to set and determine stall rates and entrance fees (Sitchon 2022a). For vendors, if a private company manages the market, it is undoubtedly intended for profit and not to serve minimum wage earners and financially challenged entrepreneurs, including those who cannot compete and afford to be in world-class private malls (Carvajal 2022).

With the privatization of Carbon Public Market comes the transformation of its facilities into a world-class innovation. Since this transformation entails beautification, anything that violates their description of a world-class market

would soon be displaced, including the street vendors and low-income workers. Carvajal (2022) explained that with its improved facilities and services, it is expected that it will become inaccessible to lowly ambulant vendors and their shabbily dressed helper-loaders, and will be unaffordable to local consumers. In other words, Carbon Public Market will lose its trademark of affordable and accessible products. This means that the market will be more expensive. It will also attract and accommodate tourists and well-heeled locals (Carvajal 2022), resulting in a drop in income among small enterprises and households (Sitchon 2022a).

The JVA between Megawide Construction Company and the Government of Cebu City clearly shows that the local government is not on the side of the vendors (Carvajal 2022). This is ironic in light of the government's primary task, which is to enhance the quality of life for everyone by providing employment opportunities and other means of livelihood. Instead, the city government serves the interests of its corporate partners more, as it could earn more by doing so than by serving ordinary people (Carvajal 2022). To accommodate the JVA, various policies have been amended and revised to align with its objectives. First, there is the amendment of the Cebu City Market Ordinance. Second is the implementation of the Comprehensive Land Use Program (CLUP). Third, the recently approved Zoning Ordinance. These policies are contrary to the primary task of the government towards its people. For the vendors, these factors further exploit and oppress them.

The modernization of Carbon Market affects not only the vendors but also the ordinary people working in the market, such as the cargo loaders and delivery personnel. The effects of Carbon Market modernization extend to small vendors and other individuals who benefit from the produce of the market, such as fisherfolk and farmers, as well as other small business sectors, including eateries, food stalls, and flower shops (Seblon 2022; Carvajal 2022). This has an adverse ripple effect on the community, especially in terms of the cost of basic commodities, tax revenues, and local food security (Sitchon 2022a). Carbon is indeed vital to the marginalized sectors of the community for them to gain access to affordable goods through Cebu's most significant public market (Mascardo 2025).

## **Aesthetics of Gentrification**

The sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) coined the term “gentrification” when she noted the flow of the more affluent and educated class, called “gentry,” into

urban areas, resulting in the displacement of the relatively lower class, mostly making up the worker population during her time. She noted that this process occurs so rapidly that most of the original working-class occupiers are being displaced, thereby changing the social character of the area. For Glass, this gentrification will soon culminate when the original residents are entirely displaced by the gentry class (Glass 1964). Ghertner (2015) further explained that gentrification has become a global phenomenon, manifesting in various class relations, including a rising rent environment and associated forms of market-induced displacement. Shafran (2014) later observed that fifty years of gentrification potentially mutates into paradigmatic urban transformation.

Gentrification usually comes with the promise of converting areas through the restoration of structures and the improvement of social, economic, and geographical aspects of the residents (Zukin 1987). Since there is a shift and conversion in the metropolitan areas, the displacement of “what has been” or “what was,” say the population and infrastructures, including their livelihood and identity, is expected to happen. This shift necessitated the disposal of a certain group (Redfern 2003). Typically, the poor and vulnerable residents, those who suffer the most in the process of gentrification (Atkinson and Bridge 2005). The development and conversion of metropolitan areas are, therefore, believed to be uneven and selective (Smith 1982). With the marginalized now displaced in gentrified areas, the residences of the gentry now shift from lower-quality housing into renovated high-rise apartments and other infrastructures that may appear as urban development (Shaw 2008), giving way to the more socioeconomically privileged population (Lindner and Sandoval 2021).

Another factor that worsens the antagonistic situation of the displaced working class is the capitalist motives behind gentrification. Gentrification not only changes the urban landscape physically and geographically but also shifts the market discipline, such as deregulation and privatization in housing and other basic commodities (Atkinson and Bridge 2005). It commonly occurs in areas where infrastructures are created to invite profitable businesses and development at the expense of urban residents, who, in turn, lose the opportunity of urban residence and work stability (Slater 2011). The improvements of towns, furthermore, accompany the increase of a much wealthier population, the construction of capitalist infrastructures such as warehouses, banks, and others, in exchange for driving away the less privileged (Marx 1967; Engels 1973). This is what is meant to be a commercialized gentrification (Gant 2015) as it provokes indirect displacement pressures that exclude the marginalized sector of society. By commercialization, it serves the interests of the business sector.

Since gentrification is understood as the displacement of a lower class for the accommodation of the “gentry,” it could be said that there is an elitist element in its social restructuring, meaning, there is an “otherness” from the main residents in the gentrified area (Redfern 2003). The “other” are the original inhabitants of the gentrified area, who, because of displacement, suffer more than the gentry who reside in that area in the name of luxury and development. Other scholars would interpret gentrification as a form of hegemonic practice (Redfern 2003) and dynamics of race (Lindner and Sandoval 2021). Clearly, the process of gentrification is a conflict of class interest (Smith and LeFaivre 1984), wherein the gentrifiers are identified as the superior elites over the lower class who struggle to survive.

In relation to the accommodation of the higher class, the gentrifiers can be extended to the international sphere in the form of urban neo-colonization, usually through capital and mercantile expansion to underdeveloped or third-world countries (Gouldner 1979; Atkinson and Bridge 2005). Gentrification further justifies this displacement through aestheticization brought about by order and beauty offered by foreign standards (Atkinson and Bridge 2005). This gentrified area of an urban space becomes desirable to the displaced locals who are struggling for survival. It also offers services that cater to the international demands in the sphere of tourism (Smith and Williams 2007). This rhetoric of settler colonialism seduces global capital investment while boosting tourist appeal (Lindner and Sandoval 2021). As gentrification extends overseas, they identify this as “neoliberal globalization and planetary gentrification” due to its increasing transnational synchronization (Lindner and Sandoval 2021).

With the displacement of the vulnerable sectors and the domination of a more powerful class, one could seek state intervention in its supposed commitment to act in accordance with the welfare of the people. In practice, however, gentrification includes political restructuring (Hackworth and Smith 2002) on top of economic and geographical factors; i.e., public policy is somehow aligned with the motives of gentrification (Lees and Ley 2008). Worse, the policymakers’ initiative to address social problems is deconcentrating working-class and poor communities and attracting the middle classes to metropolitan areas (Lees and Ley 2008). This makes the state shift its roles from the provider of social support for the marginalized to the supplier of amenities for upper- and middle-class urbanities, and services to the business sector (Wacquant 2008).

Despite the tragic realities that gentrification offered in the guise of development and improvement, the elite class presents it as if it is palatable and desirable to the masses. The upper class, through developers and politicians, tends to advertise gentrification in a positive light, often by sugarcoating the concept (Slater 2011). In reality, however, most gentrification ideas are biased towards the gentrifying middle class, not the displaced working class (Smith and Williams 2007). This could be one factor that makes gentrification desirable to others, as it is taken from the perspective of those benefiting from the process. With its aesthetic effect on urbanized societies, gentrification is closely identified with high-status developments (R  rat, S  derstr  m, and Piguet 2010): flashy architecture, an abundance of pseudo-public space, predictable public art, corporate shopping and dining chains, superficial greenwashing, restricted mobility, and a general aura of affluence and placelessness (Lindner and Sandoval 2021).

Gentrification not only affects the displaced and vulnerable sectors of society but also encompasses other aspects of this reality, specifically environmental concerns and energy crises (Smith and LeFaivre 1984). It should be noted that together with the uprooting of the working in urban areas, environmental sustainability is also put into question (R  rat, S  derstr  m, and Piguet 2010). Since Gentrification is a social process, it affects everything that is involved within a society. Among them are the workers and the environment as human and natural resources, respectively. Since both resources are commodities, they are involved in the capitalist machineries merely as participants and means of production (Smith and LeFraive 1984).

Lindner and Sandoval (2021) developed the idea of the “aesthetics of gentrification.” While the gentrified is transformed into aestheticized from the displaced unappealing sight, they describe these structures as “petty-but-functionless urbanism . . . an expensive, heavily monitored add-on to a meretricious corporate development, possessing little in the way of either function or charm . . .” (O’Sullivan quoted in Lindner and Sandoval, 2021), and “a souped-up graveyard of novelty trinkets and junkyard of half-baked ideas and botched plans” (Wainwright 2019 quoted in Lindner and Sandoval 2021). They argue that aesthetics is integral to the global narratives of gentrification, particularly in how it is being used to justify the displacement and disempowerment of vulnerable populations, giving way to urban transformation that is exclusionary, neoliberal, and consumerist (Lindner and Sandoval 2021). This way, development is deceiving. There may be promises of aestheticization and beautification, but it is never a development for the marginalized sectors of society.

## Carbon Market Modernization as Aestheticization of Gentrification

The privatization of the Carbon Public Market in the guise of beautification and modernization is a form of aestheticization of gentrification. With the promise of restoration and improvement of the market, most lower-class sectors, especially the vendors and market workers, are disadvantaged. This beautification of facilities and infrastructure would be impossible with the market vendors and workers still in their stations, and the ambulant vendors still scattered throughout the market. Hence, this process entails the displacement of the original inhabitants who are considered by the elite class as “untidy” and “dirty,” further calling them “sore to their eyes.”

Displacing the vendors and the market workers does not necessarily mean their expulsion from the area. It also entails a new arrangement that will disadvantage them. With this, it would seem that forceful expulsion did not occur during the modernization, but a decent exit due to the new exploitative arrangement of the market. The new arrangement includes consolidating the Freedom Park, Warwick Barracks, Unit 1 Meat Section, Unit 2 Interim Building, and Unit 3 Fruit Section into one Carbon Complex. This results in the disadvantageous congestion of market stalls in the building.

The vendors explained that there will be no more smooth transportation of products from the provinces in Cebu to the city through the market due to the “entrance fee” that would be collected as tolls from producers from the mountainous area of the province. This is stipulated in the JVA that the developer will be in charge of the entry and exit of goods and people in the market. Vendors also explained that since most ambulant vendors are from the provinces, they will no longer be accommodated in the market, given the expensive entrance fee imposed by the management. They expounded that these ambulant vendors supposedly carry the identity and trademark of Carbon Public Market. With its expensive and modernized facilities, only vendors who can afford the expensive rental can afford to sell in the once public market. It is indeed a form of gentrification when the original Carbon Public Market vendors are displaced to make way for the gentry-vendors. It is said that the new tenants who can afford ₱40,000 to ₱45,000 are accommodated in the market, while those who find it expensive are relocated to the margins.

Another arrangement that further disadvantages the market vendors is the shifting of schedules per stall. This means that in one stall, three vendors would take turns selling their products. They can no longer leave their extra produce

and heavy things to make way for the next vendor. They narrated that they need to vacate all things, including unsold items and heavy equipment. Some of them are given an eight-hour shift with three vendors taking turns. This is burdensome for them, especially since they are used to staying in one station for the whole duration of time, where they can leave their belongings, ready for the next day's hard work. To resolve the problem of shifting turns per station, the vendors resorted to arranging themselves in a one-square-meter stall. This is the only way that they can claim a stall without taking turns. However, they explained that it is not conducive to selling their products. They expressed that, given the size of the area, they cannot sit down or arrange their products in the stall.

Capitalist motives are behind this modernization. What used to be a public market that served the masses is now transformed into a business solely intended for profit. Prices are expected to rise as the rental and facilities are getting more expensive. This means that it is not only the vendors and the market workers who suffer from this capitalist initiative; rather, both consumers and producers carry the same burden of the market's inaccessibility. The vendors expressed that with privatization, additional payments for rental, such as the electric bill, water bill, and toll fee, would be imposed on them. They further specified that, "*Kon baboy imong tinda, kada usa, one hundred. Unya kon itlog imoha, ang tray is fifty.*" (For a kilo of pork, you need to pay one hundred pesos for the entrance fee. Per tray of eggs is fifty pesos.) They also provided situations as comparison before and after the JVA, "*For example, sa isda, twenty ra, pero didto sa JVA, three hundred twenty ang usa ka banyera . . .*" (Before the JVA, one bañera of fish is twenty pesos. However, with the agreement, it is three hundred pesos per bañera.) They added that it is a different story when the fish is a first class; payment is by kilo.) They further realized that this arrangement is indeed part of capitalist motives, "*Sila ra pu'y madato, unya dato naman sila daan. Unya kitang mga pobre, samot na ta kapobre. Di gyud sila matagbaw.*" (The private company will become richer as they are already rich, while it is we who will get poorer. They will never be contented).

Gentrification is indeed a form of elitism, not just that it is intended to accommodate the more privileged business sectors than the small-scale vendors, but also to the consumers, as they would no longer invite those who are looking for affordable and fresh goods, but rather attract those who can afford goods with relatively high prices. An interim building, which housed the displaced vendors from the demolished units, was constructed to house them. However, the arrangement of the stalls is designed for unequal competition against big business owners. The market vendors expressed that with the new

arrangement, they are disadvantaged against bigger business owners who are in a more accessible area of the market.

Gentrification is also a form of neocolonialism as it serves tourists and foreign investors. With its plan to construct hotels and malls, the Modernized Carbon will no longer serve the ordinary Cebuanos, but the global commercial sphere. With the zoning ordinance, Units 1 and 2 will be transformed into commercial hubs to construct check-in hotels to accommodate tourists from Mactan passing through the Cebu–Cordova Link Expressway (CCLEX). The developers also intended to construct a mall structure that fits international standards. With these infrastructures, market vendors are threatened with displacement, making way for these buildings to be constructed.

The vendors claimed that while the main antagonist is the Megawide construction company, privatization is impossible without the help of the city government. For them, the city government is on the side of the developers, not on the side of the vendors. The policies are always in favor of the construction company, even amending the Market Code to their interest. The vendors claimed that the amendment of the Cebu City Market Code in October 2023 worsens the situation. For them, it paved the way for the JVA, as it clearly stated in the document that the Megawide Corporation would manage the collection of funds in the market. In comparison, they explained that before the amendment, the vendors were similar to those of stakeholders with the Cebu City government as their partners. With the amendment, it is as if they are merely tenants of the Megawide Corporation in the privatized Carbon Market.

Aside from amending the Cebu City Market Code to align the ordinance with the JVA, the Zoning Ordinance, through the Comprehensive Land Use Program (CLUP), was implemented to add to the burden on the market vendors and workers in Carbon. The vendors elaborated on this case by stating that, before, it was only the Megawide Corporation that they considered a threat. Because of the Zoning Ordinance and the CLUP, vendors expect that the market value will get more expensive, and so are their rental and transactional fees.

What is happening in the Carbon Market is a form of the aestheticization of gentrification. With its attractive infrastructure and lively vibes, the lives of the marginalized sectors are now whitewashed with capitalist gains. For instance, vendors described how Pusô Village was hyped as a new attraction in Cebu City. However, the people failed to realize the conditions of the vendors, who are mostly displaced because of this structure.

## Towards a Development for the People

The character of development integrates accounting for the interests of the community first: “No development should happen at the expense of conservation. . . . It is not about making big businesses grow bigger in the hope that small people would catch some spillover benefits” (Carvajal 2021). Development is the opposite of privatization (Carvajal 2022) and, further, of gentrification. Development should be community-driven, i.e., it should be rooted in the experiences of the people.

Imbong (2025) named three key elements of development intervention from Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Pham, 2018): (1) empowerment, (2) human agency, and (3) public deliberation. Empowerment refers to the expansion of assets, especially of poor communities, to allow greater participation in the process of negotiations, influencing, control, and holding accountable the institutions affecting their lives. Agency, as the World Bank defines it, is the ability to make decisions about one’s own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution, or fear (Klugman et al, 2014). Public deliberation points on how community-driven development (CDD) necessitates the participation and discussion of local village members in assemblies. He further highlighted aspects of distinction between CDD in the government and non-government organizations (NGOs) and people’s organizations (POs): institutional character, organizational forms, and understanding of development. First, through CDD, POs maintained their autonomy and assumed a vital function in a democratic society where development initiatives are driven by non-state actors. Second, POs exercise empowerment through a people’s assembly. Lastly, POs link progress with inequalities and power asymmetries. In the case of carbon market privatization, organizations have pushed public deliberations in the name of community-based development.

In the case of Carbon Public Market, an alliance of the threatened and displaced market vendors and workers was established, in the name of Carbon-hanong Alyansa along sa Reporma ug Bahandianong Ogma sa mga Nanginabuhi (CARBON). The alliance is made up of leaders from different zones and groups in the market. Included in their objective as an alliance is to empower various groups that are threatened due to the demolition brought by the modernization and privatization of the market. Part of the organization’s accomplishment is filing a case against the city government and Megawide Corporation. Through this organization, they were able to attain representation in negotiating with the city government. Their respective

concerns and issues were publicly deliberated and collectively represented and decided through CARBON, then raised in consultation and dialogue with city officials. This gives them human agency, the capacity to decide on their own, and a plan for their common benefit and welfare.

While a big-time developer presented the City Hall with an unsolicited proposal to modernize Carbon (Carvajal 2022), the vendors also provided an alternative development plan that would benefit them and the Cebuanos, in general. It is said that vendors possess the capacity to organize and develop the Carbon Market on their own. Therefore, the vendors themselves should manage the development that occurs in Carbon Market (Carvajal 2021; Carvajal 2022). Indeed, we can say that the development plan initiated by those who truly serve the purpose of Carbon Market is beneficial to the people whose lives and livelihoods are dependent on the market.

In 2021, a concerned architect approached the market vendors and presented a proposal to achieve progress that would benefit the common people. The vendors claimed that the design presented to them can beautify the structure without taking advantage of the people's livelihood. This development derives from the vendors' collective suggestions and public deliberations. It is a kind of facelift that improves the livelihood of the vendors and the market vendors. It is an aestheticization that does not require the displacement of the marginalized sectors of the market. It is a plan that fulfills the task of the government to prioritize the welfare of the people.

With their intention to develop the Carbon Market, the organization devised an alternative plan through the architect. They claimed that this plan is designed by and for the market vendors and workers. It is far from the malls and hotels that the city government and the company envisioned. Rather, the alternative that the vendors and workers proposed is a plan that needs no displacement and demolition, a kind of development that does not destroy and dehumanize. In addition, they stated that, in the structural design, those who desire to remain in their stalls should remain in their renovated and refurbished stalls.

Instead of dumping the vendors into congested areas and shifting schedules as stipulated in the JVA, a newly renovated and wisely planned infrastructure could be constructed to develop the Carbon Public Market. Through this, facilities can be modernized, and concrete structures can be repaired and fortified.



Figure 1. Proposed Design of the Freedom Park (Interior)



Figure 2. Proposed Design of the Freedom Park (Exterior)

In Freedom Park, for example, instead of removing and displacing all flower shops, food stalls, and rattan crafts, they can be relocated to surround the area and add beautification in the park.

Currently, there are no more flower shops or rattan crafts found in Freedom Park. It is a park with no vendors in sight. From the proposed design, we can see that vendors can still sell their products without being displaced from where they were originally positioned, the Freedom Park. The perimeter of the park contains stalls that accommodate flower shops and rattan crafts vendors.

The proposed design of the exterior of the Freedom Park can also accommodate more shops and stalls for flowers, native products, and rattan crafts. Through this design, more vendors can be accommodated.

Another part of their proposed renovation is the renovation of Warwick Barracks, Units 1, 2, and 3. These areas are facing the threat of demolition with the approval of the Cebu City Zoning Ordinance, as the whole area will be transformed into a commercial area. The Warwick Barracks housed *sari-sari* stores, livestock like native chicken, and kitchen utensils. Unit 1 housed assorted



Figure 3. Proposed Design of Warwick Barracks (Exterior)



Figure 4. Proposed Design of Unit 1 (Exterior)

meats such as fish, pork, and chicken. It also housed frozen and processed food such as chorizo, ham, and hot dogs. Unit 2 housed dry goods—those that can be found in the grocery. Unit 3 housed the fruits and vegetables. Most of them are from remote areas in the province. That is why they need to keep their stalls as their storage since their place is far from the market.

This proposal is said to have cost ₱757 million, which the vendors pledged to contribute through the vendors' cooperative, alongside the city funds. To no avail, however, the officials turned a deaf ear to the vendors and instead pushed through with the ₱5.5 billion project of their joint venture agreement with the Megawide Construction Company. Many of these areas have been demolished already. New structures that are planned by the company are now operating. And the dream of modernizing the market without the stain of capitalism is crushed to the ground like a crumpled blueprint towards progress and development. The vendors narrated that during the mediation period, the Megawide Corporation and the city government showed no interest when they presented the alternative plan. There was none from the company in attendance. Representatives from the city government ignored their proposal.

It was as if they were already certain to push through with their plan as stated in the JVA. Further, the market people realized that their concerns and supplications seemed to fall on deaf ears as they were never prioritized in the city development, nor included in the agenda.



Figure 5. Proposed Design of Unit 2 (Exterior)

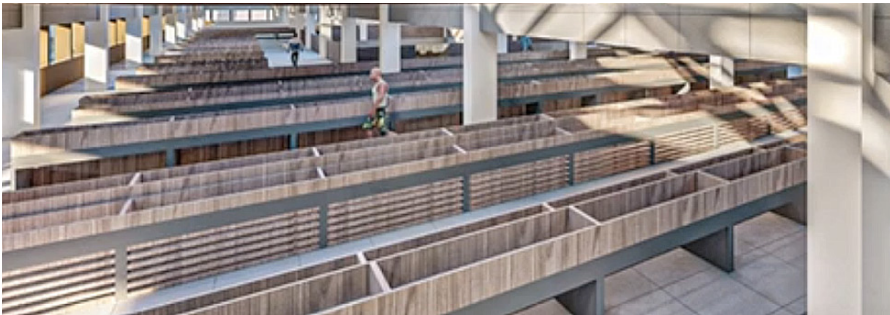


Figure 6. Proposed Design of Unit 2 (Interior)



Figure 7. Proposed Design of Unit 3 (Exterior)

Despite the threats of displacement and the indifferent treatment of the city to their plight, CARBON continued to remain steadfast in their resistance against Carbon Market Privatization in the guise of modernization, development, and progress. Despite militarization and the death of their champion lawyer, Attorney Rex Fernandez, who was gunned down after filing a complaint against the corporation (Lubiano 2021), the alliance continued to convene and call out for reforms and development, stating that those in power should not forsake the cries of the marginalized sector of society.

Even during the recent approval of the proposed Zoning Ordinance on its third reading, CARBON expressed concerns and disappointments, as the reclassification of the Market from an institutional status to commercial status would lead to more privatization (Sitchon 2025b), serving no longer the poor and low-income masses, but for the profit of big companies (Seblos 2025). Until now, they have sought to have more consultations with the city government, where public engagement should lead to true and inclusive consultations (Sitchon 2025a; Seblos 2025). They believe that since they are not being consulted, they seem to be silent about the ordinance. But they made it clear that their silence is not a form of consent, but rather a symptom of exclusion (Seblos 2025). Until now, CARBON has hoped to engage in dialogue with the city government to achieve the development it aspires to.

With the new government administration, CARBON expressed that they are confident that this new set of city officials would provide them a platform for genuine dialogue, fair solutions, and inclusive governance (Sitchon 2025b). They believe that the current administration has been their ally since the issue first arose. Specifically, the new city mayor is said to be the voice of the vendors during consultations when he was still a councilor. In fact, he clearly stated in the LRSN Cebu 2025 Kulokabildo: Central Visayas Conference on Nongovernmental CDD Initiatives that he wants all the vendors to be included in the contract or agreement, meaning no vendor will lose their livelihood. In the conference, he also assured that the Megawide Corporation is willing to negotiate with vendors and the city government to meet in the middle.

CARBON's plight against Carbon Market privatization, and the vendors' struggle against displacement, are progress that is beneficial not only to those who are in the market, but also for all. For them, Megawide Corporation caused their sufferings. For them, they can only expect development if Megawide exits the scene. Furthermore, they claimed that there is no development where Megawide is present. They are also aware that they are facing a general problem called "privatization." They believe that with the alternative plan of

development that they are proposing, the market will serve the public again. They enumerated the steps to attain development: first, resist privatization; second, make Carbon Market public again, since from the very start, Carbon Public Market is a public market.

This development, as it is planned and proposed from the ordinary experiences of common people, is what the people need. And so, as life throbbed in Carbon as all necessities of life and more were sold and bought at prices everyone can afford (Carvajal 2022), it too shall shower the blessings of fresh produce to all people, especially the Cebuanos. Their struggle is our struggle too. And the vendors are appealing to us not to remain silent for them (Carvajal 2025). Instead, we should win with them in their struggle towards a more progressive Cebu.

## Conclusion

The aestheticization of gentrification is as dangerous as development-as-deception. Gentrification caused the displacement of the lower class by accommodating the capitalist interests of a more dominant class. Elitist interests drive this development; i.e., it is made to disadvantage the marginalized sector of society. Yet even political powers support this perspective of development, as they too can benefit from it. It is dangerous as it is aestheticized, as it appears to be a beautification, and thus appears as progress. What is aesthetic, however, does not necessarily connote development, such as in the experiences of the displaced and marginalized sectors. Gentrification appears in all parts of the world, particularly in third-world countries. In Cebu, particularly, Carbon Public Market is threatened by its aestheticization of gentrification, a privatization in the guise of modernization. What appears to be progress in the market is just a form of displacement and disadvantage, not only to the vendors and market workers but also to all Cebuanos in general. The vendors, now organized and driven by a collective objective, did not just resist development as a form of antidevelopment. They proposed an alternative plan that benefits those belonging to the less privileged lower class. This development is what we consider a genuine and organic development. Until today, their resistance continues despite the threats of the ongoing displacement and marginalization. And the people who benefit from the fruits of Carbon Public Market, and those with political power and popular influence, are encouraged to stand with the people of Carbon, for it is in their struggle that Cebu lives.

## Policy Recommendation

Gentrification appears in various forms. It is appealing not just to the business sector but also to the political platform. With the dangers of gentrification that may affect ordinary people, policymakers should be wary of this phenomenon by reviewing public–private agreements to ensure that these do not disadvantage residents through displacement and marginalization. This could be in the form of reclamation, land conversion, modernization, and others. Gentrification is one-sided, usually in favor of the gentry. Constant dialogue with various sectors should be done before entering into contracts that clearly benefit the upper class. Consultations with representatives and the public should be made to solicit the perspective, even from the lower sectors of society.

In the case of the Carbon Public Market, the city government should consider the development plan that the organization proposed. This plan is community-driven and would benefit the market producers and consumers. The government should listen to the voices of the vendors and postpone the possible plans that may disadvantage these people.

In the LRSN Cebu 2025 Kulokabildo: Central Visayas Conference on Nongovernmental CDD Initiatives, the city mayor suggested sitting down again and negotiating with the company in relation to this research. With the mayor's statements, part of the policy recommendation for this paper is the continuation of consultation and negotiations among different sectors: the city government, the market workers and vendors, the researchers, and other stakeholders. The policy regarding the development of the Carbon Public Market would then be rooted in these discussions.

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