MEMBER-SUBMITTED ARTICLE: WHAT THE LIDL REVIEW LEFT OUT—CONTEXT, CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY

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Illustration by Olexa Hewryk

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By Luca Telesca

Anita Bushell's review of Lidl omits crucial context that Coop members deserve to know.

After Key Food closed in 2021, a coalition including the Fifth Avenue Committee, Park Slope Neighbors, Warren Houses Tenant Association and then-Council Member Brad Lander worked with developers to ensure an affordable grocery store would replace it. According to the *Brooklyn Paper*, they specifically banned "high-end" chains like Whole Foods and Eataly. The community asked for Lidl.

What the review doesn't mention: Bushell herself led a seven-year campaign to save Key Food, founding the "Save the Fifth Avenue Key Food" group (News12, 2021). This undisclosed conflict of interest matters when evaluating her criticism of Key Food's replacement.

> LIDL'S LOW-OVERHEAD MODEL ENABLES THOSE 49-CENT CROISSANTS. EVERY DOLLAR SPENT ON DECORATIVE POSTERS IS A DOLLAR NOT PASSED TO CUSTOMERS AS SAVINGS.

On opening day, community leader Karen McCreary, who fought for affordable grocery access, was among the first customers. Park Slope resident Aretha Jones told the *Brooklyn Paper*: "I used to go to Whole Foods, but Lidl is my favorite. I have actually cut my grocery bills in half."

The croissant comparison reveals deeper issues: Bushell compares Lidl's 49-cent croissants with the Coop's $2.11 version, declaring the affordable option "technically edible." That $1.62 (331%) difference reflects different market segments, and for many shoppers that matters enormously. Calling affordable food "technically edible" is not food criticism—it reflects troubling class bias.

Bushell's aesthetic complaints about "gray tones" and "utilitarian" design miss the point: Lidl's low-overhead model enables those 49-cent croissants. Every dollar spent on decorative posters is a dollar not passed to customers as savings. Dismissing anti-theft infrastructure as creating "entrapment" ignores the reality of urban retail.

The "lack of community" criticism is particularly tone-deaf. The Coop's model works wonderfully for people with schedule flexibility to donate almost three hours every six weeks. It works less well for home health aides, restaurant workers and parents juggling childcare and multiple jobs. They also deserve affordable groceries without judgment about whether they're building "community" the right way.

When Jones rides her e-bike to Lidl and loads her basket with groceries that cost half what she paid before, that is community support. It's just not the kind visible to someone comparing croissant heights.

> THE PARK SLOPE COMMUNITY INCLUDES PEOPLE ACROSS ALL INCOME LEVELS. THIS COMMUNITY FOUGHT FOR AFFORDABILITY—AND SUCCEEDED.

The review also questions and omits Lidl's considerable success: voted number one grocery chain in *Newsweek*'s 2025 Reader's Choice Awards and fastest-growing brick-and-mortar grocer in the UK for over two years. These aren't random achievements—they reflect a business model that serves real customer needs.

A fair review might have explored how Lidl serves different needs than the Coop, interviewed diverse customers, or examined which products Lidl excels at versus where it falls short. Instead, we got an article that mistakes personal preference for objective analysis.

The Park Slope community includes people across all income levels. This community fought for affordability—and succeeded. When we dismiss stores serving budget-conscious shoppers as inferior, when we characterize affordable food as barely edible, we're saying some community members matter less than others.

That's not the cooperative spirit I think we value.

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