

**Is there room for collective agency in a gentrifying city?:
Planning for autonomous community space in Toronto**

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of gentrification in Toronto has been enabled by the city's adoption of neoliberal urban development processes consistent with Toronto's growing desire to compete with other global cities for the attention of global investors. The impacts of gentrification are far-reaching, with physical, economic, cultural, and social consequences associated with the increase in property values, rents, changes in commercial orientation, demographics, and neighbourhood class structure. As state-sanctioned gentrification continues to take place across the city of Toronto, and terms such as "community benefits" are integrated into major neighbourhood revitalization projects by developers, this paper considers the implications that this change in urban development processes has for community-based organizations and their access to space, and the consequent implications for the autonomy of community-based work. The high cost of real estate combined with the emphasis on service-oriented third sector actors in the neoliberal city has resulted in increased pressures faced by community-based organizations to fit within the neoliberal valuation of the third sector, and higher property values or to face displacement and dissolution.

This Major Paper examines the relationship between gentrification and access to space for community-based organizations in Toronto. The discussion presented here discusses the current neoliberal urban development context that is specific to the experiences of community-based organizations in Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods, followed by a review of the main concerns and challenges raised by community-based organizations operating in these areas. By using a variety of methods including interviews, a survey and a focus group, the findings of this research project indicate that neoliberal urban development practices impact the ability of community-based organizations to access and maintain space for their communities while maintaining autonomy in regards to their activities and location. Without the ability to generate revenue to keep up with the real estate pressures of Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods or to fit within the service-oriented systems of valuation of the third sector produced by neoliberal policies, the question arises as to how community-based organizations can continue to contribute to the development of Toronto's community-focused social infrastructure. Findings indicate that the main challenges facing these organizations fall within four key categories: top-down planning processes, inequitable acquisition processes, dependence on underutilized space and of course, financial barriers. By reviewing these findings in relation to the context in which these organizations are operating, five recommendations are made in regards to current and proposed methods of creating autonomous spaces for community-based organizations.

FOREWORD

This major research paper is the final paper submitted for the requirements of the Masters of Environmental Studies (MES) program at York University. My Plan of Study focused on three core components, all of which are integrated into the analysis of this paper: gentrification, the third sector, spatial justice. This project represents a critical analysis of my own personal and professional concerns and questions regarding the nature of community-based work in Toronto, and is the culmination of my experiences analyzing these experiences through the lens of a planner. The MES program has enabled me to translate my personal and professional experiences into the context of Community & Social Planning scholarship, articulating the experiences of a practitioner within the planning context. This research contributes important findings within the community & social planning discourse, as an initial articulation of a new area of gentrification studies, building on the work of gentrification and community planning studies. As such, this paper is submitted within the MES program, fulfilling the requirement of the MES Degree in Planning.

Though this paper represents the completion of my participation in the MES program, it is only representative of one phase of my own personal learning process, which is constant and ongoing.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to community bike spaces everywhere! Thank you for inspiring me to think differently about how space can be put to use for community, by community. I did not truly appreciate how unique community bike spaces were as autonomous community spaces until I started this research project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever grateful to my research supervisor Luisa Sotomayor for taking me on for this project. 2020-2021 has been a tumultuous year to say the least, and Luisa's constant support has been empowering and comforting all at once. I am also grateful for the initial feedback provided by my Advisor, Stefan Kipfer, who pushed me to be more critical in my analysis of the role of nonprofit organizations in the urban context and to think more critically about my own experiences working within the sector.

I also want to thank my friends and family for listening to me work through this research and for providing ongoing support and feedback throughout each stage of this process - it has been a truly healing and transformational two years.

And to every single student that I met through this program! I'm endlessly grateful to have had the opportunity to learn with and from you - in person and over zoom.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The neighbourhoods and communities discussed in this research sit on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit (an Anishnaabe people), the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat and Petun Nations, land which is now home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis. This land is covered by the Dish With One Spoon wampum belt covenant, an agreement by the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee to share resources equally and peaceably. It is also covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. As settlers, we acknowledge that we have broken the treaties. Our work for the well-being of this territory must include accountability to our Indigenous relatives.

By nature of this research being on the topic of access to space in the urban North American context, I must acknowledge that the discussion of space is taking place on stolen land. The discussion presented within this paper on community self-determination and access to space is secondary to the Land Back movement, and seeks to address the additional loss of community control of space that is associated with gentrification in the neoliberal city.

1. Introduction

Though the primary focus of gentrification research in Toronto has been on housing (e.g. Slater, 2004; Hackworth & Rekers, 2005; Maaranen & Walks, 2008) and commercial change (e.g. Rankin and McLean 2015), the impacts of gentrification and neoliberal urban development processes are far-reaching, with physical, economic, cultural, and social consequences associated with the increase in property values, rents, changes in the scale of neighbourhood development projects, commercial orientation, demographics and neighbourhood class structure. The proliferation of gentrification in Toronto has been enabled by the city's adoption of neoliberal urbanism practices consistent with Toronto's growing desire to compete with other global cities for the attention of global investors (Keil, 2002). This desire to become a more global city has seen the structure of development in Toronto focus more on responding to global investment opportunities rather than local interests.

The disinvestment from social services along with the deliberate valorization of real estate and public space are definitive characteristics of the neoliberal urbanism taking place in Toronto as well as other global cities (Mayer 2017, p.173). These actions have specific and wide-ranging implications for community-based organizations whose operations are founded on fostering collective agency in specific neighbourhoods and being responsive to local objectives through community capacity building (Carriere, Horwath, Paradis 2016, p.iii). Neoliberal urbanism's emphasis on entrepreneurialism and individualism is inconsistent with these objectives. Since the 1970s, proponents of neoliberalism have operated under the belief that the main objectives of the state should be to develop policies that promote a competitive market, with state activities focused on "the protection of private property, security, national defense and the legal enforcement of contracts." (Fanelli 2014, para.12). This has resulted in prolific neoliberal urbanism in global cities like Toronto, with local governments taking an "assault against social provisions and the public sector" (Fanelli 2014, para. 11) forcing a return to the provision of social programs and services through private services, philanthropy and volunteerism (Streek and Thelan 2005; Peck 2010). Within this context, third sector

entities are valued for their professionalized, service-provider capabilities rather than their potential to act autonomously as representatives of the interests and needs of specific communities within the urban context. In contrast to the service-oriented professionalized organizations that have become the dominant third sector actors through neoliberalism, the operations of community-based organizations have greater focus on potential to further the development of collective agency by being responsive to the needs and interests of specific communities, typically led by members of the same community (Carriere, Horwath, Paradis, 2016). With the rise of mutual aid efforts across the city, largely resulting from the social and health repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic and the disproportionate impacts on already marginalized communities, the significance of access to space for community organizing and collective agency is greater than ever.

Further developing this argument, and relating the significance of community collective agency to access to space, is the discussion regarding the importance of autonomy and self-determination in community-based work. Within the body of research examining the relationship between community-based civil society organizations and their public and private supporters, recent discussions have identified the impact of neoliberal governance structures on the autonomy and self-determination of civil society (O'Hare 2018). It has been argued that partnership-building efforts taking place within the urban context exist primarily to control rather than facilitate the work of community-based groups (Taylor, 2007). The significance of autonomy in the realm of civil society and community-based work lies in the degree to which community interests and needs can be expressed and achieved absent of the pressures imposed by the interests of the public and private sectors. With urban development processes in Toronto now largely controlled through public-private partnerships, the question arises as to how this impacts the autonomy of community-based organizations and their ability to create spaces representative of community-led interests. With the quiet disappearance of more Naturally Occurring Community Spaces (NOCS), such as churches and affordable commercial spaces that have hosted community-based work in the past, community-based organizations are dependent on access to the spaces developed by

and made accessible through these new developments. The implications of such a shift in control of the landscape are consistent with the work of scholars such as Marilyn Taylor who have identified these partnerships between community-based organizations and the public and/or private sector as being used to redirect the objectives of participating organizations to be more consistent with the interests of the state and private sector.

In addition to the professionalization of third sector organizations through neoliberalism, the adoption of neoliberal urbanism priorities by the city of Toronto has fostered the proliferation of the gentrification of Toronto's downtown neighbourhoods (Maaranen & Walks, 2008), with the promotion of development practices and projects that increase the profitability of real estate through community revitalizations projects (i.e. Alexandra Park, Mirvish Village and Regent Park) and the seemingly constant replacement of the city's low-rise buildings with towering condominium developments (Lehrer, Keil & Kipfer, 2010). The fostering of public-private development partnerships has resulted in the increasing privatization of urban space in Toronto (Rosen & Walks, 2015), with few opportunities, such as Community Benefits Agreements and Section 37, for community access to space to be considered. The valorization of real estate through these projects, coupled with the associated increases in property values and rent of neighbouring residential and commercial spaces reduces the opportunities for community-based organizations to seek out affordable operating space within the context of their neighbourhoods. Without access to "naturally occurring" affordable space for community-determined use, public and private interventions are necessary to create space for community-use. This access then becomes highly dependent on the interests of the public and private sector aligning with those of the communist-based third sector, seeing the allocation of space as a shared objective. The requirement for groups to appeal to private and public sector actors, however, results in a loss in the degree of democratization of the initiatives developed by community-based groups (Arvidson & Linde, 2021), making their activities less a reflection of the needs of communities, than an appeal to the interests and values of governments and the private sector. The resulting partnerships fostered by developers with community organizations in their

allocation of space has been documented in previous studies (Ilyniak, 2017) illustrating the ways in which the concept of “community” and community identity is co-opted by these partnerships, with many organizations becoming complicit as colonial actors within the gentrification process.

The high cost of real estate in Toronto’s gentrifying and gentrified neighbourhoods, combined with this emphasis on service-oriented third sector actors has resulted in increased pressures faced by community-based organizations to fit within the neoliberal valuation of the third sector or to face displacement and dissolution. In the absence of access to permanent, long-term and underutilized free space (NOCS), commercial space is the most accessible form of real estate available to community organizations with interest in leasing space to host their work. As of June 2021, the average commercial lease rate had increased from \$17.31 to \$19.88 per square foot since June 2020 (TRREB, 2021), with a vacancy rate of approximately 2% (CREB, 2020). Organizations participating in this project and currently dependent on access to commercial space are leasing space at a rate of approximately \$5,000.00/month for 1,300 square feet of commercial storefront space, representing up to 63% of one participating organization’s operating budget. All groups participating in this project, no matter their current method of accessing space, expressed concern regarding their organization’s ability to develop and maintain the financial capacity to access and maintain operating space in Toronto, even those accessing “subsidized” space provided through a new community-oriented neighbourhood centre. Without access to ongoing and widely available subsidized community space, community-based organizations operating in Toronto’s gentrifying neighbourhoods are competing with international franchises and investors for whom space has become increasingly unaffordable (CREB, 2020).

Without the ability to generate sufficient revenue to compete with the private sector in the acquisition of space, or to fit within the service-oriented systems of valuation of the third sector produced by neoliberal policies, the question arises as to how community-based organizations can continue to access and operate space for

community-directed use in Toronto. The relevance of this question lies within the significance of community-based organizations as a reflection of the self-determination of civil society and the promotion of collective community agency. A 2016 research paper completed by the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership identified the role that local community organizations play in “addressing rising inequality and diminishing resources at the neighbourhood level”(Carrière, Howarth, Paradis 2016, p.iii) recognizing the unique role of these groups in the development of collective community agency and promotion of progressive social change (Carriere, Howarth, Paradis 2016, p.iii). The groups considered within this research project are those consistent with the subjects of this 2016 research paper and mutual aid efforts, led by members of the communities in which they operate and taking a responsive rather than repressive approach to their activities.

Within the broad landscape of gentrification-based research, the displacement of community-based organizations is still relatively understudied. Particularly, community-based organizations whose activities are tied to the promotion of local community interests and community capacity building efforts in neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification. Organizations such as community bike spaces, community arts programs, DIY spaces and neighbourhood agencies operate in a variety of spaces, ranging from commercial storefronts to church basements, and residential backyards, typically depending on each organization’s capacity to generate revenue, or their access to affordable or free operating space within existing local infrastructure (i.e. churches, community centres, co-location opportunities). In response, this Major Paper contributes to address this shortcoming by examining the relationship between gentrification and community-based organizations in Toronto, while highlighting the need to plan for autonomous community space. Planning for autonomous community spaces in this research project refers to developing an environment in which community-based organizations can access space for the delivery of their mandate without the need to compromise their objectives (Taylor 2007) and without the constant and looming threat of displacement. In other words, autonomy can be determined based on the ability of an organization to say,

“hey, we need a space to do this, and that we can afford without compromising the nature of our activities. Is it possible?”

More specifically, this research is focused on the changing nature of the spaces that have been accessed by participant organizations in the past; the new channels that have been developed to address the need for community agency space in neighbourhoods across the city, and the impact that these variables have had on the autonomy and self-determination of these organizations. Similarly, for the self-determined, autonomous organizations whose work takes a bottom-up, responsive approach, what then are the options for accessing space in the gentrified city? Are community-based movements or organizations in Toronto able to reclaim their “right to the city” in the current neoliberal urban development policy context? Have programs and policies such as Section 37 of the Ontario Planning Act developed and been implemented in such a way that facilitates this right, or in a way that filters out the groups that are unable to operate within the current neoliberal context? As state-sanctioned gentrification continues to take place across the city of Toronto, and terms such as community benefits are integrated into major neighbourhood revitalization projects by developers, in this project, I consider the implications of this change in urban development processes for community-based organizations and their access to space, and ensuing consequences of this displacement on civil society.

2. Positionality & motivation

The topic of this research project has been inspired by my personal work experience within the community nonprofit sector in Toronto since 2009, as well as my interactions with major development projects as a resident of Kensington Market and board member of Friends of Kensington Market. Having worked as a grants administrator for community-based nonprofit organizations, as well as the Executive Director of a small organization in Toronto’s Moss Park Neighbourhood, I am familiar with the barriers faced by community-based organizations in the search for space.

My motivation for this research was the result of my experiences working as the Director for a small, community-based nonprofit organization in the Moss Park Neighbourhood of Toronto. After 10 years of co-locating with a local partner shop, the organization's success led to the discussion of relocating to a home of our own within the area. The new location would enable the organization to better serve youth in the area and meet the community's need for more access to affordable active transportation options. After years of meeting with the City's Social Development Department as well as a mission-driven private developer, the organization ultimately decided to pursue a commercial space on Queen St. E as an independent entity. In the end, the partnership with the private developer would have placed a greater financial burden on the organization, with the requirement to pursue a \$200,000.00 capital campaign (doubling the organization's operating budget), on top of monthly rental costs that were on par with market rates (Approximately \$4,500/month, increasing incrementally to over \$5,000/year for a 1,600 square foot space). As these discussions were taking place, the City of Toronto decided to develop their own community bike spaces, following the same program model of our organization. This, while unable to provide support to us; the existing independent organization seeking new space to grow its already established programs. In the end, commercial space at market rental rates was the only option that could meet the organization's need to access space that would serve its mission, while remaining within the community, without taking on a potentially debilitating financial burden. Though this is a temporary solution to the challenge at hand, the organization and many in the same situation, are then faced with feelings of impending doom as gentrification threatens the long-term affordability of market-rent spaces within their communities.

My experiences as a resident of Kensington Market, and chair of the neighbourhood's Development committee and tenant network have enabled me to participate in numerous community consultation meetings in the neighbourhood since 2016. In our efforts to resist gentrification taking place in the market, opposing the development of new bars, dispensaries and condominium developments at every corner of the neighbourhood (Alexandra Park, Sneaky Dees, the Silver Dollar and the development at

Rol San on Spadina), there is a deep frustration shared amongst community members relating to our inability to suggest community use of the spaces in question due to the prohibitive costs associated with all forms of real estate in the neighbourhood (seeing commercial rents increase from \$3,000 to \$9,000 in some instances, over night). During the development of a new corporately funded venue space on Augusta Avenue in 2018, the owners of the business faced considerable backlash from community members in regards to their proposal for a 5,000 square foot corporately funded venue in the centre of the mixed-use community. In the midst of ongoing arguments and conversations with the owners, their frustration was expressed in regards to the fact that the building had been vacant for three years due to the fact that no one else had an idea for the space. This motivated me to consider why the community groups and residents involved could not propose a desired use within any of the ensuing conversations, as any ideas generated by community members would lack a robust business model that would be required to even consider accessing the space. In a neighbourhood where the Anarchist University once operated in a space supported by the sale of zines, this kind of community access to and determination of space no longer exists.

My intentions for this project and my participation in the MES program have been to channel this frustration and these experiences into the study of planning practices in Toronto in an effort to both articulate an area of study that is currently under the radar of community planning practices and to identify recommendations for future responses to the challenges at hand.

3. Methodology

The study of small community-based organizations and the impact of gentrification on their access to space is a challenge due to the elusive nature of the organizations, which typically operate at a relatively low and hyper-local capacity. The nature of grassroots community organizations has been that these groups operate on volunteer-labour or at very low administrative capacities, which results in challenges in regards to data-creation and partnership-building on a relatively short schedule. The focus of this project on the study of the relationship between gentrification and

community-based nonprofit organizations also presents a challenge because displacement is inherent to the process of gentrification and is currently not tracked. It is for these reasons that the methodology for this research project was modified near the mid-way point to address the inability of one method to adequately capture rich data to complete a cohesive analysis. The final section of this paper will outline additional data and research opportunities that will be required moving forward to continue this research discussion and work towards a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing community-based organizations in Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods. The initial research design proposed for this project included the following elements:

- Policy review
- Survey
- Focus Group

Due to a lower-than-expected response rate for the survey, however, semi-structured interviews were added to the methodology to advance the research process and access more long-term institutional knowledge from anchor organizations that often oversee and support the work of smaller community-based organizations operating in Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods.

Data Collection

1. Survey & Focus Group

Criteria for selecting survey & focus group participants

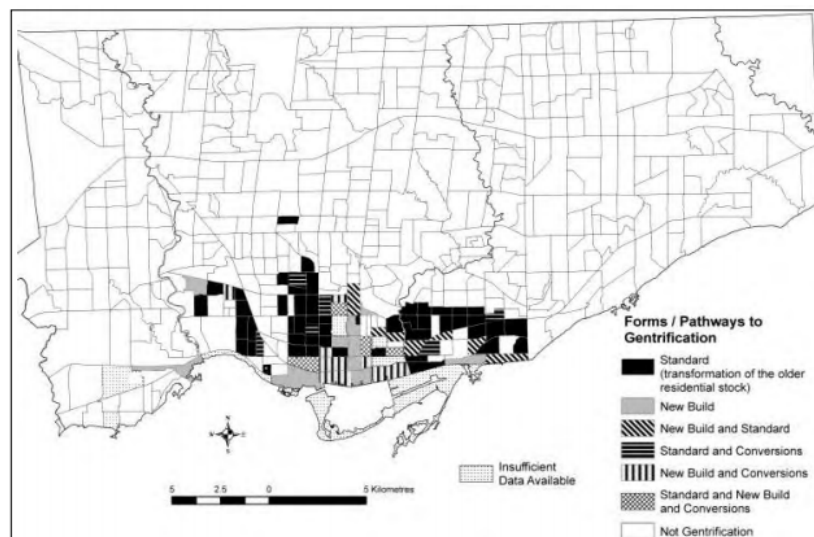
The online survey was widely distributed to community organizations of all kinds, with a focus on organizations who met the following criteria:

- Operating budget of less than \$1 million
- The organization's operations are dependent on access to space in downtown Toronto

These criteria were intentionally broad to ensure that a variety of organizations could

participate, while ensuring that the nature of the respondents' operations were relatively small (maximum \$1 million operating budget), and connected to gentrifying neighbourhoods in Toronto (downtown neighbourhoods highlighted in the map by Maaranen, R., & Walks, A. (2008) on the next page.

Figure 1. Forms & pathways to gentrification in Toronto neighbourhoods (Maaranen & Walks, 2008)



Source: Created by the authors from custom tabulations (E0985) of the Census of Canada, various years
Note: Census tract boundaries are for 2001. Forms of gentrification are shown only for gentrifying areas.

Survey respondents were asked about their interest in participating in a focus group following the completion of the survey and those who responded “yes” were invited to the focus group one month later.

Conducting the survey & focus group

I prepared a survey to distribute to community-based organizations online through several networks as well as to direct contacts at key organizations from March to April 2021. The survey was also distributed through the Centre for Social Innovation’s community listserv as well as through a weekly newsletter to all of its members in Toronto in April 2021. (See **Appendix A** for survey questions)

Focus Group

An invitation was extended to 6 of the survey respondents as well as additional community organizations through my own personal network to participate in the focus group on the topic of “Gentrification and community-based organizations in Toronto”. The focus group was conducted through Zoom on May 29, 2021 using the following questions as a guide for the conversation:

1. Describe the nature of your organization’s work
2. What is the nature of your organization’s access to space? Comment on cost, access and stability.
3. Is there anything that would improve the way in which your organization is currently able to access space?
4. Are there any resources or relationships that you’ve found helpful in your search for space, or are there any resources or programs that you wish existed?
5. Why is access to space for community-based organizations important?

Survey & Focus Group participants

1. Bikechain
2. Church in Regent Park
3. Healing as One
4. Interaccess
5. CREW Toronto
6. Times Change
7. Acorn Arts Project
8. bikeSauce
9. Gateway Bike Hub

2. Interviews

Criteria for selecting interviewees

Interviewees were selected for their ability to speak about this research topic as Subject Matter Experts, as well as the ability to speak to the long-term patterns associated with this topic. Interviewees were also identified using the snowball sampling as new people of interest were identified by interviewees. The main criteria used for the selection of interviewees included:

- Organizations whose operations have been based in at least one Toronto neighbourhood for 10+ years;

- People who could speak to the organization's partnerships with smaller community-based organizations in the same neighbourhood.

As a result, Executive Directors and key program managers from various community hub organizations were interviewed.

Conducting interviews

Between April-June, 2021, I conducted nine semi-structured online interviews on Zoom with representatives of community organizations in Toronto, using eight (see appendix) questions as a guide for each conversation. (See **Appendix B** for interview questions)

Interview Participants

1. Regent Park Film Festival
2. West Neighbourhood House
3. Women's Working
4. East Scarborough Storefront
5. Times Change
6. St. Stephen's Community House
7. Healing as One
8. Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
9. Kensington Market Action Committee
10. Green Thumbs Growing Kids

Analytical framework

Analysis was completed using a thematic framework and was applied to the responses collected from all interview, survey and focus group respondents. After all responses were transcribed, they were grouped into four main categories that were most common to all involved with this project. These responses were then analyzed in relation to the theories of gentrification, the third sector and spatial justice defined in the literature review in order to connect the data collected to the central research question.

In addition to completing a thematic analysis of responses from the interviews, survey and focus group, responses were compared with the programs and policies outlined in the Context section of this paper to develop recommendations that can address the challenges and barriers identified.

4. Literature Review

Existing research relating to neoliberal urban development processes that promote and facilitate gentrification has primarily addressed pressures on and displacement of residential and commercial tenants (e.g. Rankin & McLean; Walks, 2008). With the proliferation of public-private partnerships through neoliberalism and the disintegration of “naturally occurring community spaces” the work of nonprofit organizations has been integrated into new urban development processes in the guise of maintaining community infrastructure and community access to space. In preparation for the analysis to be presented within this research project, the subject (community-based organizations), the influencing processes (gentrification) and the significance of this analysis (spatial justice and the right to the city) will be defined through the following literature review.

4.1 Defining the community-based third sector

The contemporary description of the role of the third sector in Canadian politics, as described by Mitchell Evans and John Shields, is that of an “invisible sector” that is “occupying space in society where uncoerced human association and relational networks formed for the sake of family, faith, interests and ideology occur” (Walzer 1991, p.293). Adalbert Evers expands upon this definition by presenting a framework that explores the nature of the sector itself, seeing it as an extension of public space within civil society and an accomplishment of democratic society (Evers 1995, p.166). As such, the nature of these organizations can range from interdisciplinary, community-based arts-focused organizations, to those bearing a closer resemblance to service-oriented organizations, with a great focus on activities within a specific neighbourhood, and everything in between. The most significant aspect of this definition is that these groups operate as an extension of existing community interests and public space.

In recent years, the role of the third sector has evolved through neoliberalism from representing the needs and interests of civil society and urban social movements, to addressing public service deficits left by decades of austerity measures (Paarlberg & Yoshioka, 2015). Evans and Shields describe how the third sector has recently been tasked with more responsibilities historically led by the Canadian government in the Keynesian era of public policy development, as a result of the move towards a welfare pluralist approach to social policy development (Evans & Shields 2010, p.307). The shift towards a professionalized and service-oriented third sector raises concerns relating to the ability of the sector to act autonomously and representing local needs, described by Paarlberg & Yoshioka as,

“The global economic forces that press community leaders to look to nonprofits to assume greater responsibility for local service delivery may also limit the capacity of community organizations to respond to local needs.” (Paarlberg & Yoshioka 2015, p. 340).

Faced with the burden of making up for the shortcomings of the public sector, and reliant on funding from the private sector, the autonomy of groups in the development of their programs and mandates end up being more reflective of the needs and values of the public and private sector than those of the communities which they aim to serve (Paarlberg & Yoshioka 2015).

The significance of an autonomous third sector in urban and social planning practices has evolved since first discussed by Manuel Castells and Ray Pahl in the 1960s. Castells and Pahl led early discussions on city planning and grassroots movements that were unique at the time in asserting that “planning must be social” in contrast to the more technocratic approach taken by prominent planners at the time (Mayer 2017). Castells and Pahl articulated the significance of grassroots movements in city-building and social planning in regards to their lead role in representing the needs of the people to a greater degree than the public and private sectors (Mayer 2017). More recently,

Deborah G. Martin has built upon this argument through a discussion of the role of community organizations as an important outlet and engagement method for citizens of a city to challenge or influence local government. (Martin 2004), supporting the identification of the third sector as having the potential to act as a vehicle for social representation as it is understood in this paper.

The significance of the discussion of community autonomy in the Toronto context is covered in the 2016 report *Connecting the Power of People to the Power of Place: How Community-Based Organizations Influence Neighbourhood Collective Agency*, written by Jessica Carrière, Rob Howarth, and Emily Paradis. This report explores the question as to “how collective agency emerges in neighbourhoods, and how community-based organizations may promote or inhibit it”(Carriere, Haworth, Paradis 2016, p.iii). This study addresses the rising inequality and diminishing resources in Toronto’s neighbourhoods resulting from decades of economic changes and austerity policies, consistent with the argument presented by Paarlberg & Yoshioka above, and the role that collective agency, tied to specific neighbourhoods, can play to address this (Carriere, Haworth, Paradis 2016). Collective agency (a synonym of community autonomy) is used as a characteristic that differentiates community-based organizations representing local interests from those operating as service-oriented organizations, as an expression of the neoliberal downloading of responsibilities to the third sector. The report further reflects on the impact that “an over-reliance on service provision may inhibit collective agency and sustain the very systems that fuel deteriorating conditions in neighbourhoods.”(Carriere, Haworth, Paradis 2016, p.iv), reflecting on the changing role of the third sector in the neoliberal context and the collective agency potential of the sector in absence of the imposition of a more service-oriented role.

Another Toronto-specific report, the Parkdale Planning Study, was conducted with similar intentions as a result of the increasing gentrification pressures facing the neighbourhood, and its desire to maintain infrastructure that is “affordable and accessible to diverse community members” in one of Toronto’s downtown neighbourhoods (PCED 2016, p.4). This study is explicit in its understanding of the

significance of the neighbourhood's diverse community of nonprofit organizations as central to the success of Parkdale's social infrastructure (p.12). Community-based nonprofit-oriented social infrastructure is identified as a key component that has contributed to "keeping Parkdale inclusive and accessible while also helping mitigate displacement pressures." (p.12). Consistent with the arguments presented within this research project as well as relating to collective community agency, the subject organizations of the Parkdale study are described as being of central importance to the neighbourhood's social infrastructure. Relevant to both of the local reports discussed here is the fact that many of the smaller organizations addressed are currently facing funding and real estate pressures that are contributing to the uncertainty as to whether they will be able to remain within the neighbourhood without leases that are both long-term (greater than five years) and affordable (p.12). The framing of community-based nonprofit organizations as central to the neighbourhood's social infrastructure, and the threat that unpredictable leases and rising rental costs have to the maintenance of this infrastructure, as it is presented in this report, is exemplary of the argument made in this research project.

Building on the significance of local community organizing efforts in the response to COVID-19, Dean Spade's 2020 publication *Mutual Aid*, highlights the significance of local organizing efforts coinciding with social movements in response to local and global crises. Operating under the umbrella of the third sector, the grassroots activities of mutual aid groups and the belief in "solidarity not charity", are inherently operating at a local community scale, making mutual aid initiatives an integral component of the present and future community infrastructure of cities in the "post"-Covid era. The focus of these initiatives on providing support for communities through mutual aid efforts, as opposed to through traditional neoliberal community service delivery and charity, is a central component of the significance of autonomous community spaces, with both the mission and delivery models determined by community, and for community (Spade 2020). The evolution of the definition of the community-based third sector, from a top-down model of service delivery, to more horizontal governance, is consistent with

the argument that the development of more autonomous community space is necessary for a “post”-pandemic city.

4.2 Community-based organizations in the neoliberal context

The degree to which community-based organizations in Toronto’s gentrifying neighbourhoods are impacted by neoliberal urban development processes is better understood through a review of the evolving nature and core objectives of these processes, led by the public and private sectors. Connecting to the gentrification-focused work of Neil Smith, the privatization of Toronto’s urban development processes is consistent with the dominant characteristics of the evolution of gentrification described by Smith as involving more than just the individual (Glass 1964), rather, it can now be understood as a generalized neoliberal framework through which urban development processes are taking place (Smith 1996). The expansion of the meaning of the term now incorporates the roles of all actors involved in the development of urban space, with impacts felt beyond the immediate neighbourhoods and stakeholders directly involved in development processes.

“To explain gentrification according to the gentrifier’s preferences alone, while ignoring the role of builders, developers, landlords, mortgage lenders, government agencies, real estate agents - gentrifiers as producers- is excessively narrow. A broader theory of gentrification must take the role of the producers as well as the consumers into account, and when this is done it appears that the needs of production - in particular the need to earn profit - are a more decisive initiative behind gentrification than consumer preference” (Smith 1996, p. 55).

Specifically, the “need to make profit” as is mentioned in the quote from Smith’s work above is later addressed as one of the primary and persistent challenges faced by the organizations discussed in this report. The escalation of the valorization of space through gentrification is a core component of what influences the displacement and

reduction in the autonomy of these organizations to operate according to their own objectives.

Gentrification in Toronto's downtown neighbourhoods is largely the result of "new build" private and public-private developments as has been described and discussed in the work of Mark Davidson & Loretta Lees (2009) and Ute Lehrer & Thorben Wieditz (2009). The significance of new-build projects within the Toronto landscape has been discussed by Ute Lehrer, Roger Kiel and Stefan Kipfer in *Reurbanization in Toronto: Condominium boom and social housing revitalization* (2010) as projects that "cater to a new group of consumers of urban space" (Lehrer, Keil, Kipfer 2010, 82). Within this work and the discussion of the "neoliberalization of urban space" the argument is made that Toronto has been developed as a "profit-maximizing place" as a result of neoliberal restructuring of all levels of government, understanding planning as a deregulated practice (Lehrer, Keil & Kipfer, 2010). This work further argues that the interpretation of public interests within this neoliberal context relates primarily to economic prosperity (Lehrer, Keil & Kipfer, 2010, p. 89), directly contrasting the objectives of the third sector from the perspective of a community-based organization as furthering the interests of civil society (Evers 1995, p. 166).

The relationship between the neoliberal urban development processes discussed here and the role of the third sector, has been articulated through the work of Teresa Irene Gonzales (2017) on the collaboration between the state, Community Development Agencies and grassroots neighbourhood groups. Gonzales's work proceeds to explore the professionalization and diminishing autonomy of the third sector relating to the manner in which the sector has been involved in gentrification and redevelopment projects. In the paper, *Two sides of the same coin: The New Communities' Program, grassroots organizations, and leadership development in two Chicago neighborhoods* (2017), Gonzales argues that the inclusion of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in the development process, as agencies that have the capacity to serve as representatives of the communities in question, and the ways in which these groups are involved in the community consultation processes frequently leads to the integration of

CBOs as a “professionalized arm of the state” (Gonzales 2017, p. 1140) reflecting the work of Parberg & Yoshioka (2015). This shift in the role of CBO’s in the context of neoliberal urban development processes reduces the role of nonprofit partners as agents involved with the intention to prioritize the needs of the communities represented, diminishing their role to one of a complicit partner in the transformation of the urban landscape and class structures (Gonzales 2017). These redevelopment collaboration and consultation processes then serve to build consensus amongst CBOs in relation to state-led redevelopment processes rather than respond to and promote the needs of CBOs at the table (Gonzales 2017).

“this transformation of the voluntary sector into a professionalized arm of the state is a deliberate process undertaken by local government agencies. It is done to build consensus around city-sponsored redevelopment campaigns that privilege higher income residents.” (Gonzales, 2017, p.1140)

The work of Paul O’Hare, *Resisting the 'Long-Arm' of the State? Spheres of Capture and Opportunities for Autonomy in Community Governance* (2018), builds on the work of Gonzales, identifying the ways in which the retreat of the public sector through neoliberalism has at the same time increased the role of the third sector, while developing new governance structure through which its autonomy is diminished (O’Hare 2018). Specifically relating to the community revitalization (discussed as “regeneration” in this context) O’Hare argues that while processes led by these new governance structures have coerced community-based organizations into partnerships that diminish their autonomy in favour of state interests (as described by Gonzales), there are methods that can be used by community-led groups within this framework to maintain a functional level of autonomy (O’Hare 2018). Though the central argument of his work is to introduce the possibility of continued community autonomy within the context of the neoliberal urban environment, he admits to the vulnerability of this autonomy, which is dependent on both the capacity of the organizations involved to manipulate the process in favour of their interests, while also avoiding co-option by the public and private sector for the purposes of increasing the appeal and desirability of a development: *“Autonomy*

is also therefore vulnerable, reliant upon and often threatened by powers that may well be predisposed to co-opt and capture alternative movements.” (O’Hare 2018, p.223)

4.3 Spatial justice and the right to the city

Contrasting the discussion of the ways in which neoliberal urban development processes inhibit the ability of the third sector to act autonomously in regards to access to space, is the discussion of spatial justice and the right to the city. Spatial justice as it relates to the discussion of community access to space in gentrifying cities as the focus of this research project is founded on the modern reinterpretations of Henri Lefebvre’s “right to the city”; relating to the right to both access and shape the use of space based on use value as determined by urban citizens as opposed to the neoliberal process which determines the use of space through its market value. Lefebvre’s original definition of the concept focused on the idea of developing a new “contract of citizenship” between the state and citizens that is constantly evolving to include a more radical inclusion of rights (Lefebvre, 1968). This “contract” was described by Lefebvre as a “cry and demand” which must constantly be evolving and never fully achieved (Purcell, 2014). The redefinition of the concept includes the right to shape and be shaped by the city, the right to participation, the right to centrality, and the right to difference (Purcell, 2014). In the gentrifying city, these rights are continuously infringed upon in the ongoing privatization of space as described in the previous section and the allocation of significant (if not total) control over determining the use of urban space, to private entities.

David Harvey’s modern interpretation of the right to the city has developed in conjunction with the growth of urban social movements, taking into consideration the decision-making power of urban citizens to have influence over the development of the urban environments in which they live (Harvey, 2012). The significance of community based organizations as promoters of urban democracy, as defined in the section on the third sector, positions them well to address this aspect of the right to the city by proxy,

as these organizations are intended to represent the interests of local communities, thereby holding great potential to further a community's right to the city and the ways in which urban space is developed. Though registered nonprofit organizations are agents of the state by nature of being legal entities, as are unregistered organizations operating within the urban neoliberal context (in regards to their access to space through legal contracts), I would argue that the position of community-based organizations within the third sector affords them the greatest potential to represent the evolving needs and interests of urban citizens, and to work towards the right to the city for diverse urban communities. I believe that this understanding of the positionality of the third sector as encompassing the greatest potential to act as advocates for the right to the city is consistent with Lefebvre's argument that the contract between the state and its citizens presents the greatest potential for a "recapture a revolutionary potential from the project of rights", though the significance of "rights" and "citizenship are themselves a "liberal-democratic or bourgeois project" (Purcell 2014, 146).

Connecting the concept of the right to the city with that of spatial justice, Kunzmann argues that spatial justice is "an unfulfilled dream of the socially-minded planning community" largely because those with access to land or "space" in urban environments are not willing to forfeit their right to determine the use of and access to their property (Kunzmann 1998, p.101). Within the context of the neoliberal city and the rampant valorization of real estate through gentrification, the concept of equitable distribution of and access to "space" is significant in determining whether those unable to increase the profitability of their work can maintain any degree of the right to the city. Kunzmann's work argues for planning approaches that promote spatial justice and proposes that wealth and land can be redistributed from richer to poorer communities in an effort to encourage equitable access to space across geographic regions (Kunzmann 1998, p.101). An important component of this idea is that the use of space is not predetermined by those in the position to redistribute their resources.

Fainstein's approach to spatial justice builds upon the literature reviewed within the section on the community-based third sector, centering the neighbourhood as the basic

unit of consideration in determining the extent to which spatial justice is measured (Fainstein 2006). In reviewing Fainstein's work, Roberto Rocco, PhD writes that "*Spatial justice is firmly inscribed in a longer tradition of citizen empowerment and participation that seeks to deepen the democratic experience and to connect it to how citizens decide upon distribution and shape the city.*" (Rocco 2020). The neighbourhood is identified by Fainstein as having the greatest potential for the promotion of democracy and the least amount of power, with decision-making power increasing as one travels up the political hierarchy of the neoliberal city (Fainstein 2006, p.3). In this way, Fainstein's work ties the work of spatial justice advocates to the strengthening of the work of those tied to specific neighbourhood contexts in the urban environment. She expresses that in determining the extent to which qualities of a "Just" city have been realized, we need to consider "*redevelopment programs, the character of public space, the extent and character of property rights, the extent of redistributive programs and the relations among and spatial distribution of different social groups*"(Fainstein 2006, p.16) - all characteristics that are also tied to the modern study of gentrification and the neoliberal urban development processes that determine how space is valued and consumed.

The way in which the right to the city further connects with the significance of CBOs as playing a central role in strengthening the democracy of cities is through the interpretation of the right to the city as the right to difference, as articulated by Michele Grigolo. The central question posed by Grigolo is "how far the right to the city constrains and can eventually convey the right to difference?"(Grigolo 2019, p.23). Grigolo applies Purcell's articulation of the right to the city as a theoretical framework that elicits "user-centred approaches to city government and the management and organization of space to combat the capitalist exploitation and neoliberal governance of the city" (Purcell, 2002; Sugranyes and Mathivet, 2011; Belda-Miquel et al., 2016) in the development of this central argument. This difference is identified as being embraced and implemented primarily by social groups within a city that are typically marginalized and oppressed by neoliberal policies (Grigolo 2019, p.26) - those whose interests and needs are not reflected in policies and programs developed by the public and private

sectors. Within the discussion on spatial justice and community access to space, the significance of such spaces for people who have been and continue to be marginalized by neoliberal urban development processes and policies, lies in the ability of such spaces to support prefigurative organizing, the development of systems of support (i.e. mutual aid) and new realities that do not exist beyond those spaces (Reinecke, 2018) . In this discussion on the right to the city and the right to difference, the right to self-determination and the development of realities separate from neoliberal systems of oppression, the rights of communities in their access to space for autonomous use, is the expression of the right to difference in the context of the neoliberal city.

Contextualizing the literature review

As a topic that is not yet well-defined in existing literature, the combination of third sector, neoliberal urbanism and spatial justice work that has been reviewed in this section supports the analysis of the relationship between community-based organizations, neoliberal urban development processes and access to space in Toronto. As the third sector is an expansive sector, with actors that have become complicit within the gentrification of Toronto's neighbourhoods, the differentiation of autonomous community-based organizations as the focus of this research situates this analysis within a specific context that is threatened by, rather than complicit with the neoliberal urban development processes that lead to gentrification. By tying the work of these groups to the right to the city discussion, we are better able to understand the significance of access to space for organizations that are representative of community interests, as a question of the degree to which spatial justice is facilitated or inhibited by the neoliberal urban development context of Toronto.

5. Research Context

The context to be considered for this project is that of Toronto's evolution as a neoliberal city (relating to the valorization of real estate and the role of the third sector) and the main methods currently used by community-based organizations in their search for

space. This section will be developed from the perspective of a community-based organization searching for space.

Your organization is interested in finding space.

What are the options?

Who controls this space, and what is the nature of these spaces?

What is the regulatory framework that governs these options?

The context of interest is that in which community-based nonprofits are developed, which relates to both real estate in Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods as well as the social infrastructure policies that influence the activities of these groups. This includes the neoliberal policies that have reframed the role of the third sector in city planning, as well as the city's evolving relationship with real estate. An overview will be provided followed by further analysis within the findings section to reflect on the primary barriers and concerns expressed by organizations operating within this context.

5.1 The neoliberal governance of social infrastructure in Toronto

The neoliberal social policy framework currently in use in Toronto is the result of decades of disinvestment in the public sector, and a combination of the Harris government's objective to promote Toronto as a "global city" (Kipfer & Keil 2002; Keil 1998, 2002) as well as the amalgamation of Toronto under Mayor Mel Lastman (Fanelli, 2014). With the downloading of social programs and services to the municipal government, in combination with the Great Recession of 2008, all mayors, regardless of their political leanings, have reinforced the prominence of neoliberal social policy frameworks in Toronto (Fanelli, 2014). Despite the need for increased social infrastructure through public investment after the Great Recession of 2008, provincial funding cuts and the municipal government's shift towards privatization has resulted in

continued disinvestment in the local and community-oriented sector (Fanelli, 2014). The main objective of the city through neoliberalism is now to appeal to the investment of international capital (Kipfer & Keil, 2002; Keil 1998, 2002), compensating for the lack of local investment from every level of government (Fanelli, 2014). The disinvestment of the public sector in the provision of social programs and infrastructure has consequently resulted in a greater financial burden for third sector organizations to address, increasing the pressure for these organizations to appeal to private investors whose interests restrict the ways in which funding can be spent. The result is increasing pressure for third sector work to both fill the gaps left in Toronto's social infrastructure by an increasingly neoliberal policy framework as well as pressure to conform to the interests of investors in their appeals for financial support. The long term impacts of this approach are well articulated in the findings of the Collective Community Agency report, as is discussed in the literature review, as inhibiting the collective agency of community-based groups through the necessity to focus their activities on service provision in their appeals for support (Carriere, Haworth, Paradis 2016, iii). This shift is indicative of the changing urban context in which community-based organizations now operate in Toronto, making it increasingly difficult to illustrate the significance of interdisciplinary community-based work that does not fit within the restrictive service provider context.

The increased burden of service delivery now falling upon the third sector has influenced the governance and development of social infrastructure across the city, focusing mainly on the development of community centres and hubs that have the capacity to support numerous activities at once. These centres promote the use of space through "co-location" or sharing of space by numerous community agencies (CUI 2018). The development of community hubs has mainly taken place through Public-Private Partnerships, with anchor community agencies responsible for the management of these spaces. The Canadian Urban Institute partnered with the City of Toronto in 2018, as part of the city's TOcore Community Services and Facilities study (CSFS), to develop the Downtown Community Services & Facilities Strategy report with the intention to identify community space and facility needs for Toronto's downtown

neighbourhoods (CUI 2018, 1). Community space within the context of this report is consistent with the neoliberal interpretation of the third sector, referring to space used for one of the five “community sectors” as identified by the city of Toronto - schools, child care, libraries, recreation and human services (CUI 2018, 1). Within the CS&F study it is stated that the following terms are used interchangeably: community services & facilities, public service facilities, social infrastructure, community infrastructure, and community services. The study’s objectives and interpretation of community space are consistent with that of the neoliberal city, with key areas of focus relating mostly to the development of service-oriented hubs, outlined within the city’s Official Plan as a shared responsibility of the city, public agencies and private developers (CUI 2018, 12).

With this understanding of how social infrastructure and community-based work is defined by the city of Toronto, we can review the programs and policies that have been developed to support the ongoing development of community infrastructure across the city. The service-oriented approach to framing the value of community-based work has informed the ways in which community-based work is understood, defined and prioritized in the development of the amalgamated city of Toronto.

5.2 Policies, Programs and Methods for accessing space for community-based organizations in Toronto

Community Hubs

The term Community Hub has become common within community and social planning conversations in Toronto, mainly presented as a solution to the distribution of services to statistically underserved neighbourhoods. These hub spaces have been developed in under-utilized public buildings, and are typically implemented through partnerships between the city of Toronto, a combination of private and foundation funding and a lead nonprofit organization. Examples of community hubs currently operating in Toronto include:

- **Daniels Spectrum:** negotiated through the Daniels Corporation for the Regent Park Revitalization project) (Daniels Spectrum, 2021)
- **West Neighbourhood House:** established in a faith-based building, now supported by the United Way (WNH, 2021)
- **United Way Hubs:** located in Toronto’s inner suburbs (Community Hubs of Toronto, 2021)
- **St. James Town Community Corner:** a member of the St. James Town Service Providers Network, operating out of a Toronto Community Housing building since May 2011. (SJT, 2021)
- **Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre (PARC):** supported by the Ministry of Health - Community Mental Health Branch, the City of Toronto, United Way and donors. (TCHL, 2021)

The development of these hubs has tended towards the delivery of services such as employment training, legal clinics, social services and pop-up service provision, with many of these hubs operating primarily as community health centres, with auxiliary rooms made accessible for use as meeting spaces and for events. Opportunities to access space through community hubs differ based on the planning and coordination practices used by the agencies leading the development of each specific hub project, with anchor tenants (those leading the management of the hub and with permanent space) typically engaged at early stages within the community consultation processes or through application processes (as has been the case with Daniels Spectrum). Long and short term spaces are typically rented out at a subsidized rate, and typically require proof of liability insurance.

CreateTO & the management of public real estate

CreateTO was established by the City of Toronto on January 1, 2018 to manage the city’s real estate portfolio, consisting of 8,000 properties on 28,823 acres of land (CreateTO, 2021). The agency’s main objective is currently to centralize the city’s real estate strategy, “creating more livable, sustainable and inclusive communities.” (CreateTO, 2021). This agency functions in a manner similar to that of a private developer, conducting community consultations with local stakeholders to extract

community interests which are then incorporated into the development of a plan for the best use of various city-owned properties. Since 2018, CreateTO has led the development of several community hub projects, including the Parkdale Hub in downtown Toronto. The significance of this agency to this discussion is that it is currently responsible for the management of all underutilized public lands in the City of Toronto, combining the work of what had been the responsibility of 24 public and private agencies including Build Toronto and the Toronto Port Lands Company, the City of Toronto's Real Estate Services and Facilities Management divisions (CreateTO, 2021). The selection of community agencies and buildings to be used in the development of hub spaces is completed by the CreateTO team, with no official channel for community organizations to request space through on their own.

An inquiry as to how community organizations might be able to access space through CreateTO in February 2021 was met with a response that identifies community-based organizations as key informants in the consultation processes for projects, without an official channel through which space can be requested:

“CreateTO and the City of Toronto create a Local Advisory Committee (LAC) for many projects to share and seek feedback from organizations. Organizations are selected by working with the Councillor’s office to identify appropriate groups and through research...for participation in Local Advisory Meetings and (it) is only for the purpose of input in the public consultation process. By no means is it focused on, guarantees or provides access to programming and operating space.” (N. Sprina, personal communication, February 25, 2021)

Privatized landscapes & Community Benefits Agreements

As has been discussed in the literature review, Toronto's pursuit of global city status has resulted in a privatized downtown landscape dominated by luxury condominium and public-private developments (Lehrer, Kiel & Kipfer, 2010). Within this neoliberal restructuring of Toronto's urban development processes, Community Benefits Agreements (CBA) have been developed as an avenue through which community interests can be represented. The Mowat Centre at the University of Toronto was

commissioned by The Atkinson Foundation in 2015 to develop a report on CBAs in which they are defined as *“formal agreements between a real estate or infrastructure developer and a coalition that reflects and represents people who are affected by a large development project. The agreement outlines the benefits the community will enjoy from the project.”* (Galley, 2015). These agreements are established in neighbourhoods where major developments are taking place in order to ensure that substantial community benefits are established for communities that may not benefit directly from the development itself. This typically includes the initiation of a community consultation process with local stakeholders from historically underrepresented groups (Galley, 2015). The establishment of CBAs was first introduced and popularized in Toronto by the Regent Park Revitalization project which has boasted a strong commitment to maintaining and supporting the Regent Park community (James, 2015).

Though CBAs themselves are legally-binding agreements negotiated between community groups and a private developer, the developer is not legally obligated to establish a CBA with every new development project (Galley, 2015). Though these agreements are still relatively new in the Toronto context, the primary demands included in the CBA process are typically employment opportunities, affordable housing and community & environmental improvements (Galley, 2015). Community access to space has been provided by way of the development of community infrastructure such as the Daniels Spectrum building in Regent Park. The development of spaces through CBAs, such as Daniels Spectrum, does not include a commitment to providing these spaces for free or at a subsidized rate.

Section 37 & Community Agency Space

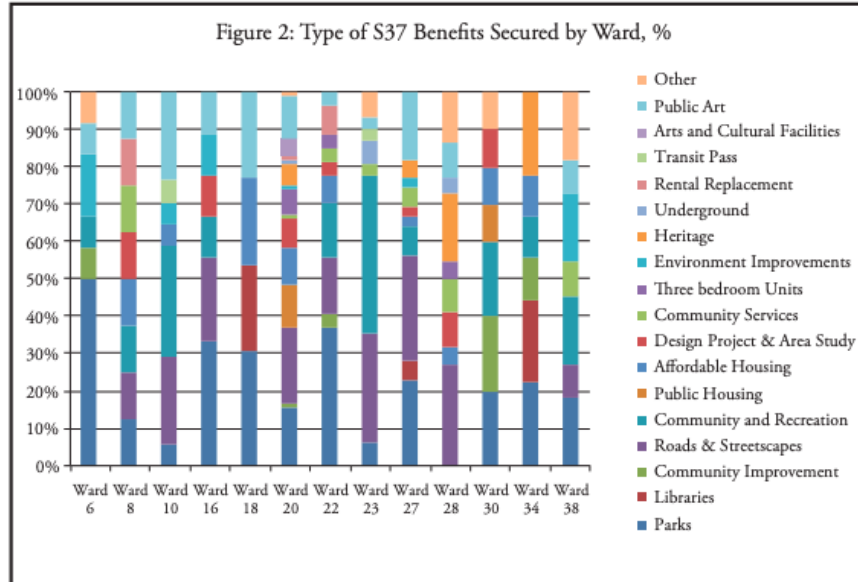
Section 37 refers to the section of the Ontario Planning Act which permits the city of Toronto to approve building height and density exemptions for new developments in exchange for community benefits (City of Toronto, 2019). This differs from the process established for the negotiation of CBAs in that Section 37 is only initiated in the instance of a request for exemptions, with the negotiated community benefits legally bound to the approval of a building permit.

This major research project was completed in 2021, and the organizations consulted had received support through the previous iteration of Section 37 that ended on September 18, 2020. As of September 2020, significant changes made to Section 37 through Bill 197 have come into effect. Bill 197 introduced regulation 509/20, repealing and replacing Sections 37 & 37.1 of the Planning Act with Community Benefits Charges (CBC) (Urban Strategies, 2020). These changes are significant in regards to the potential to secure funds as CBCs will no longer be imposed on non-residential developments, including commercial office buildings which until now have provided significant contributions to Section 37 fundings in Toronto's downtown neighbourhoods (Urban Strategies, 2020). While these changes are significant, it is believed that the analysis presented within this paper regarding the lack of transparency and inequitable distribution of Section 37 funds by city councillors, will continue to serve as a barrier for community organizations in need of access to operating space, with the changes implemented through Bill 197.

The structure of Section 37 has provided opportunities for community organizations to access capital funds for the acquisition and development of "community agency space", however in practice this is one of the areas that has received the lowest investment. The majority of Section 37 funds have historically been allocated towards streetscape improvements, with "community centres and arenas" second. Of note is that the majority of these centres are representative of the large scale infrastructure defined in the Canadian Urban Institute's report, and also for capital improvements to existing space rather than the acquisition of new space. Of the \$112.3 million negotiated and approved in 2013 and 2014 the amounts allocated to the development of community infrastructure included (City Planning Division, 2015):

- \$11,760,000 for community centres and arenas from 6 development approvals;
- \$2,565,000 for public agency space, other non-profit community agencies, boards, or commissions and/or cultural facilities from 12 development approvals;

Figure 2. Type of S37 Benefits Secured by Ward, %



Source: Trading Density for Benefits, 2013, Alan A. Moore

These negotiations are largely negotiated by the local councillor and the community agencies involved, with community agencies identified by local councillors based on the existing knowledge of space needs within the city. Though Implementation Guidelines for Section 37 of the Planning Act were developed in 2007 (City of Toronto, 2007), there is still a lack of transparency regarding the processes used by councillors in the determination of how funds are allocated, as the process requires community organizations to have their needs known and understood by the councillor’s office (Keenan 2015). This concern persists with the changes introduced through Bill 197.

Public-Nonprofit Partnerships - For Public Benefit Framework

In addition to the options discussed above, the city of Toronto has developed a framework for working with nonprofit organizations that includes a Community Space

Tenancy program through which organizations can access operating space. Within the framework, the city's relationship with the nonprofit sector is described as follows:

“The City of Toronto relies on the NFP sector to deliver hundreds of community services to residents, including but not limited to social housing, children’s services, employment services and arts and cultural programming. The City also looks to the NFP sector to identify and respond to emerging community issues and to help ensure that local voices are heard by decision-makers. In these diverse ways, Toronto’s NFP sector has a profound positive impact on our communities and on safeguarding our democracy.” (Social Development, Finance & Administration 2018, 4)

The nature of the city's relationship with the nonprofit sector is further detailed in the breakdown of the public funds that are invested into the sector on an annual basis. What is reflected is an emphasis on the purchase of services from local community agencies, with an emphasis on shelter and children's services (Social Development, Finance & Administration 2018, 5).

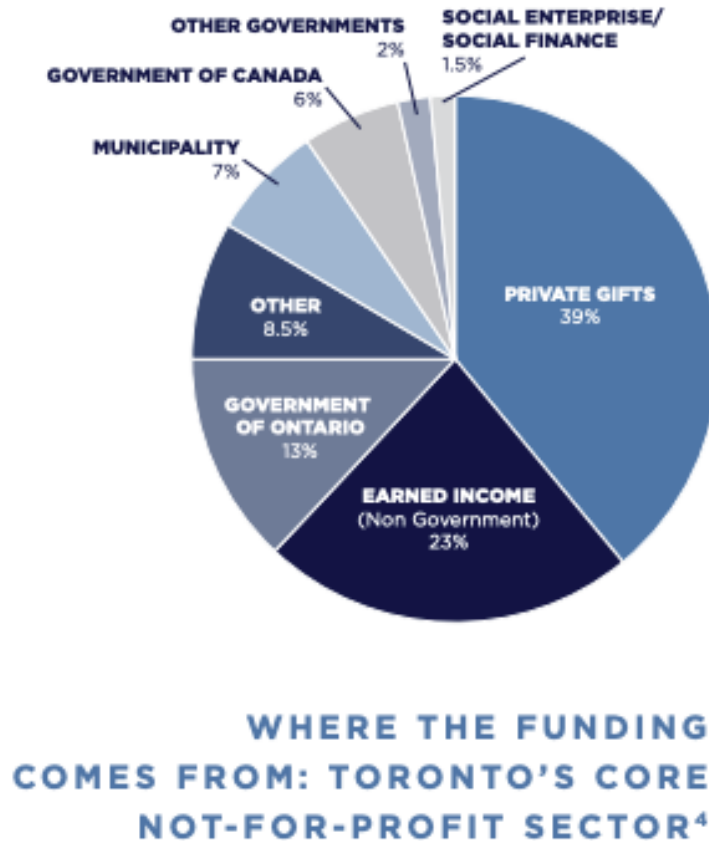
- **Total annual investment: \$1.2 Billion**
 - \$800 million, Grants & purchase of service agreements
 - \$400 million, subsidies for below market rent, fee waivers and tax deductions

Of which:

- **\$696 million invested in two main sectors**
 - \$489 million is invested in shelter/hostel services, social housing and related services
 - \$207 million is invested in children's services
- **\$504,000,000 is invested in additional sectors**

Though this might sound like a significant amount of support, this represents a relatively insignificant amount of support for the sector as a whole as municipal funding accounts for 7% of support received by Toronto's nonprofit sector:

Figure 3. Where the funding comes from: Toronto's Core Not-for-profit Sector



Source: For Public Benefit Framework, 2017 page 6

The statement of commitment from the city within this framework identifies eight core commitments to the nonprofit sector, with the eighth commitment relating to access to space:

8. **Community Space:** *The City commits to developing policies and partnerships that improve the community-based not-for-profit sector's access to decent, affordable facilities and spaces to provide community services and programming.*

The City recognizes the public benefits that are generated through community-operated and community-owned space in Toronto and is committed to helping build sector capacity to acquire and leverage real estate assets for community use. (Social Development, Finance & Administration 2018, 10)

Community Space Tenancy Eligibility

The official eligibility criteria for organizations interested in accessing space through the CST program is inclusive of organizations of varying sizes, mandates and capacity.

Applicant organizations must be (City of Toronto, 2021):

- grassroots, not-for-profit groups or organizations
- based in community service, arts and culture, community health development, and/or recreation
- based in the city of Toronto
- in good financial standing

Applicant organizations must:

- Serve Toronto residents
- Provide services that meet a demonstrated community need (e.g. immigration, youth or seniors' services, etc.)
- Support City of Toronto initiatives or strategies (e.g. Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy, Confronting Anti-Black Racism, etc.)

The nature of the spaces leased to community groups through this program varies depending on the availability and priority of units as determined by the Social Development, Finance & Administration department of the city of Toronto. One posting was found during the research phase of this project with the following details (City of Toronto, 2021):

- Former Kent School (TDSB)
- 980 Dufferin St.
- Available in 2023
- Agency must fundraise \$500,000.00 to be considered
- 20,000 Square Feet

Naturally Occurring Community Spaces (NOCS)

Another avenue through which community-based organizations access space is by seeking out “Naturally Occurring Community Spaces”. The concept of “naturally occurring” as it relates to community spaces in the context of this project is borrowed from the concept of “Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing” (NOAH), which has been used to describe housing that is affordable for people earning the median or below the median income (Carlisle 2017). Applied to the conversation on community spaces, this concept can be applied to refer to the spaces that have served as hosts for community organizations in the past due to their availability and relative affordability. These spaces are typically not developed with the intention to be used by community agencies, rather their affordability, availability, relatively barrier-free accessibility and centrality within a community make them ideal for community-use. Within the context of this paper, these spaces include, but are not limited to, affordable commercial units and underutilized spaces.

Affordable commercial units

Commercial units offer the visibility and flexibility in use of space that can support the need to be accessible and conveniently located, as well as the variety of activities provided through the third sector. Access to commercial space is primarily dependent on the ability of an organization to develop a business model to afford the costs associated with commercial spaces, with few restrictions regarding the ways in which the space is used. This makes affordable commercial units the most autonomous space option identified in this section as the main variables determining access and use of commercial spaces are the monthly costs, and the lease length negotiated with a commercial landlord. Unlike the other space options mentioned, the use of space does not require approval based on need, merit, or social value in order for organizations to secure access to space. Covered by the Commercial Tenancies Act, the details of commercial leases including length and rate are to be negotiated with the landlord (CTA, 2021). The standard commercial lease length in Toronto is currently 5 years, with no control on the amount that rent can be increased in between leases (CTA, 2021).

Underutilized spaces

One of the major challenges associated with measuring and documenting community use of space is the reliance of community-based groups on a variety of spaces that are ideal simply because they are underutilized by the current building operator, and centrally located. Within Toronto these spaces tend to be located within schools, churches, and community centres and typically require a combination of partnership-building, minimal payment for the use of space, insurance coverage and schedule flexibility. Initiatives such as the Community Use of Schools program, a program enabled by provincial funding, have been formalized through online application programs and insurance requirements, while community use of underutilized faith-based spaces remains relatively informal in Toronto. Various advocacy organizations and initiatives in Toronto are currently working to advocate for the development of a more comprehensive inventory of these spaces, while also reducing the barriers (i.e. liability insurance requirements) that make these spaces inaccessible to some groups. Some of the main initiatives involved in this work include:

- **S.P.A.C.E Coalition**, a project of Social Planning Toronto
- **Why Not Theatre**, connecting arts-based organizations with underutilized space
- **City of Toronto Community Space Registry**, a registry developed to identify community space needs and availability for redistribution. Results to be presented in 2021. (City of Toronto, 2019)

The lack of data on this topic is echoed in the No Space for Community Final Report from July 2020 which states that as of 2020 when this report was published, “*There is currently no precise data on faith building usage by the nonprofit sector in Ontario, let alone Canada.*” (Fry & Friesen 2020, p.5). This report was completed as a partnership between Faith & the Common Good, Ontario Nonprofit Network, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Cardus, the City of Toronto, The National Trust for Canada. As of yet there are currently no similar studies available regarding the use of commercial units or additional community infrastructure by nonprofit organizations in Ontario.

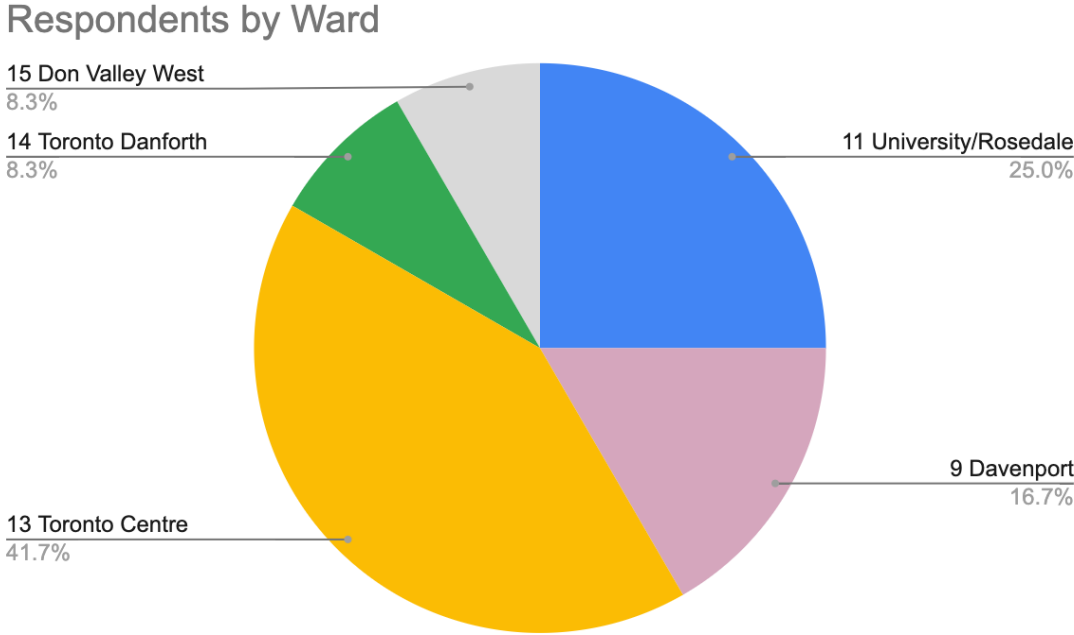
Contextualizing the findings

The policies and programs outlined in this section support the analysis of the following section by illustrating the context in which community-based organizations operate in the city of Toronto, and the primary channels that exist within the neoliberal governance context of the city for accessing space for community use. As has been presented, some of the channels are the direct result of the proliferation of neoliberal urban development processes (i.e. Section 37 & Community Benefit Agreements), the downloading of social services to the third sector (Community Hubs and Community Space Tenancy) and others are representative of the ways in which the community-based third sector has evolved to occupy spaces that have been developed for other uses (i.e. Naturally Occurring Community Spaces). By providing this context as a frame of reference, the analysis presented in the findings section is better understood as we are able to examine the ways in which the community-based organizations participating in this project are currently interacting with the various channels that exist. By navigating the options presented here, from the perspective of a community-based organization, we can gain a stronger understanding of both the work that is supported within the context of the neoliberal city as well as the nature of the groups that are unable to fit within the requirements of the options outlined above. In the following section an analysis will be presented relating to the experiences of community-based organizations in Toronto's downtown neighbourhoods and their acquisition of space using a variety of the methods outlined here.

6. Findings

Throughout the interview and survey process for this project, it became very clear that each organization is facing unique challenges that impact their sustainability and ability to function autonomously, specifically relating to access to space. The organizations participating in this project are all currently operating within Toronto’s downtown neighbourhoods, with the majority of respondents located within the Toronto Centre and University-Rosedale wards. The survey was distributed to organizations operating within all of Toronto’s downtown neighbourhoods, however organizations operating in these two wards were most enthusiastic about their participation in this work, and seemed to relate to the research topic more readily than organizations contacted in other areas.

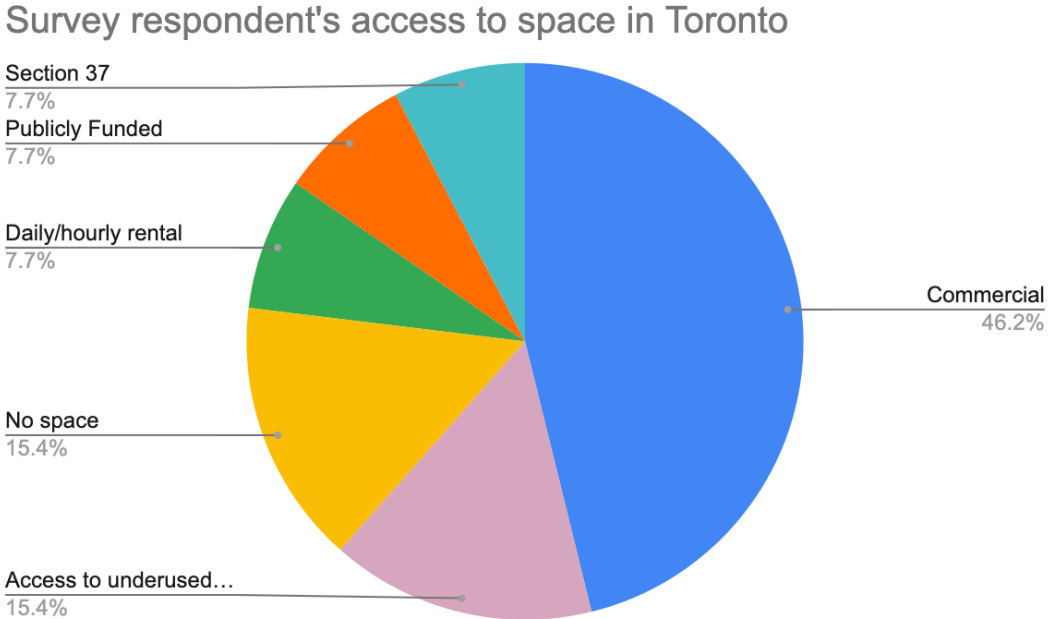
Figure 4. Project participants by Ward



In order to further locate the organizations participating in this project within the context outlined in the previous section, the methods used by participating organizations in their search for space are indicated below. Of note is the fact that the majority of organizations participating in this research are currently using commercial space for

their operations, with the second most common response being access to underutilized space. The organizations in the “No space” category expressed that they are largely dependent on access to underutilized space, and either in between more permanent spaces or in search of their first long-term operating space.

Figure 5. Project participants’ methods of access to space



The relationship between gentrification and access to space for community-based organizations, within the context of this project is complex as the ways in which groups access space varies significantly based on the resources available to each organization as well as their capacity to work within the neoliberal framework of urban development processes in Toronto. Though use of space by community-based organizations is highly variable in nature, with groups participating in this project using space for community bike programs, employment training, arts-based mental health programs, and youth programs; their intention to create spaces that are responsive to the needs of a local community are the same.

The central question being asked is “What is the relationship between gentrification and access to space for community-based organizations in Toronto?”. Following a review of the literature relating to the definition of the third sector and its role in the neoliberal urban context we are better able to understand the implications that the intersection of these two topics have in the conversation on spatial justice and the right to the city. With an understanding of this theoretical framework and a greater understanding of the context in which these groups operate in Toronto, the responses provided by groups participating in this project can be analysed more thoroughly.

Gentrification as a result of neoliberal urban development processes is presented as the main influencing force in this conversation through direct displacement pressures (i.e. the increasing cost of space) as well as through indirect pressures (i.e. inequitable space acquisition processes associated with redevelopment projects). These pressures are largely attributed to the “condoification” (Lehrer & Wieditz 2009) and proliferation of redevelopment projects that are currently synonymous with gentrification in Toronto’s downtown neighbourhoods. An additional influence is the increase in property values that comes with the gentrification of a neighbourhood through these processes.

With this understanding of how each respondent fits within the context presented in the previous chapters, we can pursue an analysis of the additional responses provided through the survey, interviews and focus groups completed for this project. In the discussion of the findings from this research project, I will highlight and define the most significant impacts that this neoliberal urban context has had on access to space for community-based organizations in Toronto. The major themes and discussions resulting from the interviews, survey and focus group completed for this project to be discussed in this section include the following:

- **Top down planning approach**
- **Dependence on neglected and under-utilized spaces**
- **Lack of transparency in the allocation and management of space**
- **Financial pressures**

These themes support my argument that community-based nonprofit organizations in Toronto are currently faced with diminishing their autonomy by adhering to neoliberal standards of real estate and the role of the third sector, or face displacement. The reduction in Naturally Occurring Community Space, replaced by limited subsidized, developer-sponsored and service-oriented spaces, creates an environment in which market-rate spaces present opportunities for the greatest autonomy, with the most displacement risk. Both characteristics of autonomy and displacement risk will be identified within each section of this discussion.

*“We have had to move from a location because of rent increases. We are now looking at the ending of our lease and the building being torn down for condos”
(Participant A., personal communication, June 8, 2021)*

6.1 Top down planning approach

In the search for space I found that the organizations most successful in their ability to secure subsidized or long-term space were those either initiated by the City of Toronto or those whose activities fit with the objectives and values of a developer through either Community Benefit Agreements or Section 37. The pressures faced by community-based nonprofit organizations to adhere to specific sets of deliverables largely determined by funders and supporters is not a new phenomenon (Arvidson & Linde 2021). The majority of the major funding programs available to nonprofit organizations require organizations to state and adhere to specific deliverables that are consistent with the values and objectives of the funding agency (Arvidson & Linde 2021). In the conversation regarding access to space, the top-down planning approach is presented through the allocation of space to organizations that align with the objectives of an authoritative entity such as the city of Toronto, a developer, a larger nonprofit organization or funding agency. This is in contrast to organizations having the power to access space in a manner that is more self-directed, while maintaining total control over their objectives and activities.

An example of this was found within the responses from community bike spaces in Toronto. In 2018 the city of Toronto’s Social Development and waste management

departments collaborated on the development of a Community Bike Hub program, with the set objective to provide “*dedicated workshop spaces to train residents in bicycle assembly, repair, maintenance and safety. It also provides residents with access to tools, equipment and supplies needed to repair bicycles.*” (City of Toronto, 2021). The programs to be implemented in these hub spaces were determined by the municipal departments collaborating on this effort prior to the invitation being extended to agencies to apply for the opportunity to manage each hub space. The community bike hub spaces are currently operating in various locations, with all operating costs currently covered by the city of Toronto (E. Mark, personal communication, May 28, 2021). Funding for these hubs is distributed with the restricted and intended purpose to be used by participating organizations for the delivery of specific positions and program deliverables, as well as rent for a set number of years, as determined by the city. The financial support provided for these hubs is not indefinite, however city departments are currently working with the community agencies managing each space to develop “sustainability plans” (after providing three years of full operating funding) that identify opportunities for these spaces to develop new business models to reduce their dependence on municipal funding (E. Mark, personal communication, May 28, 2021).

In contrast, the independent community bike organizations participating in this research have been operating in various locations across downtown Toronto have done so since 2005 (Bikechain, 2021), operating as nonprofit, volunteer-driven, donation-based social enterprises with diverse governance structures (consensus-based, board governed, staff and volunteer-run). These spaces are able to act autonomously in regards to the development of their programs and objectives, however their self-determination as it relates to maintaining space within specific communities is limited to finding “naturally occurring” affordable commercial space in the neighbourhoods that they work with (B. Wentworth, personal communication, May 28, 2021). The trade-off for the autonomy that these groups have, is the dependence on market-rate commercial spaces and commercial tenancy regulations for their operations. Two independent community bike hubs participating in this research study shared that their continued operations are dependent on the negotiation of new lease agreements with commercial landlords every

five years (B.Wentworth, personal communication, May 28, 2021; Participant B, personal communication, February 12, 2021). One of the community bike spaces surveyed indicated that the organization has moved three times in 10 years due to an inability to negotiate affordable commercial lease agreements upon the expiration of a current agreement (Participant B, personal communication, February 12, 2021), with their location moving further away from the downtown core every five years. The other similar independent organization has been more successful in their negotiations of consecutive lease agreements with their current landlord, however they expressed concern in regards to the fact that they are faced with unpredictable and potentially unaffordable commercial rent increases every five years and may not be able to “survive” the next lease negotiation (B. Wentworth, personal communication, May 28, 2021). This experience is echoed within the Parkdale Planning Report, with the primary concern of nonprofit tenants in the neighbourhood being their ability to secure and maintain consecutive and long-term leases within the neighbourhood (PCED 2016).

“...when I first came on board I wondered why the city would not fund just existing, like, you know, bike share or bike repair community shops, like Bike Pirates, or bikeSauce and stuff like that. And how easy it was for the city to just form one because of the money, it was just, it was just that easy.” (E.Mark, personal communication, May 28, 2021)

Within my own experience during this process, the City of Toronto requested a breakdown of the potential deliverables generated by the organization that I worked for in relation to each level of support and space provided. Ultimately, our contact at the City of Toronto stopped responding during this process and decided to focus on the implementation of the city’s own bike hub program through the selection of lead agencies in pre-selected communities across the city, offering program space and funding with a predetermined program curriculum and set of deliverables. Throughout this process, the independent community bike spaces had proposed that the initial phase of the development of this program be to provide support for the existing groups currently operating under the constant threat of displacement, however this proposal

was not acknowledged or pursued in favour of a program led by the objective of the city of Toronto's own departments.

Additional organizations participating in this project expressed concern regarding the tendency for private developers to dictate the social objectives in determining the use of space and the programs delivered by community agencies. The pattern that is observed is that access to space for community-based organizations is facilitated by public and private entities in accordance with their own objectives rather than in support of community-identified interests. Concerns were raised during the focus group that this results in funding and space allocation that focuses on providing support for more professionalized and service-oriented community-based organizations (M.Webb, personal communication, May 28, 2021). The concern expressed is that the top-down imposition of priorities leaves little to no room for organizations addressing specific neighbourhood needs to access support and to be prioritized by the municipal government or private developers for resources that support their efforts. By withholding this support from community-based groups, those in control of space withhold the rights of these groups to operate in a self-determined manner, instead prioritizing efforts that are predetermined by the public sector as essential. This is also reflected within the processes employed by CreateTO, with community use of space determined based on the greater intentions and objectives set by the agency.

The Executive Director of a youth-focused organization in Regent Park expressed frustration in regards to the imposition of the Daniels' Corporation's desire to make the neighbourhood a leader in urban agriculture in Toronto, though the organization's mandate and experience does not share this approach,

"I feel like [organization] is kind of, you know, carrying the torch for urban agriculture in Regent Park, and it's really not our mission, our mission is much more, you know, Child and Youth related and school garden specific. So it's, you know, it's kind of an odd place to be, but, you know, as you know, you kind of roll with the, with what you get."

“we’re at the mercy of developers, even if the city is trying to like, to do the right thing and use their land in the best way...you know, it’s still the developers that, you know, have a name and have a financial interest” (Participant C, personal communication, May 26, 2021)

The pressure placed on this organization to support the developer in their pursuit of a goal beyond the organization’s scope, further illustrates the top-down pressure that is placed on organizations to operate within the framework articulated by the developer’s greater interests, while attempting to maintain their original intent and objectives. As a long-term approach to the development of community infrastructure, this illustrates the pressure that is imposed on organizations involved in public-private partnership development processes, to adhere with the overall development plan, rather than to have their original mandates reflected in the development of a new project.

6.2 Dependence on neglected and under-utilized space

Community-based organizations interviewed for this project as well as those identified in reports such as the No Space for Community faith-based building study have expressed that one of the most common approaches to the acquisition of space for community-use is to find and request space that is currently under-utilized by the current property owner. This approach to the allocation of space for community-use is also used by programs such as Community Space Tenancy with the implementation of a new survey that seeks to match community groups with under-utilized space in nonprofit-owned buildings (City of Toronto, 2021). There are several concerns associated with this approach, including the question as to what this means for community organizations looking for space in a gentrifying city in which undervalued real estate is increasingly redeveloped in favour of more profitable use. Rob Howarth, Executive Director of Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, expressed concern that the spaces that were once available for community use in Toronto Community Housing buildings and community centres are no longer free or made available for community-use as they were 20 years ago (R. Howarth, personal communication, April 28, 2021). He followed with the

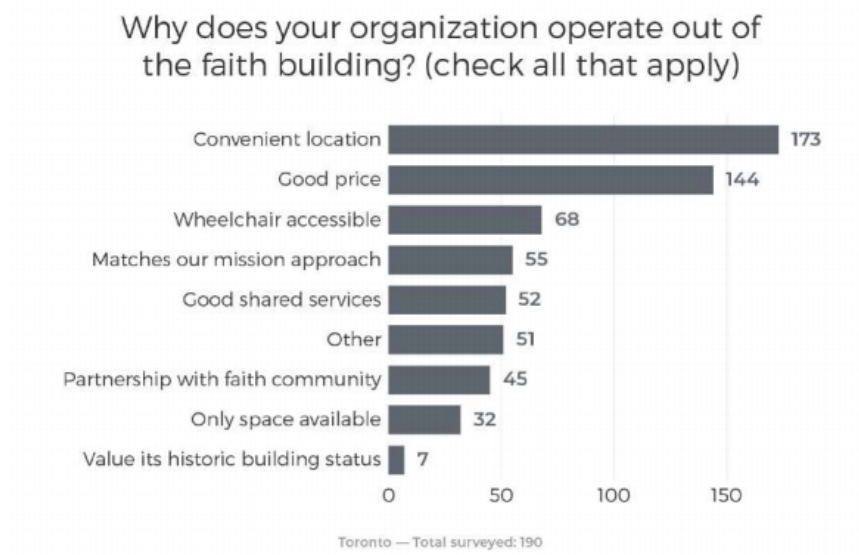
concern that the spaces that are available, those offered through larger institutions such as the Toronto District School Board, are increasingly inaccessible due to insurance and liability responsibility requirements that are typically beyond the capacity of many community-based operations. Rob expressed that the service-oriented hubs that exist in the city tend to operate at full capacity, with their use of space largely dictated by their funding restrictions determined through partnerships with the city, province and private supporters (R. Howarth, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

Relating to the concerns raised by Rob Howarth, Angela Koh, of West Neighbourhood House and formerly of the Women's Working community centre, raised the concern that the spaces that are available are typically dependent on the availability of staff to supervise the use of space by external community organizations (A. Koh, personal communication, April 28, 2021), resulting in a skewed dynamic in which groups are dependent on the lead agency's ability to provide support beyond their existing priorities and commitments. This is also dependent on access to extra funding and staff support, which in addition to the nature of access to these spaces being when it is not being used for its primary purposes, narrows the accessibility of the space for community use considerably.

A further concern regarding the dependency of community use of underutilized space is the sustainability of access to these spaces as gentrification places greater financial pressures on real estate in downtown Toronto. This concern was identified in the No Space for Community from July 2021 report which stated that nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ of faith-based buildings are currently in danger of closing, with the primary cause in Toronto being the conversion of faith-based buildings into condos (Fry & Friesen 2020, p.18), one of the main contributing factors to gentrification in the city as discussed in the literature review. While this paper does not propose further support for the Catholic church in Canada, the direct displacement implications that these closures have for community-based organizations currently dependent on space through faith-based buildings is a significant finding. In the study of Toronto, it was found that the main reason that organizations expressed for using churches for their programs are, by far, the

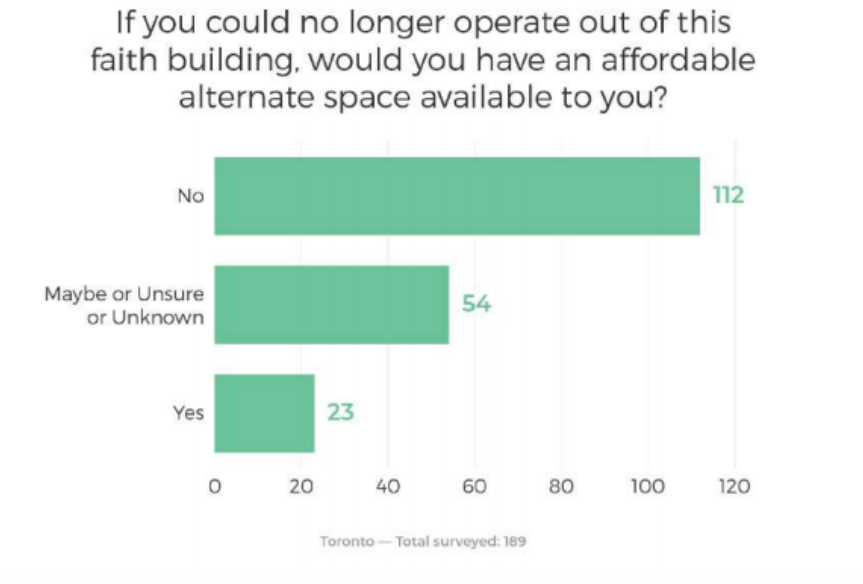
convenient location of churches within their neighbourhoods, as well as the good price associated with their access to space (Fry & Friesen 2020, pp.19-20). The survey used in this report included a question as to whether the community respondents could find new space to operate in the case that the church was no longer available, to which 60% of respondents said “no” (Fry & Friesen 2020, p.20).

Figure 6. Why does your organization operate out of a faith building?



Source: No Space for Community 2020, Page 19

Figure 7. If you could no longer operate out of this faith building, would you have an affordable alternate space available to you?



Source: No Space for Community 2020, Page 20

6.3 Lack of transparency in the allocation and management of space

Organizations included in this research project discussed the ways in which they have acquired space, with each case presenting unique circumstances. Among the groups interviewed and surveyed, the determining factors appeared to be affordability, networking and access to “the right people”. Several groups indicated that space had been acquired through personal contacts within the community and through relationship building efforts with local councillors and developers. Though their scale and scope were similar, each organization participating in the focus group came with unique experiences in their search for operating space, resulting in few opportunities to share advice for duplicating the ways that others had secured space.

Of note is the fact that though there are additional methods of accessing space in Toronto for community-based organizations, none of the groups involved with any part of this research project were familiar with options outside of their current approach. None of the organizations were aware of the potential to access space through Section 37 or the Community Space Tenancy program, including those that had reached out to

local councillors. The concern associated with this lack of information regarding additional options is that these groups are at risk of permanent displacement if faced with the need to move, with limited knowledge of the full set of options that exist. The point of entry for each organization included in this research fell under one of the following approaches:

- Senior contact at a development firm, often made through personal connections
- Strong ties to a local community hub
- Appealing to the local councillor
- Seeking market rate commercial rate

Section 37, one of the main formal approaches to accessing space for community use in Toronto, was found to be the least accessible and transparent method. The main critique presented here, as well as in other studies is that the process relies heavily, if not completely, on the discretion of the local councillor. This critique of the process has been studied previously (Moore 2013) and is further supported in the findings for this project. Among the critiques of this process is the lack of transparency regarding the decision-making process for determining the community benefits supported through this policy, as well as the ways in which community organizations can be considered for support. The guidelines for the implementation of Section 37, published in 2007 do not require that a request for proposals be distributed broadly amongst groups in the community in which the benefits are to take effect (City of Toronto, City Planning Division 2007, p.23). When asked how they were able to secure space through a Section 37 project in their downtown neighbourhood, the sole community organization involved in this project that has received space through section 37 responded with **“Whoever gets loud”** in conversation with their local councillor gets what they want (S. Alexanian, personal communication, June 11, 2021).

An example of the connection between this and larger gentrification policies and trends in the city was provided by an organization interviewed for this project. The organization, established in the 1970s, had been housed in a building at Bloor St. E and Sherbourne that recently came under the ownership of the National Post newspaper. Under the new ownership of the building, this organization, a small grassroots

organization founded during the 1970s women's movement, with a focus on connecting women from the St. James Town Neighbourhood with employment training and opportunities, was required to move from the floors where they had been operating for over 10 years to make room for the new National Post's office. Though they did obtain access to space within the same building, it soon became apparent to the organization that the rent increase associated with the transition of ownership made the space inaccessible for them based on their access to funding. In the search for a new space within the community, staff from the collective reached out to Kristyn Wong-Tam, Councillor for the St. James Town neighbourhood in which the organization was located. The meeting was secured to inquire as to whether Wong-Tam's office could provide support for the organization in their search for space, either through funding or access to city-owned properties that may be available. The response from Wong-Tam, however, consisted of the following:

"Before she became a councillor, she actually dealt in commercial real estate... If I can tell you she was absolutely not a supporter of assisting nonprofits find space... One of the first things she said to us was, well, how are you using your space?... She goes, you know, all of you nonprofits, you all don't know how to utilize space very well... Are you guys, you know, making sure that kind of thing happens in your office spaces? And we're like, no, again, because we work with really confidential and vulnerable people. And we don't want to do that in an open space. So when we said, okay, well, how can you help us? Like, is there a way that you can help us because we're about to lose, you know, our space? And we need to figure out, like, does the city have anything? And she again, went on the whole, what do they call that, that soapbox about how not for profits don't utilize the spaces that they're given in order to, you know, make it work for them... And we left that meeting, and we've never again ever even contacted her for anything, because we felt so unsupported in our efforts of trying to figure out what space and what help she could possibly offer us, there was no other help." (Participant A., personal communication, June 8, 2021)

Following this conversation, I asked the representative of this organization if the councillor had provided them with any information regarding Section 37 (which has been used numerous times by Councillor Wong-Tam in supporting capital improvements in the area), or the Community Space Tenancy program, to which they responded that they were completely unaware. The organization was eventually able to find a new space in a building at Carlton and Yonge St., however, soon after their move was

finalized they were made aware of the plan to convert the building into a condominium development in 6 years. As the organization is now faced with the requirement to move more frequently as a result of the urban development pressures facing Toronto's downtown neighbourhoods, there is great uncertainty in regards to their ability to access sufficient and appropriate space within the community that they have served since the 1970s.

6.4 Financial pressures

The most significant component of this analysis is the section on the financial pressures faced by community-based organizations in Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods. This is reflective of the valorization of real estate that is characteristic of gentrification and neoliberal urbanism. With rents and real estate becoming increasingly unaffordable in neighbourhoods across Toronto with the logics of the highest and best use of land at work within redevelopment projects, and the nature of the third sector being a "non-profit" sector, the question arises as to how space can be accessed by organizations falling under this umbrella in the context of gentrification and neoliberal urbanism.

"our biggest concern is the whims of market rate rent. And that seems to be an issue, almost no matter where you go, because, you know, market rate, if market rents are high, that tends to put pressure on the few spaces that are available"
(B. Wentworth, personal communication, May 28, 2021)

The economic pressures faced by community-based organizations in the search for space go beyond the increase in market rent in all forms of real estate. The increase in market rent for those accessing unsubsidized spaces is heightened by the precarity of short-term commercial leases, and the absence of commercial rent control policies in Ontario's Commercial Tenancies Act (CTA, 2021). For the organizations accessing space through a redevelopment or Section 37 project, though rent may be subsidized or covered, monthly costs are not guaranteed to be less expensive due to the high cost of maintenance fees, property taxes and other costs associated with accessing newly constructed spaces. The high costs associated with property taxes and maintenance fees associated with spaces located in gentrifying neighbourhoods was expressed as a

concern by several of the organizations interviewed. The increase in property taxes in a neighbourhood following the development of a revitalization project must also be considered in determining the financial impact for organizations renting space through a project of this kind. If space is subsidized through Section 37 or in partnership with a developer, how long will this last? As one of the major implications of neighbourhood revitalization projects is the increase in desirability of a neighbourhood and consequently its property taxes, this increase presents a further potential economic risk for organizations matched with community agency space through Section 37 or revitalization projects, in the case that taxes are not covered by the developer.

A significant finding within this research project is that all organizations expressed the need to alter their business model and activities in some capacity in order to afford the space that they have access to or to move into new space to meet their needs. Those accessing space through market-rent are faced with the looming threat of significant increases after each lease (typically every 5 years) while those accessing space through a developer are faced with maintenance costs, increased rental rates and significant capital costs not covered by the facilitating partner. Even the community bike organization that had originally been developed by the city of Toronto shared that the city has required the development of a “sustainability plan” to illustrate a new business model to afford the space once their partnership with the city ends.

Among the groups interviewed and surveyed, the organizations accessing space through market rent were the most likely to experience or expect displacement from the community in which they operate due to financial pressures associated with gentrification. Bike Pirates and bikeSauce, community bike organizations operating in Toronto’s east and west ends expressed shared concerns regarding the 5-year commercial leases that both organizations currently depend on, as the end of every lease presents the possibility for unrestricted increases in monthly costs by the landlord as there are currently no restrictions to commercial rent increases in Ontario. The two community bike organizations interviewed shared that they have been forced to move 2-3 times within 15 years due to significant increases in their lease agreements, with the expectation that this will continue to happen.

In addition to threatening the continued existence of these organizations which require visible and publicly accessible space in order to operate (i.e. commercial storefront space), this form of financial displacement disrupts the organization's ability to maintain a steady volunteer network to support their work. One of the organizations consulted emphasized that this was a major concern as moving from one community to another every five years disrupts the volunteer support that each organization depends on for every aspect of their operations as volunteer availability is influenced by the proximity of each organization to the communities where the volunteers reside (Participant B, personal communication, February 2021). Moving from one neighbourhood to another so frequently then requires these organizations to invest more time and energy into outreach and training efforts to maintain the organization's operating capacity as well as building trust within a new community. Bike Pirates, the organization operating in Toronto's West end shared that with each move, the organization is forced to move further West - from Bathurst to Bloordale to Parkdale to their current location at Bloor & Dundas. This movement westward mirrors gentrification patterns taking place in Toronto's west end neighbourhoods (Maaranen & Walks 2008), further illustrating the impact of gentrification on the organization's access to space.

The organizations accessing space through community partner organizations expressed less concern regarding the looming threat of displacement, however, concern was raised regarding their eventual necessity to pay rent in the event that their space is needed for other activities or the partnership discontinues. These organizations had largely developed through the use of existing free and underused space, either donated completely or supported through ongoing funding from the city of Toronto. These unique situations however, are dependent on the current partnerships facilitating this access, leading the organizations interviewed to express uncertainty as to the length of their free tenancy and ability to afford space elsewhere if faced with displacement in the future. The nature of this dependence on free space creates a dynamic in which this space is "gifted" to organizations as a favour, rather than as a long-term commitment. This sentiment is echoed in the Toronto Nonprofit Network's study on nonprofit access to space, as well as the No Space for Community Report, with the majority of

organizations surveyed responding that they do not believe that they would be able to find a new home for their programs if they no longer had free access to space in church buildings(TNN, 2020; Fry & Friesen 2020).

“So, you know, having not had to pay this overhead of rent costs, obviously, it is a concern in the case that we do have to relocate, and where are we going to go to and, you know, how do we access space?” (N. Chorney, personal communication, May 28, 2021)

Of the organizations interviewed and researched for this project, those accessing space through partnerships with developers and through Section 37 appear to face the greatest financial pressures, which contrasts the intention and publicized narrative of these approaches. The pressure to develop a new business model similar to that of a social enterprise is not unique to smaller community-based organizations in Toronto, however the ability to respond to an increased financial burden is greater with larger organizations of greater fundraising capacity. Organizations of all sizes are faced with the obligation to develop significant capital campaigns and to monetize their operations as a result of partnerships with developers and Community Benefit Agreements. The difference is that for smaller community-based organizations these fundraising goals present a greater rate of increase based on their existing operating budgets and pose a greater risk to the existing operations of the organization. Several of the organizations interviewed expressed the concern that the significant increase in focus on fundraising efforts, whether through the adoption of a social-enterprise model or a capital campaign, diverted significant time from the mission and social operations of the organization in question.

Examples of capital campaign for Section 37 community space projects in Toronto:

- **SKETCH** \$3.74 Million campaign for the purchase of a building (City Council, 2021)
- **A Different Booklist** \$2 Million campaign for a permanent space in the West Bank Mirvish Village Development. Tenancy. (Hassan, 2020)
- **Toronto Media Arts Centre** \$2.285 Million capital campaign to access space through Section 37 (TMAC, 2020)

Two of the organizations interviewed are currently accessing space through the Daniels Spectrum building in Regent Park and have been involved since the centre was established. Both organizations expressed concern regarding the fact that the “subsidized” rental rates offered to the organizations remain prohibitive, and on par with market-rates in the area, continuing to impose financial pressure on organizations operating out of the building (Ohri, personal communication, May 7, 2021; Participant C, personal communication, May 26, 2021). A story was shared of one of the original community tenants of the Spectrum building being forced out due to unpaid rent only a few years after the building opened. Consistent with the concerns raised by organizations currently accessing free spaces, concerns were raised in regards to the fact that one community-oriented building is not enough to meet the needs of the community. In the case of organizations being priced out of the already subsidized building, there are few, if any, options for organizations to remain within the community with the near complete coverage of the neighbourhood by public-private developments and condominiums.

Beyond the threat to the stability of an organization and its access to space, the financial pressures facing community-based nonprofit organizations can influence the organization’s approach to programming and the implementation of its mission. By requiring organizations to adopt social enterprise business models or to take on significant capital campaign projects, a form of “class replacement”, consistent with that observed in traditional gentrification research, is taking place. Even with the aid of subsidies and Section 37 support, lower capacity organizations are not able to compete with higher capacity organizations that are able to take on the significant capital costs associated with the acquisition of new spaces. Community-based non-profit organizations are then faced with the need to operate at higher financial capacities to avoid displacement. The case of the Toronto Media Arts Centre (TMAC) illustrates the threat that this financial burden has on access to community space through the Section 37 process. After a series of community consultation processes in the Queen West neighbourhood indicated the community’s desire for the development of a community-run media arts centre, TMAC entered into a Section 37 agreement with the

developer, Urbancorp, in 2011 (TMAC, 2021). In 2015, Ana Bailao then requested for the termination of the contract, with interest in having Artscape, a significantly larger arts-organization, take over as lead agency for the space (2021). Though TMAC was eventually able to raise sufficient funds for the capital costs associated with the new space, it was determined that the city was “of the view that TMAC is still not a viable group to operate the Combined Arts and Culture Space successfully.” and after 6 years of legal proceedings, the contract has recently been invalidated (2021).

What is the best option for maintaining the greatest degree of autonomy?

If we are to review these methods on a scale of the degree of autonomy and self-determination in regards to their access to space and the furthering of their own objectives, those accessing space through the market appear to have the greatest control of the programs and activities of their organizations. Those receiving a subsidy or gaining access through relationship-building and personal contacts expressed their requirement to make certain concessions or to adhere to specific deliverables based on the nature of the relationships that enable their access to space. The organizations accessing space at market rental rates, however, expressed concern regarding their ability to maintain such autonomy due to the prohibitive nature of market rent in Toronto. The next section will build off of the context provided, incorporating the challenges and concerns raised by those participating in this research project, to propose recommendations that have the potential to support community organizations in the acquisition of space that maintains a greater level of autonomy within their operations.

7. Planning for self-determined community spaces

Toronto’s ability to maintain and further develop strong community-based social infrastructure is dependent on its ability to support these organizations through ongoing access to space. The significance of these organizations throughout social planning processes at all levels of city planning is connected with their ability to maintain a strong degree of autonomy in order to be responsive to and representative of the communities in which they operate. In light of the ongoing pressures faced by community-based

organizations in their search for space in Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods, I present the following recommendations:

7.1 Conduct further research on the topic of access to space for community organizations

Community use of space and the unmet needs of community groups seeking new or improved spaces, is not well understood within the nonprofit sector, however, it is agreed amongst groups operating within the sector that significant challenges exist and continue to deepen with an increasing rate of gentrification in Toronto. Beyond the reports identified within this major research project, there is little data on this topic, and growing interest in gauging nonprofit use of space in Toronto and how it can be better accessed and its use determined by community members.

Based on the findings of this Major Paper, as well as the challenges encountered in the research phase, the following research topics are proposed to further this discussion, ideally to be led by the Ontario Nonprofit Network, Social Planning Toronto, the Toronto Nonprofit network and the City of Toronto to increase the diversity of responses:

- a. Survey community organizations of all sizes and government affiliations (non-registered collectives, registered nonprofits and charities) on their size, operations, current and desired access to space.
- b. How have organizations' core activities and business models changed since partnering with a developer or the city of Toronto in their search for space?
- c. How have the demographics of the communities served by organizations accessing space through developers changed over time? Has the gentrification associated with the development impacted the demographics of the communities served?

7.2 Building acquisition for community use

Through the Community Space Tenancy program, nonprofit organizations are currently able to access public buildings for free or at a reduced rate, however the offerings are inconsistent and at times still inaccessible for community organizations due to the size

and associated capital costs (listing available at the time of this writing was 20,000 square feet and requiring \$500,000 in capital costs (City of Toronto, 2021). Similarly, CreateTO does not currently offer channels through which community organizations can identify publicly owned buildings and submit a request for community-use. In addition, the findings detailed in this report illustrate the need for smaller-scale buildings (resulting in lower maintenance fees and property taxes) within Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods that could be used for community-determined purposes beyond service provision.

The idea proposed here is similar to that being used for the Toronto Music Strategy through which an inventory of Toronto's publicly-owned buildings is being developed with intention of making these buildings available for use as small and medium-sized music venues (General Manager, Economic Development & Culture, 2020). The recommendation made based on the findings from this report is to make public buildings, under 10,000 square feet in size, available on an ongoing basis for community-determined use. These buildings, ideally leased out to community groups for a nominal fee of under \$100/year, could be accessed either by networks of local community organizations for co-location purposes, or for single tenant use by one lead organization for interdisciplinary purposes that do not have to conform to a service-oriented model.

7.3 Extension of the Creative Hubs Zoning and taxation for community spaces

In addition to acquiring buildings for community use, new zoning and taxation measures should be applied to these buildings. The "creative hubs" tax class that was developed in 2017 to address the significant pressures of property taxes facing cultural hubs in downtown Toronto (such as 401 Richmond) applies to buildings which are "5,000 square feet or more, have many tenants (of which at least half are non-profits, charities, or incubators) and offer free public programming, among other criteria" (Rushowy, 2017). An extension of this measure to include spaces under 5,000 square feet would enable community-based organizations operating out of commercial storefront spaces

to become eligible for this benefit, reducing the financial burden associated with property taxes in Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods.

7.4 Greater transparency and outreach for municipal programs and operations

In light of the fact that none of the groups participating in this project were aware of the existing programs and policies that exist for organizations in need of access to space, greater transparency and outreach efforts are needed. With the introduction of the Community Space Tenancy program's online space registry, it is unclear as to how this registry will be successful without widespread dissemination throughout the sector. This tool has great potential to enable organizations to "co-locate" with other nonprofit organizations with access to more stable space, as well as to gauge the needs of organizations in need of space. Without consistent and ongoing outreach, however, this will not be possible.

The critiques of Section 37 as lacking transparency and depending too much on the interests of local councillors were further illustrated through this research project. While the implementation of Section 37 for the provision of community space has been imperfect, there is potential, through greater outreach and education, for the policy to be applied in a way that is more representative of the needs of community-based organizations. In addition to providing organizations with more information in regards to how they can approach their local councillor for support, and for what, more transparent and accessible guidelines should be created to inform the ways in which councillors select and work with organizations to ensure that support is distributed equitably to a greater variety of groups.

7.5 Find space for organizations, not organizations for space

Though this recommendation reads as the most naive of those listed, there needs to be greater emphasis within Toronto's downtown and gentrifying communities on completing audits of community need in consideration of new development projects, rather than a top-down determination of use of space as takes place with the development of

condominium and redevelopment projects. In practice this process would transform the ways in which programs like CreateTO and community hub programs operate by having city of Toronto planning departments work with local community organizations on an ongoing basis to understand their space-use needs and to allocate space for community use based on those ongoing practices. This is in contrast to the current process which has city and developer-led programs identify buildings for redevelopment, followed by a city-led community consultation process. A process that is more explicitly led by the needs and objectives of community-based organizations and interest would enable city planning processes and programs to operate in a manner that is a direct expression and implementation of community interests, as opposed to fitting community-use within the constraints of projects initiated within the neoliberal framework.

8. Conclusion

With the offloading of social services onto the third sector and the subsequent loss of support for more responsive, community-oriented organizations, Toronto is at risk of losing an integral component of the social infrastructure that supports so many of its residents, to be replaced by an over-generalized and professionalized third sector that is more so a reflection of neoliberal urbanism and gentrification taking place in Toronto's downtown neighbourhoods. By acknowledging the role that community-based organizations play in the development of strong social planning practices and collective community agency, we must also acknowledge the significance of the displacement of these groups due to gentrification pressures resulting from neoliberal urban development processes in Toronto. With the reduction in the ability of community-based groups to access space to organize autonomously, and their eventual displacement, the impact of the privatization of Toronto's urban landscape is felt as much socially as it is visible in the expression of capital through condominiums and redevelopment projects.

In surveying the ways in which community organizations are currently accessing space in Toronto, what we find is a decentralized community infrastructure network that is sensitive to the impacts of gentrification resulting from the privatization of the urban landscape through neoliberal urban development processes. Community use of space by community-based organizations requires an interdisciplinary study of space to truly capture the changes in space-use patterns over time, making it a challenge to develop a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of a highly privatized landscape on this sector. I experienced significant challenges finding information on nonprofit use of space in Toronto, which presented challenges in regards to completing a more comprehensive analysis of the experiences of community-based nonprofit organizations in the city. This concern was echoed by people that I contacted at the Ontario Nonprofit Network, the Toronto Nonprofit Network, as well as those interviewed, however there appears to be growing interest in tackling this topic through interdisciplinary approaches to research and data collection.

The central finding of this project has been that community access to space has become increasingly dependent on the ability of organizations to fit within neoliberal urban development structures, impacting an organization's ability to be a democratic expression of community values out of the necessity to fit within a neoliberal context. Even programs that aim to provide space for organizations do so with the requirement that organizations either align their deliverables with the interests of the public sector, or increase the profitability of their operations. What results is a loss in autonomy for community-based organizations in their search for space and increased pressure on these groups to meet the needs and interests of the neoliberal city to the detriment of their own.

As the inspiration for this project was based in my own experiences navigating the search for space for a community organization in one of Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods, many of the findings were not necessarily completely unanticipated, however, the concerns and observations that I had encountered in isolation were further developed through the experiences shared by those participating in this project. Though there is great diversity amongst the groups participating in this project, the ability to find common themes in the concerns and experiences raised points to a more generalized imposition on the ability of these groups to operate autonomously and sustainably within the context of Toronto's gentrifying neighbourhoods. One of the central goals of this project was to further articulate and contextualize what I had experienced as a practitioner in the world of community-based work, and by working in collaboration with additional organizations with similar concerns and experiences, I hope to have established a discussion that can be continued through further research. Within the next decade the landscape of downtown Toronto will be further privatized and consumed by condominium and neighbourhood redevelopment projects - many of which will claim to address the needs of the communities in which they are operating - and there needs to be greater scrutiny over the ways that this change in ownership of space is influencing and impeding community-based work.

Further research can help to understand the longer-term relationships that major developers and public-private partnerships have with the community-based groups that receive access to space through these projects, and whether these relationships endure beyond the “honeymoon” period of the first 5-10 years of a development. The greatest threats to these organizations being their ability to develop sufficient business models to afford significant capital campaigns and greater costs associated with these spaces, as well as maintaining their relationships within the public-private development context. A concern that I have is that as these relationships lapse due to the funding pressures faced by community-based organizations (as has been observed already with the shifting of Daniels Spectrum tenants), coinciding with the reduction in Naturally Occurring Community Spaces, these groups will be fully displaced from Toronto’s gentrifying neighbourhoods and that those remaining will become more of a superficial expression of community work that is complementary and complicit to the process of gentrification. An expression of gentrification is taking place within the nature of the organizations that are the current beneficiaries of neoliberal policies such as Section 37, as the increased need for organizations to increase their profitability to afford capital expenditures, increased property taxes and rent, results in a shift in the class structure of the organizations themselves.

By identifying various recommendations in the final chapter of this paper, continuing this discussion through further research and proposing changes to the current approaches that are used in the development of space in Toronto’s gentrifying neighbourhoods, I hope to have shed light on the potential for these concerns to be addressed rather than simply understood as an inevitability. The ability of this sector to work within an urban framework that is contrary to its nature (as a nonprofit-oriented sector) has enabled community-based work to withstand the pressures imposed by neoliberalism, however, with the increasing pressures of displacement imposed on the sector it is important to recognize how and why community access to space needs to be better facilitated as an extension of our understanding of the right to the city and spatial justice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. What is your organization's approximate average annual budget? (will not be published)
2. Please describe your organization's activities and the communities served.
3. Does your organization currently have access to space for your programs and services?
4. Describe your organization's history of accessing operating space in Toronto. (i.e. if you have always OR never had access to space, if there have been times when you have not been able to access space, if you are currently looking for a space, etc...)
5. Has your organization ever received a subsidy, discount or any other form of regular support for access to space? If not, have you applied through any specific programs?
6. Are you aware of any of the programs that currently provide support for organizations in need of operating space in Toronto?
7. Is gentrification taking place in your neighbourhood? If so, how?
8. Has gentrification had an impact on your organization's operations?
9. Has access to space impacted your programs, services and general operations in any way? If so, how?
10. Is your organization currently in the best location to meet the needs of your community? If not, what or where would be more ideal?
11. Are there barriers keeping you from accessing your ideal space now?
12. If you are currently renting, how much is your monthly base rent? Has this changed over the years?
13. Are there specific resources that you would be interested in seeing published as part of this project?
14. Are you interested in participating in an online focus group on this topic in the spring?
15. Are there additional organizations that you would recommend contacting for this research project?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What is the nature of the community work that you do?
2. How long have you been working in this neighbourhood?
3. What has been the process for engaging smaller community-based organizations in the operations of the local Hub?
4. Can you describe the nature of community-based nonprofit organizations that have operated in the neighbourhood over the years? Are there examples of organizations that have been initiated by local community members in this area? Are these organizations still in operation?
5. Do you see a need for additional community spaces outside of the hub? If yes, how would you imagine this?
6. Has gentrification impacted this neighbourhood in any way? Please describe how.
7. How has the nature of community and social services changed in this neighbourhood over the years? How has gentrification impacted this in some way?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to share on this topic?