Appropriating Community Space against Planned Dispossession across the Global North and South:

A Relational Comparison of Longo Mai, Costa Rica and Jane and Finch, Toronto, Canada

by

David Mejia Monico

Supervised by
Dr. Luisa Sotomayor

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Abstract

This Major Paper offers a relational comparison of bottom-up planning amidst capitalist development pressures and megaprojects in two case study communities, Jane and Finch in Toronto, Canada within the Global North, and Longo Mai in Puntarenas, Costa Rica within the Global South. The research examines a problem that is global in nature and local in practice, that is, how communities are resisting dispossession dynamics through the organizing of – and within – community or communal spaces, that is, how both case study communities have utilized these types of spaces to resist forces of dispossession and to understand what mutually constituting processes connect these Global North and Global South contexts. This was done by looking at their planning histories, resident migration stories, economic relationships, similarities, distinct differences and their characteristics (community spaces, the built environment, and social-environmental conditions) amid broader global processes of neoliberal development.

The findings highlight how community spaces provide physical infrastructure for social networks that help resist processes of dispossession by state and market actors in key moments of both communities with varying success. Contextual urban-rural and social differences put aside, both communities were able to utilize available community spaces and organizational capacity to effectuate spatial outcomes and resist processes of dispossession or 'primitive accumulation' brought on by planned developmental changes. In the analysis of these moments and distinct local geographies – informed through the interview findings and historical analysis – shared processes, similarities and direct connections arose. Direct connections between both communities were found with the presence of Northern educational institutions, the production and consumption of pineapples through international corporation Del Monte, and shared dispossession histories of immigrant populations in both case study areas.

Keywords: Community Spaces, Relational Comparison, Dispossession, Insurgent Planning, Global North-South Relations

Foreword

A Multidisciplinary Approach - MES Planning

As a researcher, I take a multidisciplinary approach that utilizes critical geography, radical planning, and socio-historical lenses. I can attribute my multidisciplinary approach to the direction of the EUC faculty at York University and Dr. Liette Gilbert, Program Director, who provided us with literature on the value of examining the world from various connected perspectives. This academic openness allowed me to examine personal and professional questions of why things are and through my advisor's recommendation, led to my Plan of Study to focus on Imperialism, Urbanization and Planning as its major components.

Through this Major Paper (MP) and my coursework, I was able to meet my Learning Objectives (LOs) from my Plan of Study. The LOs related to planning theory, historical analysis of planning, rural-urban comparative study, and practical strategies for social progress through bottom-up planning. Through my coursework, I met most of my LOs with a wide range of planning-focused courses which improved my competencies in politics, governance, international development and community planning. Through this MP requirement, I was able to conceptualize the ways communities are organizing to shape and plan space and for how planning can be further broadened to include and be led by subaltern and insurgent groups to produce new socio-spatial outcomes.

Positionality Statement

The research centres around multi-dimensional topics that I as a researcher have some experience with first-hand. I (he/him) am a person of Latin American descent who was born and grew up in Canada, as a child of working-class refugees and immigrants from El Salvador, with my parents settling in Toronto, Canada, towards the end of the Civil War there in the early 1990s. I lived most of my life in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood, one of the case study areas, a diverse working-class neighbourhood with ethnic enclaves from around the world. There was a shared understanding present there with people that had similar stories of dispossession, underdevelopment, political conflict, and reasons for leaving their ancestral homes as those that pushed people away from El Salvador during the war; ethnic groups and diaspora primarily from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Global South.

I am an urban planner and development professional, holding a Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning, minor in Real Estate Management and certificate in Local Economic Development from Toronto Metropolitan University. I have worked in the Jane Finch area, as a student and volunteer on various community projects.

My historical understanding and analysis of contemporary inequality led me to believe that the way urban & regional planning and economic planning is taught and orchestrated often hurts the most marginalized and underserved groups of people and is not disconnected to underdevelopment in the South. My educational focus on Global North-South relations and my reading of the history of planning during my time at York University has convinced me to take on a worldview consistent with traditions of radical planning, critical geography and anti-imperialism.

In my Major Paper (MP) I utilize my background as a long-time Jane Finch resident and as a part of the Salvadoran diaspora to understand the two subject case study communities and how they are shaping space. This also provided me with a unique insight on changes of identity within the Costa Rica case study community, as it relates to largely refugee and

diasporic participants from the Global South, while also providing me the opportunity to study my own community.

In the Jane Finch case study (the 2nd case study area), my insight as a resident, member of the Hub Organizing Committee (HOC), and participant in community projects, meant that research participants there talked about subjects where I often had an insider perspective. By being a long-time resident and being engaged early in the planning of the Jane and Finch Community Hub and Centre for the Arts ('the Hub'), I experienced many of the events and spaces that were related to the research and made me a direct participant in the research.

In the Longo Mai case study (the 1st case study area), my perspective was directly tied to my experience as the child of refugees creating a new life in a new geography; the subjective experiences of the research participants there had feelings and perspectives that I can deeply relate to.

Locally specific development histories, geography and cultural conditions notwithstanding, the similarities in immigrant and diasporic experiences made it so my interpretation of social relations were viewed with a lens of being a partial insider in Longo Mai, by sharing a prominent cultural identity in the community as part of the Salvadoran diaspora.

It is not lost on me that my work in the Longo Mai case study can be seen as extractive, regardless of the invitation for me to be there. There is an extractive aspect in utilizing those local histories for my educational gain which I hope to have minimized by creating meaningful relationships, contributing economically and emotionally in the community, and imparting any insights I was able to gain from their openness.

Land Acknowledgement

It is critically acknowledged that the lands of both case study communities and all research activities took place on historically Indigenous lands, pre-European colonial expansion to the Americas.

In what is now known as Longo Mai, the research activities took place on shared lands that were historically part of the Térrabas and Brúñcajc peoples, who continue to defend their land rights and hold territory in the broader region today.

In what is now known as Toronto, the research activities took place on the traditional territories of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

It is also vital to acknowledge the forced movement of Black population groups during the African Trans-Atlantic slave trade, indentured servitude of people from various places of the Global South, including of Indigenous nations, and the forced or coerced displacement which has taken place during colonial histories of what is now known as the North American continent, also known as Turtle Island. These histories are foundational to the research explored in this Major Paper document.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank all the people who made this research paper possible. That includes everyone who supported me through this MES-Planning program and coursework, from my professors at York University's Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change (EUC), to professional mentors, to my family and friends.

A special thanks to my supervisor, Luisa Sotomayor, for believing in me, opening doors for me to enter the MES-Planning program and eventually supervising my work; to my advisor, Stefan Kipfer, for leading me to understand the world through a new lens which helped understand my own history from a new perspective; and my Graduate Program Director, Liette Gilbert, who showed immense empathy and patience with me during difficult times throughout this program.

I would also like to recognize and thank the York University Fisher Fund for Neotropical Conservation for the generous financial support and their Award which made this research possible.

AI Disclaimer: This Major Paper and research utilized Artificial Intelligence in the editing and transcription process. Specifically, Chatgpt and Deepseek were used for proofreading and feedback, while Otter AI and Gladia Ai were used to speed up the transcription of interviews.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Research – Problems and Questions

While the two cases differ significantly in geography and scale, both have faced threats of dispossession tied to specific megaprojects for the sake of economic development in their community. The planning of hydroelectric dams and pineapple monocultural expansion in the case of rural Longo Mai, Costa Rica, and inequitable transit-oriented development in suburban Jane and Finch showed a unique parallel. Development projects are sold to these communities and similar peripheral communities in their regions as initiatives which will improve their socio-economic conditions by state agencies, without being warned of the risks and challenges that development brings to their ability to stay or their livelihoods. In both case study areas, education, insurgent practices, resident-led planning and advocacy is utilized to resist dispossession risks of displacement through gentrification with Jane and Finch, and environmental degradation through resource extraction in Longo Mai.

Dispossession comes in many forms and at multiple scales and levels. David Harvey (2004, p. 74) describes the term in an adaptation of Marx's description of primitive accumulation as the continuation of ongoing processes, which include, but are not limited to, the 'commodification and privatization of land and forceful expulsion of peasant populations, suppression of rights to the commons, suppression of indigenous or alternative forms of production, and commodification of labour'. Importantly, Harvey describes the continuation of this direct relationship of accumulated wealth with a system of actions that extract and exploit people and their resources in modern times.

While key scholars on this subject like Lefebvre (1991), Sevilla-Buitrago (2023), and Santos (1996/2021) provide theoretical frameworks for how capitalist space is produced at the expense of working class and subaltern spaces, less attention has been given to how communities in Global North and South contexts utilize community spaces to resist it in relational and comparative terms. This Major Paper (MP) attempts to fill this gap by

examining how the two case study communities are connected – through shared processes and histories of dispossession – and what role community spaces have in addressing contemporary threats associated with developmental megaprojects.

It also seeks to outline and identify in the cases, the role of planning in creating circumstances of dispossession and conceptualize how the field's current expression can be replaced with a broader bottom-up resident-led version of planning that supports autonomous social reproduction, through these spaces, sometimes referred to as, 'the commons', 'social spaces', spaces of 'horizontality' and/or 'third spaces/places'.

Amidst these topics, some key questions arise:

- How have residents in Longo Mai and Jane & Finch organized through community spaces to resist dynamics tied to developmental megaprojects?
- What planning actors, entities and institutions are shaping land use and development in each case study area?
- How have communal spaces enabled collective action and resistance to dispossession?
- How were the community spaces secured?
- What mutually constituting processes connect the case study communities?

To answer these questions, I draw on three key theoretical frameworks:

Henri Lefebvre's spatial trialectic of the conceived, perceived, and lived, in the Production of Space (1991); Milton Santos' related conceptual framing of 'verticalities' and 'horizontalities' to help explain how capital flows and local solidarity shape space, and migration as a spatial process, in The Nature of Space (1996/2021); and Sevilla-Buitrago's (2023) concepts of 'decommonization' and 'commoning', to understand the erosion of the commons and the active creation of a strengthened commons from below. These frameworks are unpacked in further detail in Section 2.

1.2 Relational Comparison

In this MP, I utilize Gillian Hart's (2018) relational comparison method by tying the everyday lives of people, their collective memories of spatial struggles, and the planned conditions of each vantage point. This helped build an understanding of how the communities are developing in relation to mutually constituting processes of dispossession which have historically altered their countries of origin and threaten their community's future. Hart's approach of including conjunctural analysis is especially relevant, as it also helps understand how different processes converge in unique moments of crises and/or resistance, as seen in the case study areas (see Key Moments section).

Following the works of Sotomayor & Daniere (2018) and Kipfer (2021), I decided that a comparison would work well to achieve the understanding of Global North-South dynamics that I was seeking with this MP. In Sotomayor & Daniere's article, the authors contrast Global South contexts of informality in Bangkok and Medellin by understanding how policy initiatives by equity planners are working to create more equitable outcomes. Similarly, the comparison of this MP attempts to conceptualize the planning and historical context of both case study communities to understand what steps equity planners and insurgent planning practices (by community residents) are making to intervene in policy and project-based spatial outcomes.

Through a socio-political lens, Kipfer (2021) applies this comparative approach across Global North-South geographies by relating the political aspects of colonial racism on dispossessed peoples like Indigenous Peoples in Urban Canada, peripheral Black enclaves of France and the Shantytowns of Martinique, comparing the areas through a focus on Franz Fanon's concept of 'compartmentalization' and the resistance of grassroots counter-movements, phenomena arguably present in both case study areas.

Here, I combine these approaches to examine how both planning-related policies shaped the case study geographies and the interventions that trained planners, residents, and grassroots organizations are employing, while identifying issues of integration and

opportunities for political organizing in spatial matters. The methodology for how I employ relational comparison in the fieldwork is outlined in Section 3.

1.3 The Case Study Communities – Longo Mai, Costa Rica and Jane & Finch, Canada

The Jane and Finch community is an urban peripheral community in Toronto, Canada, while Longo Mai is a rural village in Buenos Aires, Puntarenas, Costa Rica. Despite these differences, they share a common thread: both have historically been places of relative improvement for migrants, populated largely by displaced families, refugees and immigrants from underdeveloped, politically unstable or war-torn regions of the world.

There are many residents in the case study areas who fled to Costa Rica because of the civil war in El Salvador that my parents had fled to Canada from. Many families settled in Jane and Finch for similar reasons, i.e. the 'Hot Wars' of the 'Cold War', the West's 'War on Terror', and/or neocolonial underdevelopment which perpetuated the conditions for violent political conflicts and dangerous or unequal social conditions across the Global South. My father in particular was sponsored to come to Canada by his brother after fleeing El Salvador when one of their brothers, Saúl, was 'disappeared' in 1980. Saúl was a politically active university student and – according to my grandmother's second-hand account – was taken by the US-backed Salvadoran army and was never seen again.

Many of my friends in Jane and Finch had similar stories of why their families came to Canada, along with a growing understanding of working-class struggle in the neighbourhood, which made me feel at home. The story of Longo Mai's community formation was similar in this way as many fled because of the Salvadoran Civil War, underdevelopment and/or dangerous socio-economic circumstances exacerbating it, often in the form of gang culture or domestic issues. This initial connection between both places drove my research to focus on these areas as starting points.

As the findings in Section 4 demonstrate, residents in both communities mobilized through the planning of – and within – communal spaces to resist new pressures of dispossession.

The practice of planning community spaces themselves has created enduring spatial and policy outcomes which are substantiated by views of the research participants.

Longo Mai Community – Brief Description

Longo Mai, the first case study area, officially known as 'Refugio de Vida Silvestre de Longo Mai', is a rural agricultural village and wildlife refuge located in Costa Rica. It was established in the late 1970s by Longo Maï, a European cooperative, as a project of 'solidarity' to house refugees from Nicaragua, and later accommodated migrants, refugees and displaced people from El Salvador and peasant backgrounds (Indigenous and non-indigenous) from within Costa Rica (longomaicostarica, n.d.; radicalecologicaldemocracy, 2016).

It is also an eco-tourism-based village and conservation area situated in the district of Volcan, the *cantón* [municipality] of Buenos Aires, Puntarenas (province). Its location also nears the midpoint of two nodes of urban activity connected by the Inter American Highway built in the 1950s (Castro-Vargas, 2025); with the City of San Isidro de El General, Perez Zeledon, San Jose, to the West and the town of Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Puntarenas to the East. It also lies beside the border of both provinces, Puntarenas and San Jose.

This general rural region in the south of Costa Rica, including both aforementioned urban centres and provinces, make up the Brunca socioeconomic region and is bordered by Panama to the east. The Brunca region is one of the most unequal in the country with a 31% household poverty rate, many being immigrant and indigenous groups, and peasant households; it is also a place where social benefits and rights are least implemented (Arias Campos, 2017, p. 143).

The Rio Convento is an important natural heritage feature along the West side of Longo Mai, which also serves as the natural border between both provinces [See Figure 2]. The Rio Sonador is the other river vital to the community and sits on the east side of the community – directly opposite of lands owned by PINDECO.



Figure 1: Tourism Map of the Southeast Pacific Region of Costa Rica. By the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT), 2023.

Much of the community's local economy relies on agriculture and eco-tourism for its development. There are about 700 residents that live within the community. According to the Longo Mai association, 450 of the 850 hectares are part of protected tropical rainforest as an officially registered national conservation area with the rest used by residents (Longomaicostarica, n.d.).

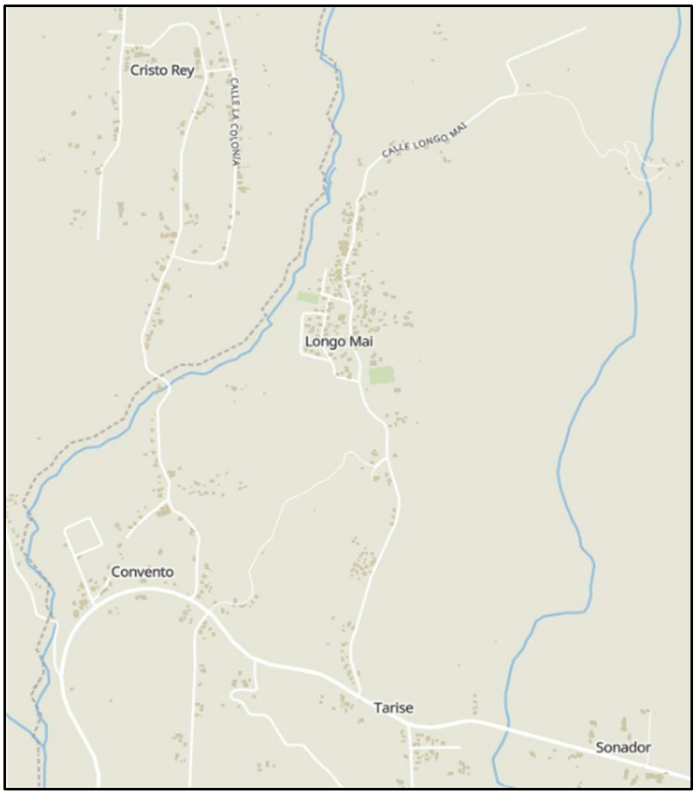


Figure 2: Longo Mai Built & Natural Environment, including Rivers (Convento & Sonador), By Environmental Justice Atlas. (n.d.)

In recent decades, Longo Mai has contributed to the region as a key centre for grassroots organizing against megadevelopments coming in the form of hydroelectric dams, backed by Instituto Costariccense de Electricidad (ICE)[Costa Rican Institute of Electricity], and monoculture expansion by PINDECO, a subsidiary of Fresh Del Monte Incorporated (Arias Campos, 2017).

Jane and Finch Community – Brief Description

Jane and Finch, the second case study area, also known as “Jane Finch” or “Jane-Finch”, is a diverse peripheral urban community, in the North-West inner suburbs of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Originally a rural community, it rapidly urbanized in the post-war period (City of Toronto, 2024) and became a landing pad for working-class immigrants, refugees, and racialized groups displaced from other areas within Toronto, Canada and various regions of the Global South (Eizadirad, 2017).

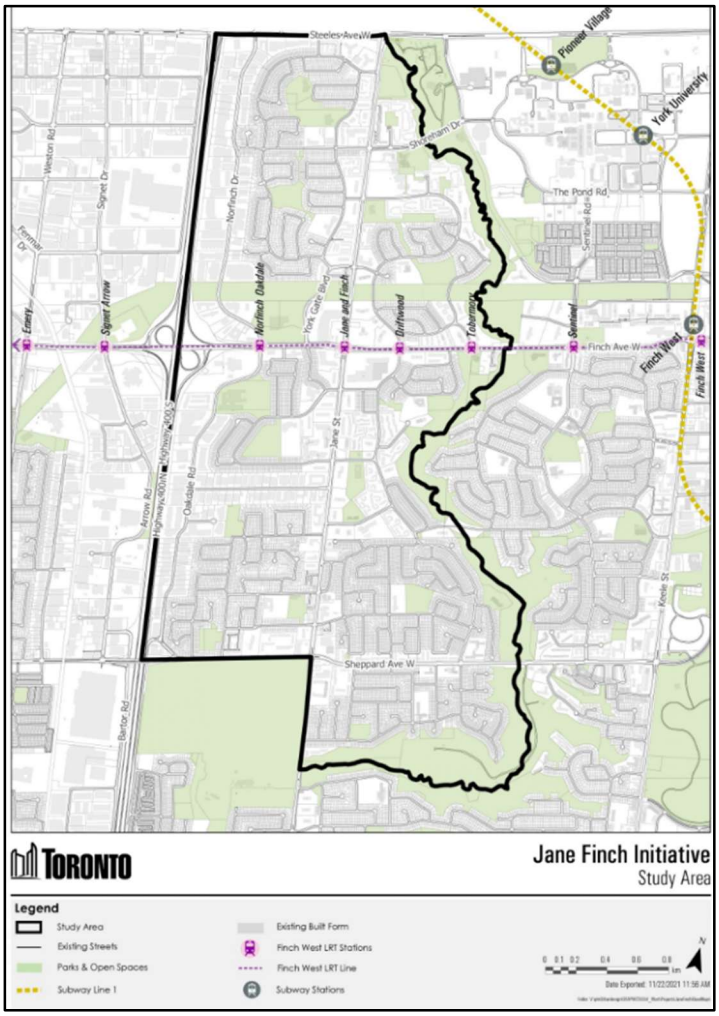


Figure 3: Map of Jane Finch through a City Planning lens, for the Jane Finch Initiative Planning study, by the City of Toronto, 2021

It is situated between areas of mostly urban-suburban activity; with the Downsview area to the South and the north side of the community, Steeles Avenue, sharing Toronto’s northern political boundary, bordering the suburban municipality of Vaughan, Ontario. The area is connected to these other suburban-urban areas by both intersecting major roadways of the central intersection, Jane Street and Finch Avenue West. The Highway 400 onramp to the west of the intersection is a nearby access point along Finch Avenue West. The eastern edge of the community is often characterized by City Planners as ending at the Black Creek, a watershed of the Humber River, located between the Jane and Finch and York University-Keele-Finch area (See Figure 3). Though some may consider areas along Finch Avenue West east of Black Creek to be part of the community as well, because of the socio-

economic connections with the Finch West Light Rail Train (LRT) station, and C.W. Jeffreys Collegiate Institute, a secondary school on Sentinel Road.

The Finch West LRT line is a recent addition to the City's transit network and runs on Finch Avenue West through the West-East length of the community (see Figure 4), with several stops. The Finch Hydro Corridor is an area for the hydroelectric transmissions lines that also provides green space and a recreational trail for the public. This corridor is oriented parallel to Finch West and is located approximately 320 m north of the Right-of-Way.

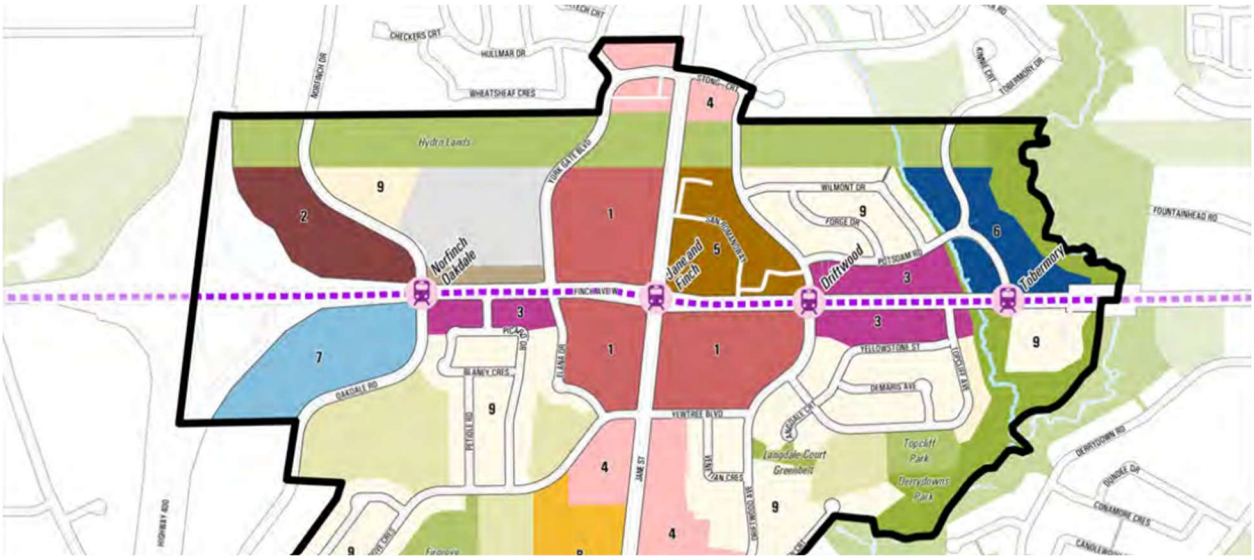


Figure 4: Secondary Plan highlighting the Finch West LRT's path through the central area of the community, City of Toronto, 2021

The Black Creek watershed is the most prominent feature of the community running across the north-south length of the neighbourhood. The Toronto Region Conservation Authority and the City of Toronto's Park department controls the area containing this creek and the parallel recreational trail maintained within the valley of Black Creek. This linear green space provides a quiet area where people bike, run, or walk while being surrounded by nature and high tree coverage for the neighbourhood's population of 50,000+ (City of Toronto, 2021). The energy infrastructure, fuel depots, pipelines and hydro-electric transmission lines within and bordering the neighbourhood are large infrastructure assets that can interestingly go unnoticed by residents, in fact they were never brought up by any of the participants of this research study.

In recent years, Jane and Finch residents have been a leading community in the North-West intervening in displacement risks and gentrification driven by transit projects and inequitable transit-oriented development by the region's transit agency, Metrolinx. In efforts to receive community benefit concessions for the development of the Finch West LRT and Maintenance/Storage Facility, the community has had to protest against an attempt to renege on a verbal agreement by Metrolinx to dedicate lands for a community hub (MacNevin, 2023) while also demanding anti-displacement planning policies be introduced in the area's secondary plans and community development policies.

1.4 Research Significance

At first glance, the two case study communities are seemingly vastly distinct, and in many ways they are. In traditional forms of comparison, they would be perceived as too different and unrelated to compare but contemporary urban research is increasingly highlighting the connected nature of the multi-faceted issues that people in communities around the world are facing in both urban and rural settings, and in Global North and South contexts. The open and investigative nature of Relational Comparison provides us with a necessary comparative framework that we can use to understand how perceived global processes are interconnected with regional and local realities, giving us a tool to address these issues with those local insights and seeing if, how, and to what extent they are interconnected.

In this comparison, the research shows how the pressures facing Longo Mai and Jane Finch are not isolated. Across the globe, neoliberal capitalism has created various crises that some call a 'polycrisis '- a convergence of climate change risks, political instability felt at a global level, and deteriorating socio-economic conditions which threaten the well-being of everyone and everything. Exemplified by climate disasters, forced displacement, housing and food insecurity, water shortages, and public health crises (Oscilowicz, Connolly & Anguelovski, 2026). As Harvey (2004) argues, the crises felt today are contradictions of the neoliberal system, namely overaccumulation, through its mode of dispossession.

Critically, the conditions of the South are not isolated and unfelt in the Global North. As Sparke (2007) articulates, in many ways, the Global South is ‘everywhere’ in the form of conditions of dispossession that can emerge when neoliberal capitalism roots inequality. People from underdeveloped, politically unstable or conflict-intense areas that characterize the Global South, often are the first to find themselves living in parallel conditions in the Global North after migrating and hoping for improved conditions. Areas of accumulation, inequality and neglect are increasingly seen in every corner of the globe, from gentrification in the North to, luxury developments in the South. In this manner, the term Global South is increasingly used as a conceptual framing for repossession by the dispossessed, which reterritorializes space in their interest and is not fixed to location necessarily. This is why I utilize it strategically in this comparison of Longo Mai and Jane Finch case studies, to build solidarity across both regions while recognizing some key differences; it vitally also shows how connected both categories are and have become.

The struggles the subject communities face are becoming increasingly visible across socio-economic groups and in new geographies. Seeing the globe as interconnected and deeply related to each other is a perspective that can help build the solidarity required to face these ongoing challenges. The documented groundwork of these communities can help expand and improve strategies that trained ‘equity planners’ and/or ‘insurgent planners’ can utilize in spatial initiatives to help address locally felt global issues, such as integrating immigrants, mitigating inequality, and organizing against dispossessive processes of gentrification and extractive megaprojects by the state and market actors.

1.5 General Organization

This paper is organized into five sections following the introduction:

- **Section 2** reviews the literature related to community spaces, spatial-temporal frames of analysis like the 'spatial triad' and 'verticalities' vs. 'horizontalities, planning histories of 'decommonization'/enclosure, and a critical engagement of resistance strategies of 'Commoning', the 'Right to the City', 'Insurgent Planning', and more recently, 'Third Spaces/Places'.
- **Section 3** outlines the methodology, fieldwork and data collection. This includes utilizing Hart's relational comparison and Clarissa Freitas' temporal-spatial analysis approach.
- **Section 4** presents findings from the two case studies – Longo Mai and Jane and Finch. Each case is organized around its history, key moments of neoliberal planning, and frequently mentioned community spaces in each area. It also discusses the shared processes, themes and connections of both case study areas.
- **Section 5** concludes by summarizing the findings, reflecting on key insights from each case study area and shared connections, discussing limitations of the research and opportunities for new areas of research. Lastly, it will outline the criteria and structure for a Knowledge Mobilization Memo to be shared with participants from the case study communities.

Figures are located throughout the text. The bibliography and appendices are located at the end of this paper.

2.0 Planning Enclosure, Extraction and Community Space

This section examines the literature regarding notions of community spaces, related concepts of bottom-up planning, and the top-down forces felt locally in the era of neoliberalism or neocolonial capitalism. The three theoretical frameworks employed by Lefebvre, Sevilla-Buitrago, and Santos, provide us with concepts that can help us effectively understand space at various scales and through multiple disciplines like history, philosophy and critical geography. Santos also provides us with a philosophical understanding of the Southern immigrant perspective in new spatial realities whereas Freitas helps us understand debates between initiatives that work both in and out of the formal legal planning process, especially in the South. Lastly, the discussion on Soja and Oldenburg's use of the 'Third Place/Spaces' provides us with the basis for a term frequently utilized in the interviews, and the value of appropriating the term as a stand in for community space in the future.

2.1 The Spatial Triad and Representational Space

Henri Lefebvre's (1991) book, *The Production of Space*, is a fundamental reading for transforming how we understand space, explained through a socio-philosophical lens. Lefebvre here outlines why we should replace traditional understandings of space – as neutral, a container or background of everyday life – and instead look at it as a unique product shaping society and produced through social relations; while also being a means of production; what he calls 'social space'. This perspective lies in sharp contrast to the dominant views within planning and spatial-planning related fields, i.e. engineering, architecture, economics, public policy, which have traditionally focused on space as a geometric problem and resource to be utilized, consumed and dominated for economic gain. The main product of this elite view has largely been the creation of a distinct type of space, i.e. 'abstract space' – a homogenizing capitalistic space that erases local spatio-

temporal characteristics and replaces it with a space that prioritizes exchange value and separates us from historical time.

In Lefebvre's view, abstract space is essential to the expanding territorial requirements of capitalism. He also sees this type of social space – "space" which he defines as a set of (social) relations between things (objects and products) (pp.82, 83) – as a form of spatial colonization, a violent subordination of local spaces to the logic of capital. To understand these relationships, Lefebvre (1991, p.33) develops the 'spatial triad', a three-sided relationship of various spaces, each representing a different aspect of space:

> **1. Spatial Practice (Perceived Space):** referring to the routines of people, taken routes, physical networks of everyday life and how they are interacted with.
>
> **2. Representations of Space (Conceived Space):** the space divided and conceptualized by the technocratic spatial fields previously mentioned, who utilize blueprints, maps, diagrams, models, policies and signs, to produce and control it.
>
> **3. Representational Space (Lived Space):** the way space is experienced emotionally and the personal meaning associated with spaces in their everyday lives, including through symbolism, life experiences, memories, art and images. It includes *Symbolic Space*, specific spaces often representing identity and origin. It is often the site where people resist *Conceived Space*.

Lefebvre's triad is important for seeing everyday life differently and the ways which we can substantially transform our communities. Though it is not a static list of categories, it is a dialectical relationship, meaning there is constant tension and relationship between them. Especially between abstract space – which primarily operates through conceived space, and its tension with 'differential space' – which is primarily advanced through representational space and spatial practice – the type of space that supports use-value over exchange value and celebrates difference. Differential space restores lived experience, which has been fragmented by abstract space, and politicizes the everyday, facilitates key moments of emotion, protest, liberatory potential and relinks time and space back together.

The spatial triad is vital for recognizing the issues that technocratic planner miss but also for seeing the opportunities and initiatives that insurgent/equity planners, residents and grassroots groups, have identified and are progressing. As they often appropriate systems and spaces, both formal and informal, to better support working class and subaltern groups and can advance differential space.

Lefebvre's framework is helpful for understanding the spatial struggles seen in the case study areas. Where groups like Movimiento Rios Vivos (Living Rivers Movement) and Jane and Finch Action Against Poverty (JFAAP), utilize differential space (controlled creative community spaces), spatial practice and representational space (symbolic imagery, art murals, workshops, advocacy, protest and political engagement) to push back against the dominant abstract space and the spatial representations that planners and the state attempts to install and eventually expand.

2.2 Planning as Enclosure and (De)Commoning

In Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago's (2023) book, *Against the Commons*, he deconstructs planning's role throughout history in deteriorating 'the commons', which applies to the cases I will be explaining in the following sections. The commons being spaces of autonomy, that the working class had previously relied on to share social interactions and resources, build social movements, produce and reproduce the requirements of human life, and areas of mutual care which ensured social reproduction. He argues that planning has been a vital part of the process of 'decommonization' of society, the term he uses to describe the 'gradual spatial subsuming, eroding and neutralizing of the commons and popular forms of (communal) living' (p.4).

Sevilla-Buitrago presents a 'radical history of planning', one that centres planning's role in the historical process of "enclosure". Enclosure referring to the privatization of shared common lands and resources, and the removal of rights to them; taking place during the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe and especially, England, where modern

planning traces its roots from according to Sevilla-Buitrago. This form of spatial dispossession, he controversially classifies as a form of 'Internal colonization', in describing the elimination of lands and resources that peasant and working classes depended on for autonomous and communal living arrangements. In his view, the consequences of this process, decommonization and dispossession more broadly, are felt especially harshly with colonization in Southern contexts, or as the term he adopts, the 'Majority world'. Though this Eurocentric framing removes the distinct violent realities of global imperial colonization, the conflation can be useful for understanding how the dynamics of dispossession are also reflected to a lesser degree in Northern contexts, such as in the case of the Jane and Finch community.

Building on his historical analysis of planning, he expands the commons from the traditional definition of the commons – as resources and physical land – instead defining the term as "shared material and immaterial resources, spaces, and skills, as well as the institutions, organizational assets, power structures, and cooperative everyday practices and territorialities involved in their production and maintenance" (p.19). His broad definition allows him to highlight how planning has targeted various types of commons as part of the decommonization strategy in the Euro-American case study areas he examines. In addition to land, he examines the commons of publicity (public spaces and social interaction), creativity (community work and artistry), and centrality (being part of historic urban cores) to show how they are arenas of top-down and bottom-up planning.

From this framework, Sevilla-Buitrago also highlights how urban forms of public spaces have often worked as a pacified replacement for a true common. Places like parks, settlement houses, playgrounds, sports facilities, and community centres – which I sometimes call community-dedicated or community space(s) – he describes as infrastructure and services that are often provided as a result of crises. This becomes apparent in our Jane and Finch case study during the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the neighbourhood and the (re)negotiation of a promised community hub.

This historical replacement that he highlights was to justify and normalize elite capitalist urbanization at the expense and marginalization of everyday commoning practices. Classifying working class practices as dangerous, backwards, and foreign while pedestalizing standards of middle- and upper-class urban conduct.

In contrast to these pacified recreational spaces, Sevilla-Buitrago imagines commoning as an active process of resistance and reclamation. “Commoning”, in its active form, then becomes a new urbanization process ‘shaping communal spaces, relations and imaginations (p.19). A practice certainly present in both case study areas as the findings highlight with their reclaiming of imagined, symbolic/physical spaces and resources; exemplified by the recommoning of lands, buildings and threatened rivers in Longo Mai and underutilized spaces in Jane Finch (residential buildings, mall spaces and the lands for the planned community hub).

Sevilla-Buitrago contemplates a bottom-up replacement for the future of the field of planning that integrates and supports these commoning strategies. To do so, he advocates for planners to facilitate the mobilization of communities to achieve their commonization goals through internal (spatial and collective) organizing and gradual state restructuring for long-term bottom-up planning. In this way, they become intermediaries between the state-market and the working class, shielding the latter from decommonization planning practices and progressing an anticapitalist people-centric future. In both case study areas, planners like this were present in some form, such as the Administration and the Committee of Tourism in Longo Mai, Costa Rica, and in Jane Finch with planners of local agencies and groups with formal and non-formal training.

2.3 Verticalities, Horizontalities and the Two Circuits of Capital

Milton Santos was a Southern (Brazilian) theorist and critical geographer that acknowledged Lefebvre’s concept of space being produced by society itself and blended it with his understanding of regional and global networks in the technology and informational age. In this spatio-temporal environment, which he called the scientific-technical-

informational milieu in his book The Nature of Space (1996/2021), hegemonic actors are increasingly blending technology, science and information into our everyday lives in what he sees as a fight in 'Espaço Banal' – everyday space, the total physical space shared locally – between 'verticalities' – the hierarchical global networks and infrastructure connected through a focus on accumulating power, profit and those that facilitate/control them – and 'horizontalities' - the local actors, interactions and collaborations taking place and characterized by human solidarity, especially in the Global South and marginalized immigrant neighbourhoods of the Global North. These terms highlight a global-local perspective of the similar conceptual relationship of 'abstract space' and 'differential space', articulated by Lefebvre'.

Horizontalities can be the community spaces that are places of struggle, made in the everyday space, that allow for new possibilities. They are socio-spatial networks that are produced by and reproduce new community spaces, that combine material objects with human actions, which allow communities like Longo Mai and Jane and Finch to lead, socialize and prioritize human (working class) solidarity over profit. Sometimes being enabled by '*rugosities'* – physical space as rough archives of the past (e.g. older underutilized commercial/residential spaces in Jane and Finch) and ambivalent verticalities – verticalities that can produce positive outcomes at times (e.g. United Nations investments in Longo Mai with the UNAPROA Ranch). When leveraged and appropriated, these spaces can provide physical infrastructure to confront hegemonic actors and verticalities in the era of globalization. Globalization which he essentially describes as a war-like, top-down project forcing external timelines on local areas and uprooting communities (Santos, 2021).

In the case of Jane and Finch and Longo Mai they are everyday spaces that would exist, according to Santos, in the lower circuit of the globalized economy. A globalized network controlled largely by the US, Western powers/allies, and transnational corporations. In his theory of economic circuits (Kipfer, 2025), Santos separates the globalized economy into two circuits, the upper- and lower- circuits, with the upper characterized by geographies with capital-intensive technology-knowledge based economies – common in the North –

and the lower being characterized by labour intensive, informal and small-scale economies – typical of the South – which often become geographies of hyperexploitation and fragmentation. The upper circuit depends largely on the lower to produce the wealth that has enabled verticalities to develop and intrude further into peripheral and rural areas, altering the 'spatio-environmental milieu' – what we experience space in all aspects, including perceptions of time and our social interactions.

The case study areas represent areas that show increasing control and interest by acting verticalities of the upper circuit. In this context, community spaces become ever more important in fights against verticalities by horizontalities of their region, especially in spaces within the lower circuit.

Regarding immigration and integration, Santos also speaks about this lived experience in philosophical terms. In his view, immigrants often represent horizontal actors pushed and pulled by verticalities, often through violent political means. In their new setting, they often must forget their past while relying on collective memory of their homelands to respatialize their new homes (often through *symbolic space*) and accept the new *spatio-temporal milieu* in order to succeed, technology often being a major factor for this need (e.g. mass agriculture, dams, strategies).

In this setting, of the scientific-technological-informational milieu, and its mainstreaming of mass culture fed by those that benefit from the hegemonic, hierarchal, and consumer nature of capitalism's globalization, profound popular culture (including that of dispossessed immigrants and working-class backgrounds) becomes possible. It is enabled through the rise in globally connected technology and media infrastructure and networks. Santos predicts the globalization of people through this vertical infrastructure, and that it may serve as a basis for a human-centric revolutionary future (see Section 5).

2.4 The Right to the City and Insurgent Planning

As a key methodological and theoretical framework, I use Clarissa Freitas's work (2017, 2019) of comparing the efforts of Right to the City (RTTC) initiatives and Insurgent planning in Fortaleza, Brazil to ground my analysis of planning contexts in both case study areas. She theorizes and shows through her case study that insurgent planning efforts are often more transformative and effective in shaping the socio-spatial realities of everyday life while showing RTTC policies are often co-opted to further a neoliberal agenda and interests by the state and market actors. Further she leans on previous work of spatial analysis of the change and/or progression of community spaces during major events, like the World Cup to measure urban change as a result of the planned environment and infrastructure projects.

In terms of Insurgent planning, Freitas sees it as a 'broader field of planning that is imagined around notions of insurgency, autonomy and interventions in the spatial building process to meet the public interest' (p. 285, 2019). To her it necessitates a "counter-hegemonic process that aims at changing the current structure of power" that is reliant on a neoliberal system and set of beliefs/values. Whereas RTTC, which Freitas separates into two definitions, one with the liberal notion evolving the concept in practice to reject the notion of social and collective rights, self-management and empowerment while the other adopts them, therefore more closely aligning with Lefebvre's vision of the concept.

In her analysis of Fortaleza, she explains how RTTC policies meant to be progressive and potentially transformative – after local demands for urbanization and engagement resourcing – were reformulated into a neoliberal planning framework and implementation that has severely weakened their inclusionary potential. The policies were harmful and misused, she identifies these harms coming as Private-Public-Partnerships (PPPs) that in effect concentrate capital, participatory planning that "depoliticize communities' struggles while extending state control within the society" (p. 297, 2019), and upgrading informal settlements in a way that worsens spatial access, increase violence and displaces community members; with some benefitting monetarily and through scenic infrastructure

upgrade of an avenue that is underutilized locally. Trends that are similarly apparent in the Jane Finch neighbourhood case study.

Insurgent planning taking place in Fortaleza on the other hand maintains the ability to confront the state through protest and selective dialogue. The community organizing themselves around thematic committees, responsible for different aspects of urban life and scrutinizing related groups and at times ally with other neighbourhoods with similar issues. Their independence from the state allows them to critique and monitor planning state action and processes implemented by formal planners and policymakers, while also carefully choosing when to negotiate, without legitimizing state actions.

In Freitas's earlier (2017) article, she examines how urban interventions and concentrated investment during the major events (specifically during the World Cup) altered the conditions for nearby residents, including through the land use change and loss of an essential community space. In it she ties urban interventions of infrastructure with the loss of a childhood development centre and worsening local social condition. In my analysis, I do this and the opposite, by looking at how community spaces containing these networks of informal planners' effect spatial outcomes.

2.5 Engaging 'Third Spaces/Places' Discourse

During my review of the literature, it became apparent that "community spaces" (*espacios comunitarios*, its Spanish translation) is a generic and broad term that is frequently utilized in practice in both Global North-South settings. Interestingly, mainstream urbanist discourse has started utilizing the terms "third places/spaces" synonymously and as a replacement to community space. It was frequently utilized by younger participants of the Jane Finch case study (4 JF participants, under the age of 30), leading me to include it in this review. A closer academic look of the term/s reveal they are actually two vastly different concepts.

Ostensibly to mainstream audiences, “Third Places” is a somewhat radical academic rebranding of the term community space, that to some, imagines a world with more places of socialization that exclude the first two domains, work and home. This is the most common understanding of the term, which is that of “third places” coined by Ray Oldenburg (1989), a relatively conservative framework that merely focuses on physical sites in isolation and as places of localized social cohesion, enjoyment and leisure.

Whereas “third spaces” by Edward Soja (1996) is a philosophical term that aligns more with Lefebvre’s *representational space (lived space)* – the messy and fluid space(s) that allow for new possibilities and radical transformation, while also providing aspects of everyday socialization. Soja combines Lefebvre’s Marxist focus with postcolonial understandings of geography and subaltern groups/identities.

In this way, my use of “community space” aligns more with Soja than Oldenburg, while understanding participants sometimes think about it more in terms set out by Oldenburg. Though in my research interviews, I left my questions and use of community, communal, community-dedicated spaces open to interpretation, for participants to be able to respond in the manner they felt made the most sense with what they knew about my research, which meant discussing these spaces in the terms that they understood them.

2.6 Summary of Literature, Gaps and Contribution

The literature reviewed through this chapter demonstrates that planning can be broadened to include activities beyond that of professional planning to activities happening in everyday life. Planning can occur through (re)commoning, confrontation, community organizing, spatial appropriation, artistry and collective action. Critical planning and geography literature is increasingly utilized in examining community spaces at a local to global level and through multiple disciplines. Space being a term that we can increasingly look at not just as a static container but as a constantly evolving product and means to shape our environment.

Frameworks developed by the examined authors provide theoretical grounding for connections of spaces across multiple scales, while attending to local specificity to help test these theories in practice, as demonstrated in Freitas's work on insurgent planning. In these framings, spaces, including community spaces, in their broadest sense are also arenas of contestation, negotiation, power, social mobilization and governance. When evaluated through comparison they can reveal how local planning practices respond to and challenge broader neoliberal planning processes.

This research addresses these gaps through relational comparison of Longo Mai and Jane and Finch, examining how community spaces and planning practices are shaped by, and respond to mutually constitutive processes. While also what connections may or may not emerge between them in wider processes of migration, globalization, capitalist development and socio-environmental change.

Ultimately, this MP argues that community spaces can often function as physical and social infrastructure allowing actors to intentionally change their local and regional environments and social conditions. By comparing both case study areas, it contributes to evidence to ongoing debates around commoning, insurgent planning, dispossession and globalization, while developing Hart's relational comparison into a direction that can connect grassroots strategies of change.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Multi-theoretical Approach

I utilize a mainly qualitative research method approach while Hart's (2018) utilizing relational comparison, by framing the two case studies as starting or "vantage points" rather than as isolated boxes to compare and contrast. By looking at similarities, vertical forces of capital, and the case study's spatio-historical specificities, I try to understand how people from the subject communities have been dispossessed of their ability to live autonomously in the past or present and the risks that may be facing them. I do this

through a series of interviews (22 in total), informal conversations, and document/spatial analysis.

In terms of strategic resistance opportunities, I evaluated community-dedicated spaces as places that can be utilized to provide the physical and social infrastructure to resist those challenges and risks from global capital forces. In the interviews, I employ Clarissa Freitas's (2017) strategy of understanding how specific spaces, places, and their social/material conditions have changed throughout time and during major events or significant moments. I utilize Hart's concept of conjunctural analysis to understand what it means on a global level in the Discussion Section, after analyzing each case study's history, local processes and challenges, as described by research participants.

From the literature I developed 4 analytical axes to develop the interview questions for the semi-structured interviews. I do this by asking questions based on the literature reviewed during the proposal stage (Ness, 2023; Cusicanqui, 2012; Escobar, 2018) and those found within the literature review of this MP. The 4 axes were: 1. Migration, Personal views & Origins, 2. Governance, Culture & Agency, 3. Strategies/Threats of Contestation, and 4. Spatial/Material Effects (See Appendix A for descriptions and questions sheet). Two sets of interview questions were developed, one for professionals or those with a formal planning background and the second for residents who participated in the planning process and utilized the community-dedicated spaces. The interview questions were then translated into Spanish for those in the Longo Mai, Costa Rica case study area.

3.2 Fieldwork

Throughout the fieldwork phase, I focused on finding research participants from racialized or Global South backgrounds. I conducted more interviews in the Longo Mai, Costa Rica case study due to my limited familiarity with the area. I visited the Longo Mai case study area for approximately 12 days in January of 2026, staying in a homestay in the area and speaking with residents of various ethnic backgrounds. There I interviewed 12 participants, all of whom were residents. 10 of them were residents with ancestry from the Central

American subcontinent who moved to Longo Mai, while 2 of the participants were long-time residents of European origin connected to the European Cooperative. Participants were recruited utilizing the Snowball method and interviewed promptly.

In the Jane Finch case study community, I interviewed 10 participants from February of 2026 to March of 2026. Fewer participants were utilized for this case study area due to my familiarity as a long-time resident (approximately 20 years). In this case study area, 9 of the participants had ancestry/origins from the Global South, i.e. Asia (4 participants), Caribbean (3 participants), South America (1 participant), Africa (1 participant). 1 of the participants was of European origin, while none were from Latin America due to low interest. Participants were recruited through familiar networks and social media posts (see Appendix B for digital poster utilized).

Further to this, photos were taken in both case study areas of community spaces and objects of interest for the purpose of spatial analysis.

3.3 Analysis

To analyze the interview findings an abductive coding approach was utilized. Otter AI and Gladia Ai were used to speed up transcription of interviews. The 4 analytical axes served as parent codes which helped specific codes during the first round of coding. Two rounds of coding were conducted in order to build the themes which make up the part of the findings.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Longo Mai, Costa Rica

4.1.1 History

The Longo Mai community in Costa Rica was started as part of the European Longo Maï cooperative's initiative to assist Nicaraguan refugees during its civil war of the 'Cold War' period. The Longo Mai movement ("Longo Maï" meaning "may it last long" in Provençal) is a group of agricultural cooperatives with an anti-capitalist ideology of grassroots

alternative sustainable rural living (radicalecologicaldemocracy, 2016). The lands to create Longo Mai were purchased in 1979 by the Longo Mai cooperative organization with financial assistance from the United Nations and began accommodating refugees from Nicaragua during the civil war.

Later, it would accommodate refugees and migrants from El Salvador during its civil war. It would also provide refuge for people looking for secure conditions from within Costa Rica itself, including for peasant families (indigenous and non-indigenous). People connected to the European Longo Mai organization and movement would later also reside in Longo Mai, Costa Rica. The first cooperative of Longo Mai was established in Europe (France) in 1973, as a result of social (student and youth) movements of 1968 demanding a better future (Longomaicostarica, n.d.).

The idea of the Costa Rica Longo Mai initiative was to create a community for displaced and impoverished people that could come cultivate their own sustenance and become self-sufficient. Longo Mai founders describe it as an act of solidarity, and it was possibly sparked by a direct request from representatives of Nicaragua's Sandinista party – Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional – Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) – according to one account (Ferretti & Galarce, & Ferretti & Tamayo, 2023). After the Sandinista's victory in Nicaragua many of the refugees returned to retrieve their lands and homes around 1980, and those lands were promptly utilized by refugees from El Salvador during some of the harshest years of the Salvadoran Civil War.

As one research participant and planner from Longo Mai implies, the community is similar to others in the region but also different in its creation, and distinct from other Longo Mai communities:

> Longo Mai [Costa Rica] is not a real socialist community or anything like that. Yeah, it's just a regular farming village, with a very unusual history, that is to say, compared to the other villages here, but otherwise the reality is more or less a farming village, with the reality of this kind of microclimate we have right here in Costa Rica (CR4-Chicharra Interview, 2026.06.03, Pos. 248)

The ‘unusual history’ possibly referring to the Sandinista proposition (amidst the Cold War) to create the community, which lead to the founding and funding by the European Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) of cooperatives of Longo Mai. Longo Mai considers the Costa Rica Longo Mai to be an “un-intentional community”, in contrast to the European Longo Mais which share communal political ideals and intentionally created their communities accordingly (radicalecologicaldemocracy, 2016). The local cooperative of Asociación Longo Mai, Costa Rica is the only community within the group of cooperatives which has its own independent legal entity and administers decisions through a board of directors and local committees (Longomaicostarica, n.d.).

Despite this, there were attempts to produce intentionality and communal arrangements through shared production of crops and the creation of committees. According to several research participants, early attempts to continue communal agricultural arrangements were largely unsuccessful, due to differences in practices, values and to a degree, language (as a result of different Spanish dialects). Though select committees remain, like the Comité de Turismo [Committee of Tourism], many no longer exist, despite successes in building projects and succeeding in socio-environmental objectives in key moments, such as with the group Asociacion Union de Amigos para la Proteccion del Ambiente (UNAPROA)[Union of Friends for Environmental Protection Association].

In many ways, Cold War politics were a major force which created the Longo Mai Costa Rica community. As previously mentioned, the European Longo Maï cooperative organization and its founders were admittedly rooted in the “Generation 68” protest movements (Longomaicostarica, n.d.), which was a global anti-establishment movement protesting the Vietnam War, Soviet and US militarism, along with global-local socio-economic conditions (Boraman, 2018). Further down the timeline, the intended refuge for Nicaraguans and later, Salvadoran refugees, were a direct result response to military interventions by Western and Soviet blocs which helped to condition, spark and influence the civil wars of that era. In this manner, the same global political reasons which made Longo Maï’s Generation 68, also created the rationale and population for Longo Mai, Costa Rica, once the European Cooperative movement was more established. These Cold War

era events and related pressures shaped subsequent migration to the community through a long-term influence on politics and socioeconomic conditions in the Central American region. This relationship is discussed further in the Discussion Section and Case-Specific findings.

4.1.2 Key Moments

Throughout Longo Mai's history there have been key moments of neoliberal megadevelopments that have threatened the autonomy and security of residents. In these moments of expansion and accumulation, developments in this urban-rural region take the form of extractive industries which threaten environmental degradation and have required the community and region to organize. Two key moments of megaprojects/developments discussed in this section are the increasing presence of pineapple monoculture, mostly by PINDECO, and hydroelectric dam proposals incentivized by the Instituto Costariccense de Electricidad (ICE).

PINDECO's Pineapple Expansion [2000 – Present]

The Pineapple Development Corporation (PINDECO), a subsidiary of Del Monte, one company within the United Fruit Group of Companies, was established in Costa Rica in 1978. In the country, PINDECO developed monoculture pineapple plantations which included the Buenos Aires region, contributing to thousands of hectares of intense land and water use that deteriorated agricultural lands and rainforest. This has led to dedicating over 58,000 ha of land to pineapples, as of 2016, making Costa Rica the leading pineapple producer in the world and creating a "five fold increase" in production since the year 2000 (Echavarría & Prunier, 2021, p.11), a number that has only increased since.

The results in Buenos Aires, have contributed to and exacerbated a host of deleterious socio-environmental factors, including but not limited to, the drying up and overflow of rivers, sedimentation, water contamination, worker exploitation/repression, pesticide-induced disease, pollution, territorial conflicts, Indigenous land loss, land

defender/activist assassinations and more (Castro-Vargas, 2025; Echavarría & Prunier, 2020; The Associated Press, 2020).

One resident and Comite de Turismo [Committee of Tourism] member, Maria (Participant CR2), described the local situation with pineapples agriculture like this:

> ...en Estados Unidos no los dejan usar a ellos ese tipo de fertilizantes allá, pero hayan bien bonito traerse esto para usarlo aquí. Entonces cuando uno reclama y uno sabe lo que están haciendo ellos no les gusta.. (Maria, Participant CR2)
>
> [..In the United States, they don't let them [producers] use that type of fertilizer there, but they find it good to use it here. So then when one complains and know what they are doing, they don't like that..]

In the case of Longo Mai, PINDECO's growing presence has resulted in worker exploitation and repression, especially in response to organizing and unionizing efforts by family members and the community around the late 2000s (Arias Campos, 2017; Maurer, 2010).

In terms of worker repression, it is easier for PINDECO to control terms with employees as it is one of the biggest employers in the region and its expansion means that smaller agricultural producers are absorbed, worsening the exploitation and human rights violations (Arias Campos, 2017; Echavarría & Prudier, 2020). In addition, their growing expansion into rural areas leads to disproportionate control of socio-economic dynamics in communities like Longo Mai, that increasingly rely on the funds workers receive (Brown et al, 2020).

Pointing to the mass firings moment in the late 2000s, Maria (CR2) had this to say:

> Y ellos tomaron represión, eso fue algo muy muy duro porque habían muchos muchachos trabajando de aquí en la.. en el PINDECO y cuando vieron que aquí estaba la sede, UNAPROA y que hace ver todo lo que ellos hacen, ellos sacaron a todos los trabajadores de allá. No querían darles trabajo y entonces claro por un lado pues todas todas las personas se sintieron mal porque es la única compañía que está este agarrando gente para trabajar ya que acá pues no hay muchas fuentes de trabajo entonces allá la gente de acá, allá va muy duro que los despidieran del trabajo pero ellos.. Ellos hicieron eso. Entonces esa fue una represión para nosotros acá, ¿no?
>
> [..And they took repressive action, that was something very very hard because there were many workers from here.. in PINDECO and when they saw that the

> headquarters [FRENTE of UNAPROA] was here, and UNAPROA will show everyone what they're doing, they fired all of the workers from there. They didn't want to give them work and so clearly, in a way, everyone felt bad because it's the only company giving people work, and here, there aren't many employment streams available, so then that was hard for people of here and there, it was very hard when they did that, but they did it. So that was a type of repression, wasn't it?] (Participant CR2-Maria)

This sort of repression has often been brought up by participants and employees of the PINDECO. One current employee describes the condition like this when asked about whether they would rather work in Longo Mai if given more opportunities:

> Sí, claro. Sí, obviamente. PINDECO es una esclavitud. Tu vida es nada. Son tantas horas, son 12 h diarias estar ahí metidos. Entonces, si Longo Mai tuviera, no sé.. una fuente de trabajo que no sea igual obviamente que PINDECO, pero se emerge un poquito, creo que preferiría estar aquí.
>
> [Yes, of course.. Yes, obviously. PINDECO is slavery. Your life is nothing [there]. So many hours, its 12 hours daily there. So if Longo Mai had, I don't know.. a stream of work which obviously wouldn't be the same as PINDECO, but one can gain a bit, I think I would prefer to stay here.] (CR7-Flowers, Pos. 287-290)

During this continuing period of dependency on PINDECO, Longo Mai has contributed to helping socio-environmental causes by hosting organizing events, (e.g. the UNAPROA building) which has helped limit PINDECO's expansion in the region. For example, with the suspension of a new PINDECO permit in 2017 and the banning of Bromacil as an agrochemical. Two participants mentioned that there seemed to be less (toxic) water runoff by PINDECO due to pressure by regional actors on MINAES, the Environment ministry. Despite these efforts, territorial and socio-environmental issues related to the cultivation of pineapple monoculture remain a concern (Environmentaljustice, 2022).

Hydroelectric Dams Proposals [2012 – 2020]

Development and megaprojects have threatened the Longo Mai community and the wellbeing of its residents with regard to hydroelectric dam proposals. Various planned projects by the Instituto Costariccense de Electricidad (ICE) have consistently threatened water sources in the Brunca region. Previous researchers such as Fletcher & Frece (2023,

p. 264), have highlighted how dams have caused harm in Costa Rican and produce negative ecological effects while “failing to deliver predicted benefits in terms of irrigation, flood control, and electricity production”. In addition, there are many possible social issues that these ecological effects can cause downstream for local communities and the displacement that occurs with such projects like increased pollution (in water and food systems), and the loss of livelihoods and biological availability.

Despite these notable issues, ICE has continuously attempted to renew the expansion of the hydroelectric dams in the country, incentivizing the planning of dozens of dams to further its National Climate Change strategy of increasing hydroelectric power generation in the country. ICE utilized evolving discourse on energy to portray dams as a green energy source that reduced the dependence on natural gas while ignoring the success of other potential alternatives in the country which previously allowed it to reduce its reliance on hydroelectricity in the past (Fletcher & Frece, 2020; Arias Campos, 2017). Several projects were being proposed in the Brunca region by small developers, many of which were absorbed by megadeveloper the Hernán Solís Group (H. Solis), the largest concessionary for public infrastructure in the country (Bolaños Dávila, 2020).

ICE supported companies like H. Solis without regard for socio-environmental conditions, the dependence by communities on these vital water sources and the energy surplus in the country. They have largely placed these concerns aside for the sake of economic growth while implementing their plans by supporting developers, for example, by giving H. Solis legal and financial assurances for the San Rafael Hydroelectric Project, which included giving them contracts before even receiving environmental permits from state environmental technical reviewer, Secretaría Técnica Nacional Ambiental (SETENA)[National Technical Environmental Secretariat](FECON, 2019).

From 2010 onwards, there have been various hydroelectric dam proposals which have directly threatened the Rio Convento and Rio Sonador, the watersystem in Longo Mai and the Brunca region. For example, Monteverde I & II, are two hydroelectric projects among many, which were proposed within the Brunca region by H. Solis, and which were being

studied by ICE and private developers (Spendlingwimmer, 2013, as cited in Álvarez, 2013) (see Figure 5), to further the country's national sustainable energy strategy. These projects would have threatened the wildlife ecological refuge that is Longo Mai, which relies on a healthy river system for flora and fauna to flourish. According to statistics generated by one Longo Mai administrator, these early proposed projects could have reduced downstream flows of the Convento River to about 10% of normal levels in one 4-5 km stretch, with the river being totally dry in the dry season (Spendlingwimmer, 2013, as cited in Álvarez, 2013); threatening residents who rely entirely on these rivers for everyday living in Longo Mai and across the Brunca region, such as in communities like San Rafael, Convento and Cristo Rey.



Figure 5: Private Hydroelectric Dam Projects in the Brunca Region in 2013. From Alvarez, 2013 (September-October Issue) by Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica [National University of Costa Rica]

Due to sustained socioenvironmental activism and legal challenges by members of Federación para la Conservación de la Naturaleza (FECON)[Natural Environment

Conservation Federation], Movimiento Rios Vivos, UNAPROA (when it was active), University of Costa Rica, University Students, Indigenous Groups and other local groups and institutions in the region, all hydroelectric dams in the region were eventually cancelled.

Though several (4) of the research participants expressed growing tension within the community and families during the proposal period that remain to this day, between individuals having opposing perspectives of wanting hydroelectric dams because of the perceived socio-economic benefits and those that saw it as an existential threat.

Socio-Environmental Activism and Community Organizing (1982 -Present)

In regard to hydroelectric projects, Longo Mai hosted key meetings and events that organized the regional organizing effort. Groups like Movimiento Ríos Vivos [Living Rivers Movement] and Comisión Defensora de los Ríos Convento y Sonador [Convento & Sonador Rivers Defence Commission] were key in taking actions that would defend against local-specific threats and organize the greater regional effort against these types of projects, groups that residents of Longo Mai often participated within and were part of.

Longo Mai's organizational structure, including its official wildlife registration, and history of environmental stewardship and cooperative values has been specifically important in protecting the environment and creating the social conditions required to resist the pineapple and hydroelectric dam developments. Not only has it worked independently as a community to preserve the forest, but its registration as a national wildlife refuge and co-op provides the sufficient autonomy to organize academic resources, institutional/activist interventions and protect residents from economic backlash. It has consistently hosted large events (festivals, workshops, etc.) and created spaces (UNAPROA, Poza Convento, etc.) that intentionally highlight the importance of natural resources to build a greater movement that would help slow down and stop these megadevelopments.

Longo Mai's connections created by ecotourism have helped expand their movements with Euro-American audiences (tourists, institutions, organizations, and readers) who have also assisted and bolstered local efforts through investment and global activism/publications. As Arias Campos (2017) highlights in his article, the alternative structural organization of Longo Mai, the local community infrastructure, educational programming and expertise possessed there has helped educate and mobilize a broad set of actors against various socio-environmental struggles, which include fighting both pineapple monocultures and dams. The power of these market actors is facilitated by state institutions following an international push in the 80s by international institutions, which forced Costa Rica to adopt structural adjustment programs that incentivized international private investment into infrastructure and agriculture, exemplified by PINDECO receiving 'more tax credits than any other corporation' (Brown et al, 2020, para. 10).

The state continues to support ecologically disastrous industries while also branding the country as eco-friendly and therefore prepares Tourism Plans that shape the region's growing tourism economy. Perhaps in a more positive direction it may ironically raise awareness of these harmful environmental practices, including for the Brunca region with the Municipal Tourism Plan of Buenos Aires (ICT, 2025).

The York University-facilitated documentary and report by Bolaños Davis (2020), provides a documented timeline of events that protected Longo Mai and other towns against these threats, which began with disconnected localized struggles in 2013 that later became a nationwide movement peaking in a demonstration in Costa Rica's capital, San Jose, in 2019. She outlines internal challenges – like issues of maintaining interest and collaboration relating to discussions around feminism – but also strategies of cooperation with how water defenders would meet, collect and distribute information, create art highlighting struggles, train community members and allies, self fund activities, and build political alliances to confront hydroelectric projects and connect to other socio-environmental conflicts, including resistance to pineapple expansion. These efforts also contributed to the cancellation of a planned 600-ha pineapple megaplantation called

“Palma Sur” [“South Palm”] by Del Monte, after activists and advocates (including FECON) protested against it, forcing the Ministry of Environment & Energy (MINAE) to cancel permits given earlier by SETENA (Castro-Vargas, 2023; Varela, 2022).

Although the proposed hydroelectric projects were ultimately cancelled, PINDECO’s monoculture plantations still remain a threat and other socio-environmental conflicts like mining threaten local water resources, the Longo Mai community, and the Indigenous Peoples of the Brunca region. Regional water defenders and Longo Mai environmental leaders remain vigilant regarding future proposals of hydroelectric dam projects that can threaten their essential water supply, livelihoods and natural resources. Several (6) of the research participants were worried these hydroelectric dam efforts could continue into the future and four participants mentioned relying on the network and movement of Rios Vivos to continue to stay organized and protect the community from threats like the dams.

In addition to resident contributions and engagement, the resident administration and founding family Spendwlimmer, which includes: Aino - Committee of Tourism member and Kolping member, Jiri - anthropologist and head of the Wilflife Refuge and Escuela de La Tierra, and Roland - the founding member of Longo Mai Costa Rica. Together they, along with two other board members based in the European Longo Mai association, make technical land use decisions and administrative decisions. According to participants (4), residents and committees are advised when land use or administrative decisions are deemed significant by the administration. They also help to provide technical findings and protection, for example with the statistics and findings for publications, including those that highlighted the threat of the hydroelectric project dams pose (Álvarez, 2013), PINDECO’s ecological destruction, and indigenous land disputes with non-indigenous Costa Ricans in the region (ENCA, 2020; Arias Campos, 2017).

In large part to grassroots efforts in the region, with key contributions by residents and (effectively) equity planners in Longo Mai, and international/regional allies, all the hydroelectric projects in the region were eventually cancelled. Though Pineapple production from PINDECO/Del Monte remains, expansion seemed to have slowed down

with some large projects halted. In these socio-environmental efforts, Longo Mai and its community spaces, served as infrastructure for socialization within a greater regional effort to organize civil society against the risks and challenges associated with hydroelectric dams in the 2010s and PINDECO's continuing expansion.

4.1.3 Community Spaces

Throughout the research interviews various community spaces were mentioned as places that served Longo Mai. The spaces mentioned below were seen by participants as important community-dedicated, communal, community-led and/or community spaces:

- **Rancho UNAPROA [Asociacion Union de Amigos para la Proteccion del Ambiente – Union of Friends for Environmental Protection Association]**



Figure 6: Photo of the front of the UNAPROA building. By David Mejia Monico, 2026.

The UNAPROA building is a prime example of how Longo Mai has historically planned spaces around regional socio-environmental activism as a key objective. It was created in response to issues like pineapple production but served as a key meeting place for hydroelectric dam planning efforts. It creates a key centre for focusing regional efforts, hosting events and educational experiences that would be vital for stopping the dams from being approved and which have slowed down PINDECO's expansion in the Brunca region.

Early on in the fight against hydroelectric dams, it served as a vital space for hosting social and environmental events such as the Festival de Agua [Festival of Water] and initially, Festival Madre Monte [Mother Earth Festival], before being moved to other spaces. The community would hold festivals, meetings and workshops which would help build momentum, strategize and grow solidarity across the region. Often these events were held in community spaces such as the Rancho UNAPROA, which hosted the first meeting that would help create the collective solidarity networks required to stop the hydroelectric projects from continuing (Bolaños Dávila, 2020).

In the fight against PINDECO, the UNAPROA building was a vital meeting place for FRENTE, which was a worker rights and environmental protection group resisting the worker exploitation and harmful environmental social practices of PINDECO. While also serving as events like the Festival de Agua, which helped to increase participation while also providing opportunities for local residents to sell goods and products. Four of the participants cited selling products during the events and five participants said they participated in activities.



Figure 7: Images from a meeting during the 6th Annual Water Festival within the UNAPROA building in 2014. Top-right shows banner for the festival, reads "Festival of Water" "Regional interchange of the defence of our territories". Both photos from Fiesta del Agua By Arce, 2022, published in Surcosdigital.com

According to one resident (CR4-Chicharra), whom I would qualify as a community resident planner, that led the effort in creating the UNAPROA building, the building was created entirely with local labour and resources. The only exceptions being a Spanish architect that did the design at no cost to the community and the $20,000 USD donation provided by the United Nations Development program; given to UNAPROA to facilitate their work in socio-environmental activism promotion and protection (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2002).

After its creation, five of the participants described themselves and the community as being more involved in social and environmental activism and activities. All (12) thought its presence was important in fights for the community's security, environmental activism and for creating a space of socialization for community events such as weddings or parties.

- **'La Esencia' edificio multiusos – 'The Essence' multi-use building**



Figure 8: Image of 'La Esencia' ['The Essence'] building in Longo Mai, the meeting place of the Comite de Turismo [Tourism Committee] and hosts a small library. By David Mejia Monico, 2026.

During the interviews in Longo Mai, La Esencia [The Essence] was often mentioned as a key community space by resident community planners. According to them (4 participants in this category), it was recently renovated (using primarily tourism collected funds) to become a central meeting space for the Tourism Committee, a small library, and a place to host tourist student groups. Its painted walls show a mural that highlights the community's identity and features residents from El Salvador, Costa Rica, Europe, and Indigenous peoples of the region living together in Longo Mai. It serves as a symbolic space representing togetherness and the community's diverse history.

One resident, Abril (CR6), who fled El Salvador because of gangs nearly killing her family member, feels warm towards her Salvador identity but misses her family there. The murals of the community represent a place that reminds her of who she is and what the community is. One interaction during the interview reveals the reason for the building's name from her point of view and describes what it means to her:

> **Interviewer:** ¿Y porque es importante, crees.. tener esos murales?
> [.. And why is that important, do you think.. to have those murals?]
>
> **Participant:** Porque es parte de nuestra identidad como salvadoreños. De no dejar nuestra identidad perdida y agradecemos mucho a Costa Rica por habernos recibido también. Y si no perder eso, porque para no perder la esencia, la identidad de uno, de nuestra cultura. Sí, por eso se llama 'La Esencia'.
> [Because its part of our identity as Salvadorans. To not let us lose our identity and we appreciate Costa Rica a lot for having received us too. And yes, to not lose that, to not lose the essence, the identity of oneself, of our culture. Yes, that is why it is called 'The Essence'.] (CR6-Abril, Pos. 597-604)

According to her Abril (CR6) and resident planners (1), the Administration and Committee of Tourism consulted the public on the name of the building, though she did not participate in that process, she appreciates the name chosen. Though the mural of La Esencia is representative of a diverse set of community member identities, many residents (6) mentioned not knowing much about it and/or barely accessing the space in its remodeled form. While a few (3) residents mentioned its continued importance as serving the changing needs of the community, being previously a temporary home for new displaced residents (like CR6-Abril) and at one point after that as a fabric and textiles workshop centre that one resident worked in (CR3-Flor). Though these past uses no longer are part of the space's current objective, as governed by the Tourism Committee, its historical usage shows how spaces evolve in Longo Mai according to need, economic activity (recently from tourism) and participation and interest from the community.

- **Parque Recreativo Kolping – Kolping Recreational Park**

The Kolping Recreational Park is a local park that provides an area for residents, visitors and children to play and exercise. It contains a playground, soccer field, swing set, and seating areas. It was funded partially by the Kolping Society, a Christian Faith, international development social organization, with some European residents of Longo Mai being members of the association.



Figure 9: Image of Parque Recreativo Kolping [Kolping Recreational Park]. By David Mejia Monico, 2026.

Four resident participants mentioned these events as beneficial for the local economic impact to the community and their household. The park provided an area for residents to sell food, goods and products to tourists and visitors during various events and festivals, like the Water Festival. According to one resident planner, due to increased enforcement on food handling licensing by the Ministry of Health, food items are no longer sold here during events, limiting residents' ability to improve their household finances throughout the year.

- **Poza (artificial) de Río Convento – Artificial Pool of Rio Convento**

A short walk west of the Kolping Recreational Park is a nameless artificially created pool, made by residents to cool down. Made through the removal of rocks by various community members. It is an important social space for visitors, tourists and residents to enjoy throughout the year. Several residents described it as an area important for socialization and for youth to experience the joy brought by being in nature and in a rural setting.



Figure 10: Image of Poza Artificial de Rio Convento [Artificial Pool of Convento River], Longo Mai. By David Mejia Monico, 2026.

The artificial pool is made and reformed through a collective effort by Longo Mai community members every year to provide a nearby accessible space for people to enjoy and cool down on hot days. In this river area, people from various walks of life (domestic, regional and international) connect through the sounds of the rainforest, and the water source that sustains Longo Mai and other towns and villages in the region. In the area between the poza [artificial pool] of the Convento River and Kolping recreational park, a passerby can see the pipes which carry water from the river to the residents of Longo Mai.

Many of the residents and community resident planners said this pool was an important space for the community and the region. It is a place of gathering, rest, and recreation, that also serves as a network for building a relationship with the natural environment. It requires no funding, and collective labour and networks of care to sustain it. This water source was threatened directly by the hydroelectric dam proposals, specifically, Monteverde I in the 2010s (Álvarez, 2013).

- **La Casa Madremonte – The Madremonte House**

Local artist and organizer, Guadalupe Urbina, has been an important advocate and organizer for Longo Mai – as expressed by four participants – and has developed a flexible space on her share of land that at times serve as a community space, called La Casa Madremonte [meaning the mother mountain house]. The area provides a performance space for an event held in Longo Mai, which she hosts, called the Festival Madremonte, to promote the advocacy of environmental/water protection, community building through the arts, and spiritual connection with nature. Guadalupe provides a stage for performances, areas for horticulture education, herbs, and other natural product items for the festival and other events. It is both her home and a place for community and individual projects that she leads.

Often festivals like the Madremonte festival are held in various locations across the community across several days. It has utilized green spaces in Kolping Park and the more secluded Escuela de La Tierra [Earth School] further north from the town centre, where activities can be held more privately.

- **Escuela Sonador – Sonador School, Longo Mai**

The Sonador school, the local public school, was often brought up as an important community space for participants (four research participants mentioned it). The vital aspects of the space being education for youth, meeting/event place, and recreational sports facilities, for activities like Fútbol [soccer] that adult residents can use on evenings and weekends. It was built, operated and funded by the Ministry of Public Education, though extracurricular programming is funded through local



Figure 11: Photo of the local public school, Escuela Sonador. By David Mejia Monico, 2026

funds collected through its educational and volunteer-based tourist economy and the accommodation fees, according to one resident planner and committee of tourism member (CR1-A).

- **La Escuela de la Tierra – The Earth School, Longo Mai**

The Escuela de la Tierra is an interdisciplinary eco-biological school and education centre important for ensuring that Longo Mai's responsibilities as a registered Wildlife Refuge and protection of the rainforest are sustained. It is a space partially funded by Universidad Alternativa del Sur [Alternative University of the South] and provides space for workshops, education and environmental research which frequently includes tourists, environmental advocates/groups, committee members and at times, local residents. Although, most participants did not see it as an accessible or vital community space due to its distance from the community and relatively low engagement with regular residents, many saw its presence and work as vital for environmental protection of Longo Mai. Two residents expressed visiting for workshops or festivals, while many of the community resident planners had visited for events or activities such as meetings, workshops or festivals. Events such as the Festival de Agua [Festival of Water] and the Madremonte Festival have at times utilized the space as an area for workshops and art activities. The education centre also holds activities in other spaces throughout Longo Mai, such as in Kolping Park and Rancho UNAPROA (Arias Campos, 2017).



Figure 12: Image of La Escuela de La Tierra. Sourced from escueladelatierra.org

- **Iglesia Catholica [Catholic Church] de Longo Mai**

Residents in Longo Mai frequently mentioned the importance of the Iglesia Catholica [Catholic Church] and churches more generally for the community. They recognized it as an importance place of spirituality, socialization, motivation, values and togetherness. It features a mural of Monseñor Óscar Romero – a patron Saint of the Catholic church. Romero is an important Catholic Salvadoran figure of Latin American struggles against inequality and political violence and was killed by the Salvadoran national army during the civil war, in the mural he is shown holding hands with a Costa Rican girl and a Salvadoran Boy, with an indigenous man and (seemingly European) woman behind them. It is another important symbolic space in the Longo Mai community that bridges religious identity with racial/ethnic background identity and social struggles. Catholic churches in the region, including the one in Longo Mai, were often brought up as frequent meeting places for social and environmental struggles in participant interviews and historical records, such as in the campaign against the hydroelectric dams (Bolaños Davis, 2020; eraverdeucr, 2013, 23:48).



Figure 13: Image of La Iglesia Catolica de Longo Mai [The Catholic Church of Longo Mai]. By David Mejia Monico, 2026.

- **Among these highlighted spaces, other essential spaces sometimes mentioned by research participants were:**
  - **All of Longo Mai – the community as a whole**
    - Due to its governance structure and co-op values
  - **La Pulperia [local mini supermarket] of Longo Mai**
  - **Participating Resident Homes**
    - Due to ecotourist nature of the community (e.g. gardens, homestays, tourist meeting areas, shared kitchens for cooking lessons, etc.)
  - **The Evangelical Church of Longo Mai**

4.1.4 Case Specific Findings

Planning and Governance in Longo Mai

The residents mostly take the role of contributors in efforts to plan Longo Mai, with the organizing capacity coming from community leaders, and the administrators and a few key committees – especially the Committee of Tourism (CT). All residents identified the CT and the Administration as the key decision maker of planning and services. Of the 12 participants, 10 expressed that they had little influence in the process of planning the community or services and saw themselves more as participants, including one CT member. 7 resident participants expressed engaging less with meetings about decisions over time. 4 participants felt that the relationship between the residents of the community and the Longo Mai European Association was unequal, where those with close ties to the European organization had the most influence, such as the Administration (made up of (3) founding family members and two members of the European Association) and CT (various resident members). In my communication with state planning officials from the municipality of Buenos Aires requesting planning information, they referred me to contacts at the Escuela de La Tierra, a space led by one of the administrators (see Community Spaces section) in charge of Longo Mai as a registered wildlife refuge.

One of the participants (CR4-Chicharra) with close ties to the Association justified the current relationship between residents and the Administration as a way to protect the residents against decisions that would remove the protection that Longo Mai's legal structure and governance provide, referring to the policies they have for the community. Such as policies that require new residents to be 'in-need' to live there (as new residents were being introduced without permission or notification), limiting the sale of residential contracts (which were being illegally sold, at times to wealthy outsiders) on the property markets, and cited the issues of the community essentially becoming more 'capitalistic' and 'individualist' over time; issues that were becoming apparent, with at least one of these issues mentioned by all participants. When residents were prompted on why these issues were occurring or why they (or other) supported ownership and sales, many (8)

pointed to a feeling of insufficient resources, funding/educational opportunities, little benefit for past work, and/or competition by better positioned residents.

In my view, it is the unequal relationship between the Longo Mai European association and residents on questions of land use and governance which are contributing to a growing want for individualism, deteriorating confidence in opportunities, and weakening desire for engagement. Though the legal structure is protecting residents, sentiments and actions allowing market actors to enter Longo Mai may become a growing threat to its stability.

A Regional and International Community Space and Network

The values, and general direction that Longo Mai has taken since its inception has made it an international and regional centre that resist neoliberal projects like dam development and Pindeco's pineapple expansion. This is apparent in the Rancho UNAPROA's purpose, but the artificial poza [pool], Kolping Park, Escuela de La Tierra and Casa Madremonte also serve a similar function at times, i.e. to educate, socialize and create a regional and international network that can work on anti-capitalist, environmental, and human rights issues together. These spaces have been frequently mentioned by almost all participants (11) as spaces of important socialization that brings those from Longo Mai, the Brunca region, and international tourists/visitors to appreciate nature, different cultures and connect on socio-environmental issues.

As tourists. school groups and academics are frequent visitors; they have shaped the use of spaces in Longo Mai, as exemplified by the CTs utilization of La Escencia building as the main headquarters and shared with tourists/residents. Tourism/academia has provided an expanded reach and an important funding source for residents but also required residents to adjust culturally and share space with outsiders. It has created a significant socio-economic force shaping the decision-making of space, for example, when some participants were asked 'whether these spaces were more for residents or tourists', 3 said it was more for tourists/tourism while the majority (4) said it was for both tourism and

residents. 11 of the participants expressed that tourism was ‘mostly positive for Longo Mai’ and ‘that it had changed the community’.

The benefits of being an international node of alternative development is highlighted by Chicharra, when he describes how international tourists that have visited Longo Mai or the Rancho UNAPROA have often written to the state in support of efforts against hydroelectric dams and PINDECO expansion projects, he says:

> They listen often more to foreigners than to their own people, as in other countries too. It's sad to see that, but it's sadly the truth. I say the government should work for its own people, not for foreigners, but let it speak. The locals are not taken seriously, especially not the poor campesinos. Nobody listens to them. (CR4-Chicharra),

This highlights the importance of having a strong multi-scalar effort, enabled by community spaces like the Rancho UNAPROA and the network of spaces that are utilized during festivals like the Water Festival. It provides an insight on how unequal the relationship between Northern actors and local residents in the South can be and how it can be leveraged in key moments.

Migration, Culture and Separation

Salvadoran residents expressed feeling at home or connected with their heritage in Longo Mai due to their prominence as a group, representation in the community (e.g. with murals), and felt a great benefit of living there compared to their country of origin but often pointed to criminality as an increasing issue that reminded them of El Salvador’s gang culture. 8 residents highlighted crime as a growing issue with 4 mentioning El Salvador’s past as a similar situation or as a context that reminded them of this current issues.

A physical and social separation between the central community further up the road (with mostly Salvadoran and European heritage) and the Indigenous population closer to the highway became apparent. A few participants (3) alluded to the problem of crime as connected to the ‘Indigenous residents down the road’. 6 participants noted a disconnect between groups with two mentioning that they are stigmatized and left out of projects ‘due

to their inward focus'. There was found to be limited communication and collaboration between both groups (with meetings at community spaces said to be a rare exception by 2), and the physical separation created a sense of danger for those of the research participants – who were all residents of the central community.

Another notable issue separating groups was misogyny or anti-feminist sentiments in activities or households relating to participation in activism or organized groups. A few (4) mentioned it as a problem that improved over time in the community due to various womens groups/initiatives, they described these projects as often addressing a cultural sentiment of their country of origin, these events were at times held by tourists/visitors. This similar issue was also noted by Bolaños Davis in her research (2020).

4.2 Jane and Finch, Toronto, Canada

4.2.1 History

The Jane and Finch neighbourhood, post-European colonization was a rural community which rapidly urbanized in the 20th century. Its growth was closely planned and managed by the state in the second half of the century. It evolved from a rural agricultural European settlement community to a growing suburban community in the 1950s, to a rapidly urbanizing community after the early-1960s. The plans for the neighbourhood in that half of the century envisioned the neighbourhood as an auto-centric modernist neighbourhood paired with dense social and affordable housing (City of Toronto, 2024). As the community urbanized, the neighbourhood would become a place known as a 'landing pad' for working-class immigrants, refugees and people displaced from other areas of the Greater Toronto Area region, and often from racialized groups. Social issues of isolation, crime and poverty would later emerge as a result of a lack of investment, employment, social programmes and resources, further worsened by its subsequent stigmatization by the media (Eizarad, 2018).

The fuel infrastructure – owned by Shell, Imperial Oil, and Suncor – depot which sits on the eastern edge of the community (North-East of Keele and Finch Ave. W), the pipelines and hydroelectric lines which run across the hydrocorridor, existed prior to the Jane and Finch neighbourhood's existence, and were constructed in the late 1940-1950s (Podur & Zalik, 2012; Greene, 2020). Similarly, the Highway 400 on its Western edge, was also constructed around this time in 1952, a linear space representative of the modernist auto-centric development occurring in this era of planning across other North American cities and which would later form the community's built environment (City of Toronto, 2023).

During the post-WWII period, Canada started to open immigration to non-European countries and create social housing in the suburbs of cities. In the case of Jane and Finch, this meant the provincial housing corporation creating social housing in areas of low land value (Coney, 2022) to accommodate immigrants coming as a result of a more open national immigration policy through a merits-based system. This change to federal policy was due to worker shortages, global decolonization movements like independence movements across underdeveloped countries in the Global South (including former British colonies) and calls for international human rights which influenced international institutions and therefore Canada (City of Toronto, 2023, Mccutcheon, n.d).

This planned mix of social and affordable peripheral housing in Jane and Finch would accommodate low-income refugees during the violent eras of the 'Cold War' and 'the War on Terror' of the 1970s through to the 2000s, among other conflicts (theCanadian-Encyclopedia, n.d.). This resulted in a local census area population that is made up of 58.4% immigrants,78.2% racialized individuals and 27.7% residents that arrived in Canada as refugees (Statistics Canada, 2021)

The lack of planning around sufficient social infrastructure/resources and continued neglect of the neighbourhood would result in a stigmatized, criminalized area that was overpoliced. Grassroots social activists throughout its decades of urbanization would press the government for improvements, increased connections and resources being invested in critical areas like transit – with spaces like Yorkwoods library negotiated as

meeting places to discuss these issues – and increased community spaces. The area's social conditions have steadily improved thanks to these efforts as outlined by MacNevin (2023) and development interest was re-sparked as a result of the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension, which was cheered on by York University (Joy, 2017). The project would initiate a series of various planning studies like the Keele Finch Plus study and bring development interest in the surrounding areas of Keele and Finch. This interest would finally arrive to the neighbourhood through the planning of the Finch West LRT. This is clear in how the City saw these transit investments (led by Metrolinx) as "a stimulus for growth and investment" (City of Toronto, 2017) and originally envisioned condo proposals for the Hub lands, but for which CAPG members felt that "the community deserved something better" (MacNevin, 2023).

In the Jane and Finch case study, the clearest success was regaining these lands for the community that was eventually promised by Metrolinx after they changed plans to look at other uses during the pandemic (MacNevin, 2023). Though solidified outcomes are yet to be seen in the case of equitable transit-oriented development, current plans reflect some key demands by residents for community spaces and anti-displacement policies.

4.2.2 Key Moments

In Jane and Finch's recent history it has had to deal with many of the socio-historic challenges of its past but notably the threat of megadevelopment occurring in a way that risks dispossessing them. This megadevelopment occurring in the form of 'condofication' initiated by 'Transit-Oriented Development' (TOD). In the neoliberal context of Public Private Partnerships of Toronto, this was apparent with Metrolinx's, the regional transit agency, way of conducting TOD, among similar patterns of redevelopment plans that were initially praised by mainstream planning of the region in recent decades, which later displaced racialized residents, such as was the case with the redevelopment of Regent Park and Little Jamaica.

Amidst this recent push to redevelop areas seen as undervalued or now useful by the state and market actors, Jane and Finch residents noticed this pattern of dispossession which led to two key moments of interventions that would alter planning in the area. The first moment the push for (and against) inequitable TOD in the area and the second being an attempt by Metrolinx to renege on the promise of building a community hub.

Finch West LRT and TOD timing [2000 – Present]

Since the extension of the subway project and the Keele Finch Plus study, the Jane Finch neighbourhood and those surrounding it in Northwest Toronto have increasingly been identified as areas ideal for transit-oriented development (TOD). The Infrastructure Institute 2025 report (TII) outlines comprehensively how transportation planning in Toronto, has generally been inequitable throughout its history with the construction of highways and in recent decades with transit projects. In the case of Neighbourhood Improvements Areas (NIAs) – areas identified by City policymakers as community's needing socio-economic investment – of which Jane Finch was one, have been affected by provincial transit policy that have been pushing TOD to these areas as a way 'to provide access to these communities while raising property values' (p. 52). Owning property in these transit areas became an attract proposition to profit from for property developers, landlords and investors.

The construction created conditions were also difficult for small businesses, causing the subsequent gentrification of racialized communities like Mount Dennis and Little Jamaica with the construction of the Eglinton LRT project in the 2010s (TII, 2025). Often these TOD projects come with upzoning, demolition of family-sized units, and condofication of these areas (Lehrer, 2009). Through this gentrification process, the increases in market rents during this type of large redevelopment process, transit or condo, often displace racialized low-income residents, often historically dispossessed and displaced Black and racialized residents like three of my research participants that moved because of the Firgrove Grassways demolition and deteriorating building conditions in another. This was also seen in the case of social housing in Regent Park, where many were displaced and condo

owners privatized much of the *lived space* in the area, developers and the state giving concessions in the form of community and recreational space.

In the case of Jane and Finch, early attempts to redevelop became apparent with the rebranding of the community as 'University Heights'. As explained by Eizadirad (2017) article, it was marketed to stakeholders and residents as a way to bring economic opportunity and to be seen as an extension of York University, a 'more civilized geographic name' being the implication, in Eizadirad's view. It was ultimately rejected and was identified as a neoliberal tactic to gentrify the neighbourhood by local organizations like Jane Finch Action Against Poverty (JFAAP) and local academics like Suzanne Narain (2012).

Eizadirad (2017) also argues the neoliberal position that York University has had since its inception prioritized profit-making collaboratively with the state and largely isolated itself from contributing to the adjacent Jane and Finch neighbourhood besides development expansion (e.g. the Village at York) and extractive research of the community. Though this dynamic seems to have improved in recent years as several participants of this study cite recent partnerships with the York University TD Engagement Centre (CEC) as positive (2 participants) and is corroborated by local researchers (Hynie Et Al, 2016).

Similarly, to York's neoliberal position, transit planners and Metrolinx, played a similar extractive role with the creation of the Finch West LRT in the neighbourhood. It has led to attracting new condo development proposals within and around the transit areas, like that of the vitally important Jane Finch mall which resulted in multi-tower mixed-use redevelopment plans, though it had some community spaces involved in its engagement process and final plans. It also came with the initiation of the Jane and Finch initiative, a study for a secondary plan to manage the development occurring as a result of the Finch West LRT and renewed development interest amidst the city's condo boom.

Around the same time, the historical and continued divestment of housing – in this case by Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) – in the community led to the demolition of most buildings of the Firgrove Grassways in 2021, a large social housing complex leaving 600 residents displaced (Manucdoc, 2022). Redevelopment plans for the site by TCHC as

of 2025 have failed to find a private partner due to low interest and insufficient land value, coinciding with a city-wide drop in land values in recent years, and therefore has not resulted in any meaningful development progress that would allow residents to return (TCHC, 2025). Residents and resident community planners, including two of the research participants were involved in the engagement process for the redevelopment master plan.

One of the resident community planners, describe how it has changed their sense of home and relationship with the community like this:

> I grew up in Firgrove, and so in 2017-2018 we were all evicted from the neighborhood because of the poor condition of the housing we were living in. And so that did kind of change my relationship, my relationship physically, because I no longer could call the neighborhood home in the same way. And then I think, I guess, like socially, economically, politically, it.. my relationship with the community changed because I became more of an advocate for anti displacement and trying to think of ways that we can "grow in place" as community members (JF3-Tanisha, Pos. 156)

Tanisha, believes there are inherent risks to the state's mode of development, risks attributable to the Finch West LRT and the Major Transit Station Area designation in the area that permit more intensification, risks like cultural erasure and displacement. She says this:

> New development is permitted in existing areas at higher rates and that could lead to the gentrification of the community, because it would obviously be housing that's a lot more expensive, because the housing market is a lot more expensive, and that can lead to people being priced out. And then the other thing about gentrification is the removal of the original people who live there before the people who have roots in the community. It's the loss of culture and stuff like that. So there's, like, a lot of things that happen organically in communities that have been rooted for some time that will be erased as well. (JF3-Tanisha, Pos. 166)

Despite these pressures resident community planners and residents are engaged in disrupting and intervening in various planning processes as seen in the fight for the Jane and Finch Community Hub and Centre for the Arts (the "Hub") and in social activism in the neighbourhood more generally.

The Fight for a Community Hub [2021 – Present]

Amidst this wave of transit-oriented planning and redevelopment around the Finch West LRT came the verbal agreement, reneging, and renegotiating of a community hub project called the Jane and Finch Hub and Centre for the Arts (the "Hub"). Metrolinx and the Province planned to place the Finch West LRT Storage and Maintenance Facility within a central underutilized greenfield in front of Yorkgate mall. Amid the planning and engagement process with community stakeholders, they eventually agreed to allocate adjacent lands to a proposed Hub with members of a residential committee as a community benefit

A research participant (Participant JF5-S), former CAPG member and current resident community planner who has been a key advocate, and now resident community planner integral to the advocacy of Black social and planning issues – demanded from the agency to provide the lands for a Hub as a community benefit upon learning about the plans. She also has personal experience with the impacts of gun violence in the area, losing children to gun violence in the neighbourhood. The idea of the hub was originally an idea by members of York-West Community Action Planning Group (CAPG) and members of Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN) as they identified the impending TOD as a potential gentrification threat to the community and Northwest Toronto.

She highlights in the research interview that the historical divestment, gentrification occurring, lack of community spaces and social services in the neighbourhood are key reasons that there is gun violence in the community, an experience especially effecting young Black men and boys. She connects the various issues, saying this:

> I realized that there was a connection between gentrification, displacement, the death of my children, and the gun violence issue that we're having. And so, for me, it was really about connecting the two and understanding how to dismantle that, so that our children will have a better chance of looking at their communities and themselves as valued - where they're not thinking that it's okay to go around killing themselves, kill one another, and be honest, right? 'm looking at, currently, how extremely important the belonging piece is. (Participant JF5-SW - Pos. 139)

To her, community spaces give a sense of belonging, economically, socially and culturally, through education, training, and cultural arts that connect them to their origins and their current community, an asset that was frequently insufficient throughout the community's planned history. This is what made the Hub so important and why she advocated for it, she describes that aspect of the Hub's potential to bring change like this:

> Again, if people understand that they belong somewhere, there is a settling that happens, versus thinking, 'I don't belong here. I wasn't a part of that. I didn't know that was happening.' Inherently, there's a disconnect. And so, when we have these hubs and opportunities where we can get involved, people get involved with their hearts, their emotions, their bodies, their thinking, their dreams, and their aspirations. That evolves into people learning skills, learning new ideas, learning how to do things differently, learning how to create differently, and learning how to understand differently. All these things are generated. They grow, they evolve, and they evolve people. And so, when people evolve, places evolve. When places evolve, livelihood evolves. (JF5-SW, Pos. 231)

The decision makers and Metrolinx verbally agreed to her plea and request by CAPG and the community. They referenced her perspective in their decision, as corroborated by other resident (2)- and non-resident (1) community planners that were participants of this study.

Amidst the planning and construction of the Finch West LRT came the Covid-19 pandemic which disproportionately affected the Jane and Finch community in terms of mortality, cases and hospitalizations (Movahedi Nia et al, 2025). During this time, Metrolinx, decided that the site could be better used for other purposes such as developments with affordable housing, funded with partnerships with private developers. The reneging of this promise united many of the research participants, including myself, to collaborate and organize against this change of land use plans.

The networking of activists and advocates led to various resident-led community groups – including JFAAP, CAPG, and youth art organizations like Flaunt It+, Success Beyond Limits, and community planning agency, Jane Finch Family & Community Centre (JFC) – to organize a protest at Yorkgate Mall's parking area, across from the originally promised hub space.

The protest was captured by local media and subsequently led to intense regional criticism by allies, and advocates (Westoll, 2020), which was picked up by national media and which showed the agency in a bad light (MacNevin, 2023).

According to several research participants (and as witnessed with my own involvement), after days of negotiation with local politicians and resident community planners/leaders, the promise was restored and a legal arrangement was developed for residents to lead the planning process, including in its governance and design. From this came an organization called the Hub Organizing Committee (HOC), a group of residents and resident planners, and equity planners - including from the Jane and Finch Centre, which took the lead on the initial engagement and planning process – to transition to a local governance structure. This new governance structure may or may not include the City of Toronto as a key contributor, though they are involved in the transition as the legal body receiving the lands from Metrolinx in the land transfer agreement with stipulations that the community will control it.

A History of Activism & Spatial Planning Interventions [1970s – Present]

The residents of the Jane and Finch community have continually shaped the planning of their geography through continued and sustained grassroots organization efforts, often employing any community spaces that they can access. From the malls, like Jane and Finch mall and Yorkgate mall – which many of the research participants (7/10) identified as important community spaces – to resident-engaged spaces like Corner Commons at the central intersection, the local community centres, parks, and repurposed residential spaces rented in social housing complexes, the community has continually found spaces to organize, network, educate and motivate the neighbourhood and their supporters.

Wanda McNevin, a local resident organizer outlines this historic legacy in her 2023 report, *It Happened Here: Places of Community Organizing and Activism in Jane-Finch*. McNevin outlines the history of immigrant integration, activism and fights for social economic resources by the state, the profiling of Black people/youth by Toronto Police and Toronto

education system in the community and mobilizations against it, lack of affordable housing and the planning of local developments, artistry and visible mural/art creation in community spaces, affordable food access and increasing access through resident-led initiatives like the Black Creek Community Farm, and the countless forums and meetings held in dozens of spaces across Jane and Finch to intervene in the planning of space and to expand the spaces' access and availability.

Though space remained insufficient due to the density of the neighbourhood and limited access/resources, progress was consistently made through these decades of grassroots efforts and the flexibility of organizers utilizing any space available (McNevin, 2023). This is exemplified in the way EarlyON Centre, a provincial daycare centre space, is frequently utilized for holding educational workshops and community organizing.

McNevin's report itself was conducted as part of the Jane Finch Initiative, the first phase of studies by the City of Toronto which laid the foundation for the future secondary plan and a first for the province, the Jane Finch community development plan (CDP), which innovatively connected and worked in tandem with the land use plan. McNevin's contribution was not the only direct contribution to these city plans, as the years of grassroots organizing meant community members were engaged and involved in the planning process across various advisory committees in the early and later phases.

Efforts by some Black resident planners, including three of the research participants, helped develop ideas around '*Growing in Place'*, a Black anti-displacement strategy that would aim to protect all residents, which was integrated into the CDP. In it, were some meaningful policies that required developers to explain how development projects fulfill locally specific socio-economic objectives (outlined in the CDP) in their development applications to the City (Mejia Monico, 2024).

Connections with Institutions like York University was another partnership which eventually became more meaningfully collaborative over the decades through these grassroots efforts. Eizadirad (2017) highlights its place as a neoliberal space and its exploitative relationship with the community. Hynie Et Al's (2016) article, highlight the

improvement of the relationship between the two through the creation of the TD Engagement Community Engagement Centre (CEC) (see Community Spaces section).

Equity planners like those at the Jane Finch Centre (JFC), consistently engaged and assisted residents throughout many planning processes, along with the creation of other spaces like Corner Commons, which helped as a place to imagine the community hub and the campaign to keep it. Many of the spaces referenced above, in addition to a strong online presence, served as places of socialization that several (6) research participants thought were vital in efforts to rally the community in pressuring the Province and Metrolinx to keep their promise of developing the Hub and in resident planners push for the City to implement anti-displacement policies in the CDP.

4.2.3 Community Spaces

Throughout the research interviews various community spaces were mentioned as places that served Jane and Finch. The spaces mentioned below were seen by participants as important community-dedicated, communal, community-led and/or community spaces:

- **Corner Commons**

Corners Commons was a space mentioned by 8 out of the 10 research participants as an important community space in Jane and Finch. It was created by planners at Green Change – a former satellite space of the Jane Finch Family and Community Centre (JFC) that the property owners recently reconverted to residential units – on the parking lot of the Jane and Finch mall site, with permission from the owners.



Figure 14: An Image of Corner Commons located at the North-South corner of the Jane and Finch intersection, by Yader Guzman. From "At Jane and Finch, a Fight for Community Space", by Joseph, 2023. The Local.

Residents were engaged at nearly every phase of the process, according to one of the participant non-resident planners responsible for its coordination (JF4-E). The space's modular materials have been financed through funding by grants from Parks People Space Incubator, City of Toronto and United Way. It was chosen a site because of its centrality, history as a site of protest and its proximity to bus stops nearby. Volunteers from the neighbourhood are trained and often receive honorariums to help with construction, photography, videography and other tasks to produce the space, making it a bottom-up effort, supported by planners at JFC.

The site has consistently hosted activities and events like the Flaunt It Community Arts Festival, workshops for migrant workers, residents and newcomers, performances, artist residencies, small vendor markets, and during the Covid-19 pandemic, a vaccine clinic. It was also a place where engagement has taken place for input on the proposed community hub.

As the redevelopment of the Jane Finch neighbourhood continues, so have the redevelopment plans for Jane Finch mall where this space is located. In the plans developed, partially through engagement in the JFM+ engagement space, this space has been included in *conceived space*, the official plan amendments and rezoning plans for the redevelopment, with diagrams showing this corner as a public area and park while also containing a community centre within one of the blocks.

Though funding sustainability is a continued struggle, as mentioned by JF3-E, this space continues to be an important place for community events, protest and activism. Available grants continue to be the main source of funding for this space but as she explains "they're less and less common these days" (JF4-E, Pos. 134).

- **Jane Finch Mall and Yorkgate Mall**

The malls of Jane and Finch and Yorkgate Mall were sites that residents frequently mentioned as important community spaces. They contain spaces that are frequently used for engagement, art, social organizing, town hall events, and also have important symbolic spaces like murals. They also contain many spaces that serve the community like the EarlyON Centre, TD Community Engagement Centre, Black Creek Community Health Centre, JVS Employment Services, the Spot (Youth Centre) and areas for resident art programming.



Figure 15: Image of community engagement tabling conducted for the Hub feasibility report in Jane Finch Mall. By David Mejia Monico, 2018.

The JFM+ Engagement Space and Corner Commons are both on the Jane and Finch mall property and are both utilized for a variety of art programming purposes while at times becoming a place to gather community input on the use and production of current and future spaces in the neighbourhood. For example, both malls were spaces where input was received for the first Hub Feasibility report (JFC & CAPG, 2019).



Figure 16: Image of Jane Finch Centre and community facilitators gathering input for the development of the proposed community hub. By David Mejia Monico, 2018.

Though they are privately owned spaces, the malls have become key partners to local organizations through early community activism, local political pressure (MacNevin,

2023) and the fostering of a collective vision. All of the participants of the case study mentioned these malls as important community spaces, and several (4 participants) mentioned the collaborative relationship with the mall owners and management as a key reason for community access.

- **Early ON Child and Family Centre (Jane and Finch Mall)**

The EarlyON Child and Family Centre is an early childhood care space that is an office for the JF Centre and is often utilized for various organizing, educational and social development purposes. It came about as a program from Jane Finch Centre's Early Years Centre program which later utilized multiple spaces including the EarlyON Centre space (MacNevin, 2023). The centre holds workshops, courses, training sessions and meetings, including for those regarding worker rights, tenant rights, transit and community justice, often in collaboration with JFAAP and other connected local organizations. For example, it sometimes holds worker rights courses and documentary screenings with York University student and research organizations and often these events are directed towards residents of the Northwest region (see *Figure 17*). It also held planning consultations and engagement sessions for the Jane Finch Initiative around displacement, gentrification, and the various studies that informed the Secondary Plan and the Community Development, and the plans themselves (City of Toronto, 2024).



Figure 17: Left image shows a poster advertising a free documentary screening (2024), right image shows a "Workers' Justice" course opportunity (2026). Both were hosted at the EarlyON Centre at Jane Finch Mall. By JFAAP (Source: JFAAP Facebook Page).

Five of the research participants mentioned hosting or attending a community event in the EarlyON Centre, including 3 residents. Such as Naz (Participant JF6), a resident community

planner who has hosted community knowledge cafes and other events in the space for research projects and in her work for the Jane and Finch Education Program.

- **JFM+ Community Engagement Space (Jane and Finch Mall)**



Figure 18: Image of the entrance and space where JFM+ is located. By David Mejia Monico, 2026.

The JFM+ Community Engagement Space is one that was mentioned frequently by interview participants (4 participants). It is a space that was originally provided by the Jane and Finch mall to engage with residents on the mall redevelopment plans (which included the South-East corner where Corner Commons is located).

Throughout the process 2000+ community members were engaged, and various workshops/meetings were held with residents and grassroots groups. Over a dozen community animators were involved in the process, to provide updates and collect input for the redevelopment plans which were eventually approved in 2024 (City of Toronto, 2024). Though several (3) participants were involved (as paid community animators) and thought the level of density and intensification was still concerning, they were generally appreciative of the effort put by City Planning staff and the property owners into the process.

Two of the participants (JF3 & JF6) mentioned that they were able to easily access the space if needed and have even hosted York University MES planning workshops there. They also noted how the space serves the AstroSankofa Arts Initiative which connects peoples to legacies of Afro-diasporic communities through public art in Jane and Finch and the rest of the City of Toronto. In their art projects, they blend and embrace Afrofuturism with acknowledgement of important Black historical figures.

- **York University TD Community Engagement Centre (CEC)**

The York University Community Engagement Centre is a space provided by York University and funded by Toronto Dominion Bank. It came to be partially as a result of criticisms by the community of York University, with demands to improve their historic extractive practices and geographic isolation (Hynie et al, 2016). These criticisms and demands were explicitly communicated in engagements held in community centres and local spaces for the Black Creek Community Capacity Building Project, a city-backed study in the 2000s sparked by the shooting of Brianna Davy, which galvanized various community groups to act and work together (McNevin, 2023, p. 11).



Figure 19: Image of the Jane and Finch Community Research Partnership (JFCRP) symposium at the TD CEC in 2013. Source: York University, JFCRP page, n.d.

After its creation and through continued and sustained advocacy, the CEC became a place that was operated by local residents and helped grassroots organizations, Indigenous educators, local researchers and activists host events and build capacity. This was partially done through the Jane Finch Community Research Partnership events (see *Figure 19*) that looked at developing research terms and resources in the neighbourhood (Tecle et al, 2016).

The CEC has also provided a space for activities related to advocacy and planning the planned community hub and education projects, by CAPG in the 2010. This included engagement funded through York University's Catalyst Grant program in 2015 and in capacity building activities in 2019, as witnessed during my involvement with the Hub before CAPG became inactive and the Hub Organizing Committee (HOC) was formed in 2022.

- **Jane and Finch Community Hub and Centre for the Arts (The "Hub")**

As previously mentioned, in the Key Moments section, the Hub is a planned community centre for social services and arts, among other local socio-economic objectives.



Figure 20: Rendering of the proposed Jane Finch Community Hub and Centre for the Arts. By Workshop Architecture. Sourced from CAPG & JFC, 2019.

The process included physical and digital engagement facilitated by community resident planners that took place in various spaces like the Jane and Sheppard library, Jane Finch Family Centre at 4400 Jane Street, Black Community Creek Farm, Yorkgate Mall and Jane and Finch Mall. The engagement helped inform the 2019 feasibility study and was conducted by JFC, CAPG and community facilitators.

It is still in the planning process and is according, to HOC members and involved research participants, on track to be built and constructed by 2029. Some of the core values produced through the engagement process were that it was Community Owned & Run, Diverse in Culture, Faiths & Ages, and that it Foster Growth & Collaboration (JFC & CAPG, 2019). Three of the research participants partially attributed the success of the protests which secured the space after Metrolinx reneged on following through with it(see Key Moment) to earlier spatial initiatives, engagement processes, such as that of the Corner Commons project. While five research participants cited Zoom and social media as an important aspect of the protest's success.

- **Flaunt It Studios**

Several of the research participants, including one planner of the space, mentioned Flaunt It + Studios as a vital space for women and immigrant/diasporic communities. The studio is an incubator for Women of Colour to engage in creative art training, events and skill development. It also hosts academic and historical education for the community tied to Global South experiences, for example, workshops by one of the participants (JF7-Jane, daughter of Cambodian Refugees to Canada) exploring the imperial history of Southeast Asia during Asian Heritage month. In Jane's view community spaces like Flaunt It studios are important because of their opportunity for self realization.

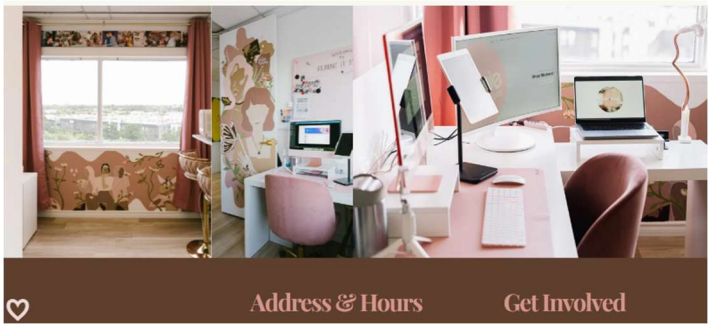


Figure 21: Flauntit Studio. Photo from Flauntitstudio.ca

The studio utilizes rented commercial office units using funds from various grant programs from the federal and municipal government, like the City of Toronto's Culture Plan, but financial sustainability is a continued and significant problem, according to resident community planner, Jane (JF7).

The work by Flaunt It has also helped the organization and maintenance of the planned Community Hub, especially in terms of engagement and communication with residents. The group is frequently involved in digital communication for events and organizing town hall meetings regarding various spatial projects in the community.

- **The Black Creek Community Farm**

The Black Creek Community Farm is a space that was described as community-led by research participants (3). It is a community-run farm that provides food to local households, the public, school food programs and events. It also provides a place of training and skill development in agriculture for residents and racialized communities.



Figure 22: A Festival and Dinner event at Black Creek Community Farm. Sourced from Blackcreekfarm.ca.

A non-resident planner and research participant (JF10-Frankie) highlights how it was originally Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA)-owned lands that provided food programs and youth training. Before TRCA putting out a call for external actors to operate it because of "a lack of funding" to an external group called Everdale before eventually being taken over by local groups due to criticism and political pressure. She describes how the internal dynamics have constantly been reshaped, saying:

> as much as it is trying to serve the city and as a whole, and welcomes visitors from all over, it continues to shape itself based on the people who have come through and a lot of residents that cross over with our other agencies, it's sometimes like a whole other world of people who interact with, the farm, and have made it that place, but it's like a constantly shaped space, (JF10-Frankie, Pos. 128)

She describes the ever-changing nature of the space, the eventual integration of local agencies/leaders that have operated the space and made it a community farm, one that "is constantly evolving" with 'different plots, programs and new structures'(JF10-Frankie). Bessho et al's (2020) article of the Black Creek Community Farm shows a shifting role for immigrants from *recipients* of programming to more engaged *assistant* and *facilitator* roles from 2010 to 2018. The study showed a clear transition for newcomers (from largely the Global South) from seeking help for various needs to gradually providing help to others in need and engaging in the farm's organization, enabled by the space's urban agricultural focus and leadership programs. The farm continues to provide food security and skill development for racialized and immigrant populations in the community.

Among these, highlighted spaces, other essential spaces mentioned were:

- **Westview Centennial Secondary School and Oakdale Secondary School**
    - Due to access provided for cultural events
- **Driftwood Community Centre and Others (Oakdale, Northwood)**
- **The Spot at Yorkgate Mall**
- **Yorkwoods Library and Theatre**
    - As community workshops and events are held here at times
- **Black Creek Ravine and Local Parks (Firgrove, Oakdale and others)**
- **Spaces outside of residential buildings and parking lots**
    - As a frequent area of socialization that is now over-surveilled, according to several participants (3)

4.2.4 Case Specific Findings

Migration, Culture and Community Initiative

Six of the Jane Finch GS-origin resident participants connected the push factors of their (or their family's) migration, and the issues of their new community or to domestic problems that they connected to historical factors like the slave trade, war, poverty and underdevelopment. All (10) participants said that there was a 'feeling of solidarity' felt by themselves/residents, many (7 resident participants) mentioned a sense of connection to their country of origin – with several GS diaspora participants (4) never having visited. 8 of the resident participants mentioned their family's history and the community feeling as a key motive for their interventions and participation in the planning process. 4 participants said something – along the lines of – 'community spaces are places of cultural connection' and were important for them and the community because of that.

From this we can gather that dispossessive processes in the form of push factors (the reasons they or their parents left - either as understood through themselves or their parents) like with underdevelopment (described as "poverty") in the Caribbean, wars in places like Southeast Asia or Africa, and the continued struggles of their new community

has initiated and motivated actions leading to planning changes that mitigate their harms. All said current community spaces and new ones (like corner commons), are places that helped develop them personally or facilitated initiatives that they currently participate in or lead. 5 of the participants thought that local planning decisions were shared between 'the community and the government' and 8 participants felt the community was becoming increasingly involved in decision-making. It should be mentioned that all of the research participants in Jane and Finch had received a post-secondary education.

Community Spaces As (Physical/Metaphorical) Arenas

Community spaces in Jane and Finch are arenas where various actors fight over and can rally behind as physical infrastructure and as a metaphor for autonomy. All participants mentioned that there was a need for more spaces and felt there can be difficulty accessing existing spaces by them or other community members; 5 mentioned agencies often had an advantage in this regard. 8 of the participants attributed the shortfall due to overwhelming demand, while a few (3) believed it was mostly an issue of access or governance. Several (5) mentioned the 'flexibility or tenacity' that the community has in creating or accessing spaces in malls, community centres, parks, parking lots, and sidewalks, despite limitations in funding (grants), surveillance and over policing.

The community hub was often mentioned in concert with the environment of the Covid-19 pandemic and the struggle that the community felt at that time. Six participants mentioned Zoom as an important technology (replacing physical community spaces) which facilitated the meetings and organizing of the main protest against Metrolinx and a few mentioned meeting recently for new community planning initiatives (potential land trusts and educative workshops). In this manner, digital meeting spaces are also an opportunistic and plentiful community space being utilized to organize against developmental projects which threaten displacement and gentrification

LRT Trojan Horse for Underinvestment

To research participants Finch West LRT was seen as a trojan horse for residents. Many (8) mentioned it as a key reason driving gentrification and displacement in the city, 4 participants cited similar displacement occurring in other Black and racialized areas like Lawrence West, Regent Park and Little Jamaica. In fact, most (9) participants thought the Finch West LRT was mostly negative for the community, 3 resident planners believed mobility is worse now than in decades/years prior and 7 mentioned believing the project mainly benefitted landowners and investors.

Though it was sold to the community as a solution or response to historical underinvestment, many people believe its benefits have been limited or even deleterious, essentially seeing it was a way to gentrify the neighbourhood and replace residents. 4 participants mentioned recent development as a 'risk to the cultural heritage and population of the area'. Two planners mentioned their displacement during this time (due to the demolition of Firgrove Grassways complex) as a reason they have become involved in local planning initiatives.

In this view, the community hub was also merely a concession which allowed the decommonization of central lands in the neighbourhood. Though it had to be pleaded by local resident planners originally, subsequent demands after Metrolinx's reneging directly led to more residents being involved due to the social networks of groups connected in the original engagement throughout the various community spaces for the feasibility study. The Hub's subsequent reengagement and transition (if successful) to a self-governing space, could possibly be seen as a recommoning effort, facilitated through insurgent planning practices (e.g. protests), online meetings, and community spaces which held early engagement for the project.

Separation and Historical Compartmentalization

In many ways the interviews shed light on the difficulty of also living in a diverse community that is socially and economically secluded from the rest of the city and sometimes within the neighbourhood itself. The history of violent crime and stigmatization was often noted by participants, especially Black participants - with a few expressing that they have sometimes felt discrimination from other racialized groups at times or discriminated against by police or the education system. All residents (8) noted that there is a history of feeling excluded by media, state institutions – often in relation to education, lack of resources, insufficient community spaces, state of repair of buildings – and/or even employers or people generally (e.g. in-person and online spaces/social media). Many resident planners (6) alluded to 'racial and class separation by built form' within the neighbourhood, such as the racial makeup of tenants of apartments vs homeowners (often White/European), and the prominence of Black/racialized residents in social housing projects which were often highly surveilled. In concert with outcomes of overpolicing, issues of labour/institutional exploitation (e.g. York University's historical research practices within the neighbourhood), Covid-19 pandemic outcomes, historical stigmatization by institutions and groups, it is difficult to say the neighbourhood has not been compartmentalized and separated in a neocolonial fashion through it built form and design.

4.3 Discussion of Cases

In the key moments of the case study communities, both communities realize shortcomings in their attempts to fully alter the terms of megadevelopmental changes and planning direction by market actors and the state institutions, which often work together for economic interest against horizontalities like the communities in Longo Mai and the Brunca region or Jane and Finch and North West Toronto.

In the Jane Finch case study, failure to change displacement outcomes were identified through those displaced by the neglect, demolition and redevelopment of Firgrove

Grassways complex. As well as in how the state continues to under resource the area or fully fund social housing without a private partner while also passing ‘grow in place’ policies that resident planners have demanded to mitigate displacement, especially for and by Black and racialized residents. The greater success was clearly in retaining autonomy over the originally promised Jane Finch Community Hub and Centre for the Arts through means of insurgent planning practices i.e. organized and visible mass protest with regional actors of Northwest Toronto.

In Longo Mai, PINDECO’s success in cultivating monocultures continues to be a worry for community members and is suspected to still be polluting the natural environment of the region. Even in these breakdowns, some benefits and positive changes are perceived to have improved the outcomes through cancelled expansions protested regionally with contributions from Longo Mai as a host. The main success for Longo Mai was seen in their part as hosts and organizers of events and networks, which eventually cancelled all hydroelectric dam projects in the region.

4.3.1 Similarities and Shared Processes

In relation to the interview findings of each case, some similarities and shared processes became apparent such as the vertical nature of the actors the communities faced, the role of the community within a broader regional/historical effort, the collaborative nature between state and market institutions, and the spatial-cultural separations felt in both.

Historical Dispossession through Planning

The analysis and findings of both cases show similar patterns in how land and people are dispossessed, exploited and utilized as resources by spatial planners. The indigenous populations being the first to be dispossessed under European colonial capitalism in both geographies, the areas first became rural areas to be environmentally exploited for (food/industrial) energy production, i.e. agricultural lands (pineapple monocultures, labour) connected by a road that later became the Inter-American highway

with Longo Mai, and farmlands, oil, and hydroelectric infrastructure with Jane and Finch – as they were rural farmlands that later integrated highways, fuel depots, hydroelectric infrastructure in the 50s.

In the 80s, the Brunca region became a place for Global South migrants to work as PINDECO's monoculture projects expanded which was facilitated by state/environmental planning, with Longo Mai becoming a refuge. Similarly, planners for Jane and Finch in 60s onwards planned to contain similar groups (see section 4), but to exploit their labour for economic growth in a previously suburban industrial area of low land value. In the 2000s is when planned energy infrastructure came in the form of hydroelectric infrastructure which would attempt to (and fail to) dispossess current residents of water rights in rural Longo Mai but promise economic opportunities. In the context of Jane Finch, this would come in the form of transit spurred gentrification after decades of underinvestment, that marketed economic development and improved mobility for residents. Migrants in both regions are a valuable and exploited resource of labour which fuel both national economies and connect through verticalities such as PINDECO (see direct connections)

In both geographies, the lands are utilized with more intensely around similar decades and as land became more valuable, but in ways that exploit their specific context and location. As both places evolved, a more 'advanced' (profitable) type of development was proposed by relevant planners, albeit different types of planners (national vs. provincial, urban vs. environmental). These planners promised economic opportunities through *decommoning* projects for historically ignored and residents which risked displacing them, and who often fled similar dispossessive forces and circumstances. Overall, the cases showed a pattern of utizing lands and people as they become more valuable and profiting from dispossessive development.

Networks of Community Spaces and Resource Appropriation

The spaces hosted in both communities were the physical infrastructure supporting the recommoning and insurgent efforts in key moments. A network and redundancy of having many community spaces partially made up for the low funding environment of both communities. The culmination of having various community spaces located close to each other and connected by vertical/horizontal networks of human, physical (and digital) infrastructure created a sort of 'network effect' that brought civil society and grassroots organizations together in key moments.

The infrastructure like telecommunications (including internet), highways, roads, electricity, helped facilitate the community spaces, that then created more spaces through these verticalities in a cyclical process. The multiplicity of flexible spaces provided conditions for human and social connection to be planned (in the form of events like protests/festivals promoted through social media). These festivals created connection and the social networks required to organize (up to an international scale in the case of Longo Mai), and (regionally for Jane Finch) in key moments of confrontation, which occupied private spaces in highly (physically) central visible protests at their height.

The community spaces in everyday life created the awareness, motivation, social network, vision, and capacity for the organization required to recommon private and public spaces, pass/enforce policies (e.g. 'growing in place; in Jane Finch, and MINAES water runoff enforcement). The spaces incubated the social networks required to provide an organized political response, insurgent planning strategies that confront and hold government more accountable for unkept promises, divestment/austerity or dispossessive projects.

Many of the actors that provided physical spaces are those within the upper circuit of the globalized economy and often the Global North. The malls (Jane Finch, Yorkgate), the UN, Metrolinx, York University, and in a way, even the European Longo Mai through its international funding of the community as a whole. In this way, equity planners and insurgent (resident) planners alike must appropriate these resources and spaces against their other manifestations and main objectives, those that prioritize capital generation.

Migration, Solidarity and Leading Regional Centres

Both case study areas were unique leading regional centres of organizing, solidarity, and migrant experience connected through experiences, art and spaces. A migration background was important in both cases as it created a unique differentiating identity and motivation against dispossessive processes of state planning. Residents in both cases felt a sense of connection for their own culture and others with art in symbolic spaces (e.g. murals in key community spaces), as this was the most prominent method for which representation was provided in the built environment. Their unique cultural identities downstream of their cultural origin and often dispossessed backgrounds was often connected with why they took new dispossessive challenges and risks so seriously.

While engagement is going in different directions for both communities – though seemingly, Longo Mai is becoming less engaged and Jane and Finch more so – the solidarity felt as places of working-class people that supported one another was described by residents frequently in why their communities were involved in grassroots organizing during the key moments of neoliberal planning. In Longo Mai the solidarity often involved a deeper connection to nature in addition to working class solidarity.

Though physical spaces were seen as vital for social organization, the human infrastructure and networks were often seen as more important, as access to spaces were seen as less valuable than making new ones due to their sometimes distant, restricted or limited access. Some research participants even downplayed the importance of community space at times, while recognizing its importance in the past, and multiple emphasized having a collective culture over individualist one, democratized decentralized decision-making that permits more access, social connection and organizing was often seen as more important than making new ones by residents in both cases. The unmet need for community spaces often required alternative parties who could provide/access space or intervene and utilize their own project-building capacity; this was the case with Casa

Madremonte in Longo Mai and JFC in Jane and Finch with creating the Corner Commons space.

Equity Planners and Insurgent Planning Practices

Non-resident planners, resident planners and resident collaboration were vital in shaping space in both cases. Whereas residents were very engaged in planning independently in Jane and Finch, planning in Longo Mai took the form of projects and organizations formed by leaders in more formal or recognized positions, and contributed through labour and participation rather than advocacy, managing, leading and coordinating in Jane and Finch. A lot of this can be attributable to the large differences in educational, funding and training opportunities but can also be that planners in Jane and Finch have tended to put residents in leadership and engagement roles more often.

The equity planners in the Longo Mai (within the Administration) also have more decision-making power regarding land use compared to the equity planners in Jane and Finch, which were part of non-governmental agencies like JFC, or grassroots groups like HOC or JFAAP. Whereas the equity planners in Longo Mai seemingly made decisions to protect and consult with semi-annual engagements (townhalls, workshops) and lower participation (besides in *Key Moments)*, in Jane and Finch, the participants (including the formal planners) felt they had marginal decision-making power but felt more engaged and involved years after those moments. Due to their legal structures and responsibilities, it is difficult to compare planners in these communities, but I interpret from my findings that equity planners in Longo Mai seem to have more of a paternalistic governance position, which perhaps has protected residents from the market system, but as a result, are losing ground to individualism and consumptive (capitalistic) views. In Jane and Finch, residents are slowly transitioning to more autonomous governance, infiltrating the capitalistic market property and planning system and exploring alternative legal arrangements and governance structures (like cooperatives, land trusts) amidst its gentrification.

In key moments, both communities benefit from the collaboration of formal equity planners and of the community organizers which practice insurgency and planning

separately from formal governance regularly. Which was the case with artist Guadalupe Urbina work with Rios Vivos, with Escuela de La Tierra against the dams and JFAAP/CAPG with JFC against the reneging of the Hub and TOD-driven displacement.

Criminality, Separation and Compartmentalization

In both cases, the communities deal with different levels of spatial separation by ethnic group. In Jane and Finch, this was expressed by participants as racial/ethnic separation by built form and distance from the rest of the city, whereas in Longo Mai it was primarily ethnic separation by distance from each other. Though the case can be argued that in Jane and Finch this was intentional and systemic – akin to Fanon's concept of compartmentalization (Kipfer, 2021) – I have no retrospective findings that this was intentional in the case in Longo Mai, though my contact with Indigenous people there was admittedly limited. To the contrary, I found evidence that there were attempts to connect the Indigenous and mixed communities in Longo Mai by equity planners of the administration, but the stigmatization and attribution of criminality to Black or Indigenous racial groups was still present in both case interviews, reflecting a historic racial hierarchy very much present in Latin America and the globe i.e. Black, Indigenous and racialized groups being viewed as dangerous or threatening in comparison to European (White) identity.

4.3.2 Direct Connections

The two case study areas are thousands of kilometres apart, but the field work revealed that besides the research project itself, they were also connected by their positions in the upper and lower circuits of globalized capitalism. The pineapple production/consumption, migration from the Global South, and Global North educational institutions like York University were additional connections representative of their positions and shaping the spatial conditions of each community. The social welfare system and benefits available were a major difference between them.

In this circuitry, Canada and Costa Rica, represent benefitting allies of US Hegemony, receiving funding in the form of trade with Canada and subsidies for Costa Rica, in exchange for influence in their affairs and expenditures (Brown et al, 2020, Ness, 2023). Both benefiting in exchange for support, complicity and facilitation of the US and Western interventions in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. It can be argued, in this exchange Canada and Costa Rica, have a reciprocal but mutually benefitting relationship with the US, by having a growing low-cost labour force (through immigration) while also being less directly involved in the costs of military interventionism (Ness, 2023).

Though normally the safety net is not available in the South, Costa Rica has been an exception in its place in the circuits as a key ally of the US imperialism, receiving more funding than almost any other country in Latin America and which implemented some social benefits and systems prior to the Cold War (Fletcher et al, 2023). Complicating the GN-GS binary is the neglect the case study areas have seen by their state governments, and the deteriorating social benefits given during their neoliberal turn. In both case study areas, their unique social geographic contexts (rural for Longo Mai and compartmentalized for Jane and Finch; both being migrant communities) has always had them remain as part of the lower circuit arguably, with less social investment and more labour-intensive exploitative conditions (Arias Campos, 2017; AccessAlliance, 2013. In Longo Mai, the co-op association, administration and NGOs (like UN/Kolping) provide this social welfare system in the form of food, land and funding for spaces and shelter, while in Jane and Finch this is shared by many state institutions and non-profits.

As previously explored, York University is a unique connective thread that has recently improved its relationship with neighbouring Jane and Finch while also contributing to Longo Mai with academic projects like that of Bolaños Davis (2020) and now this research project. Most of the initiatives by York have been focused on Santa Elena, where their Las Nubes campus is located. This educational connection is representative of the educational ecotourism taking place in Longo Mai by Northern schools more generally, shaping how community spaces are being utilized and shared, but also highlights the difference in social benefits available with Canada's place as one of the most educated

populaces. This does benefit Jane and Finch's ability to plan itself as seen with the backgrounds of resident planners, and less so with Longo Mai.

While the safety net in Canada often comes with caveats like control, grants and increasing debt, resources like cheap (but increasingly costly) goods are made available, including for those in difficult social positions like in Jane and Finch, as a result of the (consumption-driven) knowledge and service-based economy in place and previously entrenched social protections. Longo Mai and Costa Rica having a position perhaps closer to the lower circuit (labour intensive, extractive economy), and with likely less educational opportunities and less state protections, creating the conditions for locals to be exploited in PINDECO's pineapple fields and processing facilities. Jane and Finch is positioned similarly in the lower circuit arguably with the labour-intense precarious work carried out factories and warehouses in Northwest Toronto (AccessAlliance, 2013). The pineapple fields which pay very little to workers and cause immense social and environmental damage make their way to the Global North, including to the Jane and Finch community, highlighting how they are actually connected (see Figure 23).



Figure 23: Image (left) shows Del Monte & Dole pineapples from Costa Rica being sold in Freshco Jane and Finch. Right image shows a close up of the Del Monte pineapple label branded with characters from Toy Story 5. Mejia Monico, 2026.

This exploitative and extractive historical condition and global order is often representative of the conditions or connected experiences that Global South immigrants in Jane and Finch themselves fled from. Neocolonial conditions, banana republics and underdevelopment in rural and urban areas of the Global South which created conditions that fostered civil wars, gang culture and intense poverty, as reflected in many of the backgrounds of the research participants in both case study areas. In this manner, imperialism has been a continued process that has greatly shaped both communities, in Longo Mai this was intentionally the case as an international strategy to house refugees during the Cold War, while in Jane and Finch this was perhaps less intentional but still the end result, as a compartmentalized area of the city that accommodated refugees of many wars (including of the Cold War) and immigrants that fled for the same core reasons, i.e. underdevelopment, colonialism, US/Western intervention and control.

Similarly, educational institutions have previously shaped the environments of both case study areas and continue to do so. In this respect, Northern students and researchers alike embody and represent the idea of verticalities that alter local socio-economic conditions in the communities directly. In the case of Longo Mai, this is an economic benefit but also a risk that can worsen inequality, but which has mostly benefitted the community, while in Jane and Finch it has historically been more exploitative (with York University) and has only improved in recent years.

5.0 Conclusion

Final Insights

The comparison showed that the communities were tied by similar stories of migration and were being increasingly shaped by their relationships to Northern educational institutions and by their emphasis on creating community spaces. Both communities have a history of finding any opportunity to create new spaces for residents to socialize, meet, improve and to utilize art to further a feeling of social and cultural belonging. The communities themselves were directly connected by the trade of produce such as pineapples from the surrounding region of Longo Mai, the Brunca region, which were being delivered to supermarkets within the Jane and Finch community from companies that employ workers from Longo Mai. They were also connected through their relationship with York University, an example of Northern educational institutions increasing international presence.

In artistic terms and following the lead of the important artistry taken by some of the research participants that lean on art to help organize and motivate civil society, I cannot help but note that there are prominent artists that have also engaged in critical relational comparison. Reminiscent of Santos' (1996/2021) prediction that popular culture of the working class will eventually reach the mainstream thanks to technology and globalization, Bad Bunny's Lo Que Paso a Hawaii [What Happened to Hawaii] is a song where the pop reggaeton artist, compares the historical and current dispossession of Native Hawaiians with the concurrent and ongoing neocolonial struggles of his homeland, Puerto Rico. The audio of which has frequently been used in a social media trend (Instagram/Tiktok) to highlight the imperial struggles of the dispossessed all across the Global South, such as with the genocide in Palestine, and even with the diasporic, immigrant and racialized communities in the Global North. This in my view starts to form a digital space, a space increasingly utilized by both case study areas to organize the shaping of physical space that can – along with networks of community spaces — lead to global solidarity, recommoning, repossession and reterritorialization of Southern geographies globally for the masses (the working class).

It is difficult to ignore that in many of the interviews the importance of home and rivers that came across, in some instances, repeating almost exactly the words and sentiment of the lyrics that Bad Bunny expresses in his song, i.e. ‘quieren quitarnos el rio’ [‘they want to take away our river’] in the Longo Mai case study and in the Jane Finch study, with residents expressing that ‘they want to take away our neighbourhood and replace residents’ or as Bad Bunny captured the feeling in the song’s chorus:

> They want to take my river and my beach too,
> They want my neighbourhood and grandma to leave…
> No one here wanted to leave, and those who left dream of returning,
> If one day it's my turn, it’s gonna hurt so much…
> They want my neighbourhood and your kids to leave,
> No, don’t let go of the flag nor forget the lelolai,
> ‘Cause I don’t want them to do to you what happened to Hawaii…
>
> (As translated by Vargas-Silva, 2025)

In this vein, I have attempted to evoke the histories of research participants regarding dispossession and global and local challenges, through relational comparison of peripheral urban and rural settings, which are both in distinct grey areas of the Global North and South. Through insurgent planning practices, assistance from equity planners, recommoning, and the creation of differential space – which importantly includes community spaces (physical and digital) – the Jane and Finch and Longo Mai cases show how this can begin to take place in their contexts by utilizing community spaces as political arenas and expanding networks, which can potentially become the foundations differential space.

Across both cases, community spaces served not only as meeting spaces in key moments of dispossession and displacement risk, but as physical and social infrastructure through which organizational capacity was developed and mobilized. Through horizontal and tactical infrastructure (physical and social relations), and insurgent practices, community

spaces can, at times, be mobilized against connected and mutually constitutive processes of dispossession.

Limitations and Areas for Further Research

Both case study areas represented vastly different contexts and circumstances and derived insights from the selected research participants and do not represent the experiences of all or even most residents of the case study areas. Residents interviewed were mostly from racialized, diasporic and/or Global South backgrounds that make up a particular focus on historical social experiences. This research represents generalizations of multiple groups of similar interests and shared histories of dispossession rather than representations of perspectives of particular groups.

Research participants in the Longo Mai case study sometimes described themselves as illiterate due to a lack of educational opportunities (sometimes having no or very limited formal education), which could have altered interpretation of questions, answers given and meanings. It could have also led to less participation by them specifically in their community and as a result, to insights that provide a non-majority view of engagement, participation, equity and opportunities in the Longo Mai community.

Participants from both case studies also represented vastly different levels of engagement due to my ability to find engaged individuals in the Jane Finch case study as a long time resident and relatively low familiarity with the Longo Mai community.

Knowledge Mobilization

In a subsequent document, a memorandum (Appendix C) will be provided to participants digitally which provide recommendations for community planners and leaders of the case study areas. The memo will weigh insights derived from individual residents and precarious employment positions more heavily rather than those with a permanent or established institutional position, in an effort to bolster grassroots bottom-up planning initiatives and efforts.

In the Longo Mai case study, most participants (approximately 8/12) were asked if they wanted to see recommendations and insights from the study, of which all of them agreed that they would be appreciative of that initiative and would like to see such a document come from the research. The recommendations will utilize the insights and themes from this research to outline how what changes can be made to improve socio-environmental outcomes.

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7.0 Appendices

Appendix A

A1 - The 4 analytical lenses:

· Migration, personal views & origins: migration cause/reason, timing, experiences with dispossession/displacement, cultural identification, and socio-economic stability.

· Governance, culture & agency: who controls the space, decision pathways, funding sources, integrating cultures into the space and practices (from diverse populations and indigenous peoples), challenges of governance internally (interpersonal/community)

· Strategies/threats of contestation: tactics used to resist dispossession, contemporary issues of dispossession, organizing and relationships between actors (legal/collective action,, coalition building, megaprojects, community issues, control of land)

· Spatial/material effects**:** physical changes, how it has changed spatial/land use planning in the community, links to nearby development, changes to ways of thinking about and/or organizing space.

A2 – Main Semi-Structure Interview Questionairre

Demographics

To begin, I would love to learn a bit more about you. These demographic questions are to help me contextualize your responses. Feel free to answer in your own words.

1. Choose based on confidentiality level..

· [If Confidential/Anonymous] - What pseudonym would you like me to use for your interview? A pseudonym is like a nickname. I will use it to refer to you instead of your real name.

· [If openly available participation] – please choose a pseudonym in case you change your mind regarding confidentiality at a later date.

[Both options– continued] ..This will help preserve confidentiality in case it is needed. You can use any name you like.

2. What is your preferred gender pronoun?

3. How old are you?

4. How would you describe your cultural and ethnic background?

5. Would you describe yourself as a newcomer, migrant, or citizen of this country? Which ones and why?

6. How long have you lived in the community?

7. When did you arrive to the community?

8. When did you leave your home/birth/ancestral country? That is the country you identify with ethnically or by heritage.

9. Is there anything else that you would like to share that would be important for us to know to help contextualize your answers?

Main Interview (60-75 minutes)

1. Why did you leave, or why did you have to leave, the country(ies) you mentioned? Can you tell me about the context from your perspective?

2. How would you describe your relationship to this community now. What role do you play here?

3. How has living here changed your personal identity, traditions, habits or sense of home?

4. What do you think about development in your original country(ies) now compared to here? Do you see important differences?

5. Who, in your view, are the planners of this community. Who makes decisions about space and services? Do you feel you have a strong role in that process?

6. Tell me about your relationship with [subject space name]. How do you use it, and were you involved in its planning, development, programming or maintenance?

7. If you participated in organizing/programming/securing/planning the space, what challenges did you face and what strategies did you use to overcome them? [N/A to strict users]

8. What do you like (if anything) about how the physical environment around the space is changing? Has the subject space had a role in changing nearby development or organization?

9. What issues or risks do you or the community feel regarding keeping your home and community (past or present)? For example, nearby megaprojects or political instability.

10. What role does the space, in terms of security and organizing for the community, have in preventing any important issues that pushed you from home or the risks you just mentioned? If any.

11. What opportunities does the community space create for personal development, a sense of home, socio-economic stability, or changing the community's development in the future? Giving an idea of life here before it was proposed and how it has evolved.

12. What role did the community space's development have for the community in your view? Is there anything else about the subject space's importance, or about community planning here, that you want to add.

Appendix B - Jane Finch Digital Recruitment Poster



Appendix C – Knowledge Mobilization Memo

[To be submitted to Research Participants and Interested Parties]